A CHORUS OF MANY VOICES:
How to Prevent, Resolve and Make Productive Use of Conflict in Mainline Protestant Congregations

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In order to maintain confidentiality, all names of churches and individuals have been changed. The exception to this is when I refer to the congregations that I have served as pastor. In some cases, parallel events that took place within a number of churches have been condensed into one example case.

Introduction/

Contextual Essay

The purpose of this book is to help pastors and leaders of Christian congregations prevent, resolve and make productive use of conflicts within their churches. It is directed particularly to pastors and leaders of congregations that historically and sociologically have been referred to as "mainline Protestant denominations". "Mainline" churches are the predominantly white, middle and upper class Protestant denominations that were established by European immigrants to North America in the 1600's and early 1700's. These denominations would include Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, and the Reformed. The reason that this book is directed to that audience is that I grew up and now work as a pastor in one of those denominations (Lutheran). Therefore, I feel that I can best understand and address the dynamics, culture and polity of a "mainline" congregation. I have developed my own skills as a conflict facilitator working within that context. The very fact that we refer to ourselves as "mainline" is already a clue to some of the specific issues of identity, rank and marginalization that are present in our congregations.

Although "mainline" congregations share many characteristics with other Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Mormon, Pentecostal and African-American church bodies, there are also enough differences in culture, practice and belief that would require elements of familiarity and skill which, as an outsider, I lack. This would be even

more the case with congregations of other faith traditions, such as Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist. Therefore, this book is of more limited use to clergy and leaders in those communities. I look forward to learning from my sisters and brothers in other traditions and denominations about how conflict facilitation works best in their context.

The conflict facilitation skills that I present in this book are rooted in Process Work. Process Work was developed by Jungian analyst Arnold Mindell, who applied and broadened Jungian psychology to address the process of health, illness, conflict and growth at the individual, group and world level.[1] Process Work is now taught and practiced by a gifted faculty at the Process Work Institute in Portland, OR, as well as by institutes and collegial associations around the world. It is not the purpose of this book to explain Process Work itself, but rather to apply its wisdom, skills and techniques to issues of conflict and diversity in a "mainline" congregation. In effect, I intend to translate and apply the gifts of Process Work, using language, examples and emphases that will be most understandable and useful in the context of a particular religious community. However, in this introduction, I want to indicate the primary elements of Process Work that form the basis of what I will present in the following chapters. I list these elements below with a brief summary of how I incorporate them.

1. *Deep democracy* is a key ingredient for a building a healthy community and facilitating diversity and conflicts.[2] Deep democracy, a phrase first coined by Dr. Mindell, begins by affirming the basic, democratic right of every community member to have a voice in community decisions. Deep democracy takes this a step further by recognizing that the spectrum of voices is broader than just the one audible voice of each participant in a

conflict dialog. Along with this audible, "outer" voice, there are many "inner" voices in the dialog. Each participant, in a given moment, may be expressing one position or feeling to the group, but will be thinking and feeling a whole number of other thoughts and emotions on the inside. In the same way, one particular sub-group or "side" in a conflict may be voicing a primary or initial position, yet as group members talk more, it becomes clear that their viewpoints and emotions vary in a variety of complex ways. Every person and every group has multiple voices, and successful facilitation of a conflict requires helping those voices to speak and react to each other. This framework for facilitation is expressed in the title of my book, *A Chorus of Many Voices,* and is repeatedly reinforced throughout the chapters. Particularly in Chapter 3, there are detailed instructions for welcoming and engaging as many voices from the congregation as possible when managing a conflict.

2. Conflict is a natural ingredient in a healthy community that fosters deep democracy. Nearly every person and community, including a mainline, Protestant congregation, abhors conflicts and finds them very painful. Out of that comes a deep, visceral judgment that the presence of conflict is a sign of failure as a community. Process Work brings with it the realization that our inherent diversity naturally puts people in different places and positions. Ignoring, marginalizing or silencing these differences not only cuts off the gifts of our diversity, it also guarantees and escalates conflict, as the many voices demand to be heard. By acknowledging and managing its differences, a community both claims its varied gifts and de-escalates the level of conflict. Consequently, facilitating conflict is part of the ongoing process of healthy, community life. In Chapter 2, I

propose how conflict, rather than being a failure, is actually a valuable opportunity for a congregation to sharpen its identity and increase the effectiveness of its program. Through effective facilitation, pastors and leaders are able to productively use conflict to increase the health of their congregation.

3. Building increased *awareness* of various factors assists the community as it works through its conflicts. In my book, I have used Process Work language to describe the different kinds of awareness that a facilitator can use and teach to a congregation. For example, in some detail I present awareness of roles, rank, outer and inner voices. I discuss awareness of channels of experience, but focus primarily on the visual, auditory and proprioceptive. I talk about ghost roles and edges within a group process without using those specific terms. In cases where I do not articulate key Process Work elements (for example, levels of experience: consensus reality, dreaming and sentient), I do so to stay within the limits of the book's purpose and not out of disagreement with Process Work theory. In cases where I rename Process Work terms, such as ghost roles, I do so to translate Process Work skills and theory into the language and cultural images of the congregation's context.

4. Group processes have a common flow of elements that the facilitator can frame and utilize to deepen the conflict dialog. Process work names these elements as sorting, framing, consensus, identifying roles, edges and hotspots. In Chapter 3, I take the facilitator though the stages of a conflict dialog and the useful skills to use along the way. Once again, I use some Process terms and rename others, in order to make use of

vocabulary and examples that best fit a mainline congregation. I also stress that a group process is never a neat, linear process, but rather an interwoven fabric of many elements.

I would like to comment on the religious, in this case Christian, language and imagery that I use throughout my book. I quote extensively from both Hebrew and Christian scripture and use faith language to describe the identity and purpose of a congregation. I am aware that this language and imagery may bring a variety of reactions from a non-Christian or non-religious reader. The institutional Christian church has been involved in a variety of conflicts over the past 2,000 years. It has played many roles, including oppressor, victim and privileged, detached on-looker. Within the Process Work community, there is wide diversity among community members regarding spirituality and institutional religion. Some in the PW community may have personally suffered from oppressive actions by the Christian church. The language and setting of this book might certainly bring up that pain once again. Others may have no involvement or interest in religion or religious community and may simply find this book curious or irrelevant. Still others in the PW community may have a variety of connections or interests with religious communities and may find this book helpful in reflecting on their own experiences. A future open forum would be a wonderful setting to sort through all of these responses!

Alongside the "institutional church" issue in this book is the "God" or "God-language" issue. In academic circles in North America and Europe, "God-language" is often viewed suspiciously as an entry into rigid, irrelevant dogma and superstition. In American culture, religious images in the media are dominated by TV evangelists promoting hierarchical, exclusive

communities. In light of all this, I hear a voice asking, "How does an overtly Christian book that refers repeatedly to God and Jesus fit into the theory, culture and community of Process Work?"

One entry point for this discussion is to make use of a framework provided by William James in his classic study, "The Varieties of Religious Experience."[3] James proposes that the common feature among the variety of religious expressions that have existed throughout history is the belief that there is "something more" than physical reality. This "something more" is given different names within each religious expression or tradition. A common name for it is "god", or one of the specific names for "god" found within different traditions. The "something more" is also given names such as spirit, life-force, Ground of Being and others. Each religious tradition gathers and develops its own language and images in its attempt to express what this "something more" is and how it relates to the purpose, meaning and value of both individuals and communities. To this framework of William James, I would add the proposal that religious conflict is inevitable for two reasons. First, the "something more" is by its very nature vast and mysterious beyond our complete knowing. As St. Augustine once said, "If we completely understand what we were just saying, we couldn't have been talking about God." Therefore, religion is always a process of exploration, rather than complete certainty, although we religious people regularly forget that. Secondly, as each tradition, person or group attempts to describe the "something more", they are always confined and limited by the culture-specific vocabulary and images with which they work. The person or group fifty miles away will have a different set of words, experiences and images to work with and so will come up with a different picture of the "something more." From these differences, however minute, will come passionate religious conflict. Yet from these different perspectives also will come vivid, unique paintings of the

mysterious “something more”, which are sometimes beautiful and unifying and sometimes terrifying and shattering.

Once again, how does this relate, if at all, to Process Work? As I have studied Process Work over the years and participated in classes, forums and groups, I have often been struck by the “religious” language and elements that come up. Process Work is, of course, not related or aligned to any institutional religion. However, in Process Work, a belief in “something more” does seem to be part of the framework. A central element in Process Work is its definition of levels of awareness as consensus reality, dreamland, and essence. The language describing these levels, and the flow of meaning, energy and connection among them, is language that points beyond physical, empirical reality. Furthermore, the diagnosis of levels of self-other experience (generic, individual, relationship and group/world) assume an element of relationship and unity among people that moves beyond the scientifically measurable to the intuitive and mystical...the Big U! Process Work teachers also regularly use images from Buddhism, Taoism and Don Juan to communicate a point. Among the types of rank that are presented is spiritual rank. The use in process work of body movement, breathing, dreamwork and exploration of altered states mirrors the use of these same elements in many religious traditions. In all of this there is some suggestion that there are broader currents of energy, meaning and relationship that move through the world than can be accounted for by empirical science. There is “something more” at work. How we name and talk about that, of course, is the source of great dialog and bitterly painful conflicts.

Finally, there is a very practical reason for the religious language in this book. One axiom that is frequently expressed by Process Work teachers is that the best therapists and consultants don't impose a language or a culture on the clients and corporations with whom they work. Rather, the therapist or consultant learns about the issues, hopes, dreams and conflicts of their client through the client's own language and cultural images. The therapist or consultant then uses that set of images and language to work productively with their client.

There are approximately one billion people in the world for whom the language, images and stories of Christian tradition and scripture are their most vivid, heart-felt means of talking about life's meaning, hope and challenges. In the smaller, mainline Protestant audience of North America that this book addresses, there are approximately 30 million members and 40,000 clergy. Considering the numerical presence and social power of this group of people, even the tiniest success in building healthier and deeply democratic congregations, who model how to productively manage their conflicts, will also bring greater health to our society and to the world. My passion for writing this book comes from my deep desire to be a social activist. From the beginning, the element that most drew me to Process Work was its ability to perceive and work with the connection between inner work, relationship work and Worldwork! I have been active in social causes for most of my life. I now believe that the most radically transformative action in our present day, North American society is to help groups, institutions and communities of people to both celebrate and productively manage their diversity and conflicts. This will have an immense impact on the justice and democracy that we practice. Therefore, in this book, I am delighted to be able to present the insights and gifts of Process Work in a manner that connects with and serves my "home" community of mainline Protestant Christian churches.

Chapter 1

A Chorus of Many Voices

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands….And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'" Revelation 7:9-12

One way of appreciating the beauty and complexity of a congregation is to see and hear it as a chorus of many voices. Through the combined notes of their words, actions, and lives, members of a church community are continually singing a song of praise to God. Depending on what day it is and what life experiences they have just gone through, the music they create will voice many different emotions and messages. Each member's particular gifts, passions, and struggles will produce their own melody. Consequently, like the notes on a page of music, the life-music of church members may go in many different directions at the same time. Sometimes they will sing in unison, sometimes in sweet harmonies, and sometimes they will sing in tense counterpoint to each other. Yet in all of this, the Holy Spirit is singing through the members to produce a chorus of many voices.

Recently, I attended a performance of the Oregon Repertory Singers, one of the top choral groups in the Portland, Oregon, area where I live. On the program was a motet by Johann Sebastian Bach. What I remember most were all the different voices that were a part of that piece. It wasn't simply that there were 80 people singing in the choir. It was that the choir itself was divided into two choruses, and each chorus was divided into five additional parts: first and second soprano, alto, tenor and bass. This meant that there were 10 distinct groups of approximately 8 singers each. As the motet unfolded, Bach brought each part in, one by one, and wove them around each other until all their voices together made a beautiful sound. It was the distinctive harmony and blending of each of those voices that brought out the magnificence of the music. From a production standpoint, it was also an obviously complicated and challenging musical piece to direct. It required an experienced conductor who could guide the voices and hold them together in a meaningful way.

The purpose of this book is to provide the training and skills needed by pastors and lay leaders of congregations to effectively guide the chorus of many voices in their church communities, particularly in times of tension and conflict. Similar to the training given to choir directors, this book will train pastors and leaders to skillfully invite each of the congregation's voices into the chorus, support the voices as they speak and respond to each other in a productive interchange, and finally bring those voices together to produce the best music possible.

Diversity: the gift and challenge of being different

The composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart once played a newly composed piece for the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II, and then asked him, “What did you think of it?"
"Too many notes," said the Emperor. "No," countered Mozart. "There were just the right amount!"

I am writing this book from the perspective that our diversity and differences are a God-given gift. Furthermore, these differences enrich the life of every congregation through the many notes that are being sung in its midst. God brings together an astounding mixture of people and stirs up within us a wonderful variety of voices.

Diversity is also a complicated, sometimes painful gift. The emperor had a point when he complained that Mozart had put “too many notes” on the page. People with a lot of different gifts, callings and passions typically head out in many directions at the same time. A clash of many voices often ensues. Diversity regularly leads to tension, disagreement and conflict. To avoid this discomfort, there is often a spoken or unspoken desire in congregations that everybody sing the same tune. (This is true not only for churches, but for every group and organization.) Like families that avoid talking about religion or politics when the relatives are visiting, many congregations also instinctively avoid anything that makes their differences more evident. An inner pressure arises to be of the same opinion, walk in the same direction, and think as everyone else.

However, if the congregation and its leaders are able to make full use of the diverse gifts, passions and ideas that their members possess, the congregation will make a wonderful discovery! **A productive use of conflict and differences will lead to a congregation's growth, creativity and greater effectiveness in the congregation's mission.** That is the central belief on which this entire book is based.

Jesus gathers a diverse community

Jesus sets the pattern for building a diverse community. Think, for example, of the disciples that Jesus gathered and how their diverse gifts were crucial for the new church: Peter, with his gift of passion and strength; Thomas, often called the Doubter, who had the ability to voice the most honest questions; Mary Magdalene, whose wisdom and service grew out of her own wounds; Martha, who had the gift of active hospitality, and her sister, Mary, who had the gift of listening and attentiveness; Levi, the tax collector, who knew about life at the margins. The list goes on.

Jesus envisions and intentionally gathers a core group of disciples who are very diverse and, in doing so, communicates two of the most basic truths of his ministry. First of all, Jesus' wide welcome expresses the infinite grace and welcome of God to all. Secondly, the multi-faceted gifts and struggles of all of his disciples previews how the Holy Spirit will put together a growing, effective church "body" out of an amazing variety of "parts." St. Paul captures this in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit

we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Jesus reveals the gift of diversity again when he gathers a very assorted group of people around the lunch and dinner table on so many occasions. Throughout the Gospels, one of the most common actions of Jesus is to invite an amazing and surprising collection of people to eat with him. He gathers tax collectors, prostitutes, foreigners, the sick, old enemies, the forgotten ones…everybody he meets.

In Jesus' time, one of the strongest social rules was that you ate a meal only with those people whom you considered worthy to be part of your family.[4] Furthermore, from the religious perspective of the Pharisees and Essenes, those you ate with would signal the community that God was gathering together for the divine and eternal feast. When Jesus welcomed his diverse gathering to the dinner table, he was clearly welcoming them as family.[5] He stated out loud that he was doing so in behalf of God, which meant that God, too, invited and welcomed all. Jesus' table habits were deeply shocking to his critics, who defined "family" according to those who conformed to narrow guidelines of purity, status and wealth.

It's amazing to see that Jesus not only invited to the table those who were on the fringes of society, but he also invited his critics. He relished dialog and meal fellowship with both friends and antagonists. For example, St. Luke tells about the dinner Jesus had at the house of Simon the Pharisee, who criticizes Jesus even while they are having dinner. (Luke 7:36-50) Jesus, however, turns the moment into a time for interchange and challenge, which enables all

those present to go deeper into the truth of the Gospel. Again and again, Jesus invites a wild assortment of people to the table and, out of the many differences, fashions the new community envisioned by God.

Did they sing hymns together around the table? The gospels don't give us that detail, although St. Paul talked often about the Christian community singing together. (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) However, the combined images of mealtime and singing get us back to the metaphor of music as a way to picture the gifts and challenges of being in community.

As congregations, we are a chorus gathered around the table. Jesus knows, of course, that gathering all these diverse voices together around the table will produce a very complicated chorus. There will be melodies and counter-melodies all over the place. There will be flats and sharps and discordance. Yet, as a sign of God's grace, Jesus welcomes all. As one through whom the Spirit moves, Jesus teaches his community a new song. In so doing, Jesus also teaches us how an effective use of conflict and dialog in our church communities will lead to a ministry that grows, creates and powerfully lives out its mission in the world.

What kind of diversity exists in congregations?

When the word "diversity" is used, what often comes to mind first is ethnic and racial diversity. In many of our mainline, Protestant denominations, we have passed resolutions to increase our diversity, which once again is usually defined as increasing the ethnic diversity of

our congregations. However, if we look at ourselves only in terms of ethnic background, most of our congregations are 95-99% white. Where is the diversity?

Another common characteristic of church communities also seems to suggest that little diversity will be found. When looking for a church to join, people often look for a congregation where they can share with others the kind of worship, teaching and service they prefer. They look for a place where they "fit in" and where the other members also "fit" their expectations. Furthermore, when new members join the church, there is often a rite of welcome that asks them to commit themselves to the Christian faith and life outlined in the congregation's mission statement or constitution. From this it appears that both the congregation and the members who join are seeking conformity. One would think that, as a result, all diversity gets screened out.

It does and it doesn't. It's true that group dynamics and people's instinctive desires for homogeneity are powerful forces that move congregations in the direction of conformity and agreement. However, the amazing differences that exist among God's people also move congregations towards diversity, conflict and creativity.

That gets us back to the question: What kind of diversity exists even in a seemingly mono-cultural, homogenous church? Here is a list of different kinds of diversity that exist in churches, some of which are quite visible and others of which are more hidden.

Physical and life-stage diversity: male, female, young, old, middle-aged, healthy, frail, tall, short, trim, obese, chronic diseases, mental challenges.

Social diversity: single, married; widowed; living together, but not married; divorced, celibate, close to family, distant from family, no family, single parent.

Sexual orientation diversity: gay, lesbian, straight, bi-sexual; transgender.

Educational diversity: elementary, middle school, high school, college, graduate studies, self-educated, highly skilled in specific field, smart with hands, smart with mind, pragmatic, intuitive, factual, poetic, dreamy, avid reader and explorer, never reads.

Economic and work diversity: employed, unemployed, underemployed, rich, poor, surviving, grew up with wealth, grew up with poverty, beginning career, beginning retirement, professional, clerical, skilled craft, service, management, labor, employed in a currently stable job sector, employed in an unstable or diminishing job sector, socially esteemed job, socially ridiculed job, only working adult in family, both spouses working, only "at home" spouse in family.

Background diversity: ethnic, race, national, regional, class, city, suburban, rural, family of origin dynamics.

Religious diversity: core beliefs, what people look for in a church, which of the church's programs they value the most (worship, education, fellowship, community service, etc.), where they belonged before they joined their current church, which part of their current

church's teachings they agree with and which part they don't, which religious differences they tolerate and are even intrigued by and which religious differences they clearly object to, preferences regarding church music, liturgy, program priorities, social action; what kind of pastor and church staff they like; what kind of religious art they like.

Diversity regarding their current spiritual "state": feel close to God, feel distant from God, calm and trusting, angry, confused, questioning what God is up to, needing healing, excited about the future, anxious about the future, view their life as something good and meaningful, view their life with judgment or shame.

Diversity regarding their relationship to the congregation: feel connected to the congregation, feel different and disconnected from the congregation, brand new to the congregation, wanting to get more involved, on their way out.

Psycho-social diversity: out-going, shy, talkative, quiet, confident, ill at ease, loves groups, prefers solitude, avoids controversy, loves a good argument, quick to accuse, quick to "patch over" and de-escalate any tension, centered, fragmented, old wounds, diagnosable disorders.

To this list, you can add a number of other diversities: politics, favorite sport teams, what people do in their spare time, favorite TV shows, …the list goes on. We think we are the same. As congregations, we celebrate our unity and what we have in common. Yet, countless and complex differences are inevitable. God creates us each distinct and different and then invites us

all to the table. Once the table conversation begins, it is guaranteed that people will be in different places on different topics.

There are many situations where most of us enjoy diversity. If we are filling our plate at an international potluck lunch, or if we are walking through the streets as a tourist in a beautiful foreign place, diversity is a delight. It feels much more threatening, however, when the people we assume are our allies actively disagree with us on an important issue. Our fear grows that, the more that diversity is encouraged and supported, the more the unity of the community will be stressed and challenged.

This is an entirely sensible fear to have! Diversity and unity are always in tension with each other. Yet, as we see in scripture, it is God who weaves this tension into the fabric of our life together. Even as God gathers us together in a unity of faith, hope, and calling, God also gives distinct voices, gifts and dreams to each one of us, which leads to the many differences in how that faith, hope, and calling are expressed.

The first congregation I served right out of seminary was St. John Lutheran Church in the Mission District of San Francisco. When St. John was founded in 1895, the Mission District was populated mostly by German immigrants, which led to the building of a towering, neo-gothic German Lutheran church. Then, in the 1920's and 1930's, other immigrant groups arrived and settled in "the Mission", including large numbers of Irish and Italians. Next, in the 1950's, workers and families arrived from throughout all of Central America, resulting in a population of 80,000 Latin Americans in the Mission District by the time I arrived in 1975. The North

American members of St. John, who numbered about 200, wanted to do a better job of welcoming and serving their Latin American neighbors, so I was called to begin a ministry in Spanish.

With the help and support of church members, both new and old, St. John's ministry grew into a wide assortment of programs: worship services in English and Spanish; Bible classes and ESL classes; bake sales and an emergency food program for refugees arriving from war zones. Since its founding, St. John had operated a Kindergarten through 8th grade parochial school and our student body was equal parts White, African-American and Latin American, with healthy numbers of Asian and Pacific Island students thrown in. We were in "the Mission" and we reflected all the faces that lived there.

There is one moment I remember that captures so much of what was delightful and challenging in those days. We decided to put on a "yard sale" in the playground of our school to raise money for student scholarships. Families of our church and school brought a huge number of used items from their houses one Saturday and we spent from 8am to 4pm setting up and holding this sale. Overall, the day went great as we worked together as a very diverse group. Yet, there were many complicating factors along the way: people had different ideas about how to do a yard sale "right"; we were constantly trading responsibilities back and forth while trying to communicate in multiple languages; there were on-the-spot decisions to be made (…how much should the chair sell for?...should the foot rest be thrown in with it?…if the customer you are selling to is your cousin, should they get a discount?). It even rained for about a half hour

that day, which is unheard of for San Francisco in August. It was exhausting and it was absolutely delightful.

The moment I particularly remember was at the end of the day when the sale was over and we had everything cleaned up. We stood in a big circle holding hands, and one of the members offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the success and experience of the day. I stood looking around the circle and was struck by what a great collection of God's people this was. We were a group of people whose roots were in Germany and Denmark, North Dakota and Louisiana, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Ethiopia and Kenya, Japan and Guam. We had worked together, argued together, laughed together, and dreamed together about the school kids we were helping. The $1,000 we had raised for the school was nothing compared to the wealth of satisfying work and relationship we had been given that day.

As a pastor fresh out of seminary, I realized that I had done very little to "produce" this moment. I was still very much at the learning stage and it had come to us all as a gift. However, as I stood in that diverse circle, I became very intrigued to learn the skills that could help such moments happen again.

It wasn't just an attraction to the happy moments that made me want to understand group dynamics. I was also prompted by the painful moments of conflict that regularly happened in our congregation. Here a few of the conflicts we experienced.

- Staff conflict among our parochial school teachers flared up when a new principal was hired who had a much different personality and management style.

- When we added a Spanish service on Sunday mornings to our schedule of English services, there was tension around which language would get the "prime time" of 10:30AM.

- Two highly involved families in our Latino congregation, one from Nicaragua and one from El Salvador, accused each other of mismanaging a food and job distribution program that the church ran. Other families took sides as well, and twenty members ended up leaving the church.

- Our church council and voting members were regularly stressed about our financial shortfalls, which expressed itself in strong disagreement about our budget priorities. For example, there was disagreement about how much the church should subsidize the school operation. Our long-time treasurer suddenly quit, partly over the school question and partly from financial fatigue.

- The majority of members of our Latino congregation had recently emigrated to the United States from countries caught up in civil warfare: Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, and Honduras. There were various, strongly-expressed opinions among both the Latino and North American members of the congregation about which side they supported in those wars, what US foreign policy should be, and whether asylum

seekers should be accepted by the US. These were not just polite debates. I remember shouting matches and people walking out the door, never to return.

- The most painful conflict occurred early in my ministry at St. John as the congregation debated leaving its national denomination, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). For a period of eight years, the LCMS itself had been caught up in a conflict around various issues, including women's ordination, ecumenical cooperation and the interpretation of scripture. After 18 months of emotional, heart-felt conversations, St. John voted by a two-thirds majority to leave the LCMS and join a new Lutheran denomination. Twenty families, many of them with deep roots in the congregation, resigned from St. John at that time.

So went the dance of being a community made up of many diverse people. We were deeply united in some ways and deeply different in other ways. There were moments of rich bonding and moments of excruciating conflict.

In the years since this first call, I served in two additional ministries, first at a retreat center and now at my present congregation. In addition, I have assisted numerous other churches and clergy as they have dealt with conflict issues. Time and again I have witnessed how tension and conflict are a natural, constant element within every church community. The issues that spark a conflict are countless:

- Deciding which staff to hire or fire.

- Changing a liturgy.
- Adding guitars and drums to worship.
- Voting on church renovations and changes to the sanctuary.
- Addressing broader denominational issues such as accepting gay and lesbian pastors or entering into full communion with other church bodies.
- Reacting to a well-loved pastor who divorces his well-loved wife (and both wish to stay in the congregation.)

The origins of church conflict follow a pattern that is both straightforward and painfully perplexing. God creates each of us with unique gifts, callings and personalities. God also invites us into the gift of community. Once together, our differences sometimes bring delight and many other times bring painful tension and shattering conflict. If left unaddressed, these conflicts result in deep pain and disintegration. As I witnessed this happening again and again in my congregations and in others, I more persistently asked the question, "What skills could I learn that would help me guide a congregation through conflict to a healthier place?"

A basic outline of skills

For many years I sang in the adult choir of my congregation, which was conducted by a professionally trained church musician. As I watched her conduct at Thursday evening choir rehearsals and Sunday morning worship services, I noticed a regular pattern of skills that she used to bring out the best sound.

First, she invited all the voices to sing. She did this literally each September and throughout the year when she recruited church members to join the choir. There's no choir if you don't get the people to come out and sing. At each choir rehearsal, she would once again invite and encourage all of the voices to sing. Volunteer choir members sometimes need that encouragement, either because of shyness or feeling uncertain about their voice.

Second, as we were learning our parts and beginning to sing out at rehearsals, she would then encourage us to listen to each other. In part, that required listening to the people singing the same part that you were, i.e., tenors listening to tenors, altos to altos and so forth, to insure that you were all together. Even more importantly, it required that the four different parts would listen and respond to each other. The best music rarely comes from each voice bellowing on its own. As a good director, she taught sopranos, altos, tenors and basses to sing out with their own voice, yet to listen to each other and respond with matching energy, volume and inflection.

Third, once we had learned the basic notes of the piece, she would then help us find the deeper meaning and beauty of the piece. In music, there is always more to the story than just notes and timing. There is the passion, joy, pain, or longing that gives birth to the composition, awakened again in those who sing and, finally, communicated to those who listen.

Finally, in those moments when, both by hard work and good fortune, our voices came together to produce a very beautiful sound, the conductor would affirm and praise us. She did this out loud at rehearsals and with a smiles and nods on Sundays as we were singing. Affirming the successes, however temporary, is a crucial part of the process. However, in order for our

choir to continue to grow, she would also note for us at our next rehearsal the places where we were still "off". In this way, singing together became an ongoing learning experience, as well as an experience of sharing music in the moment.

Singing in a choir and learning how to blend your voice with others is both hard work and an exquisite joy. In fact, for many people, singing together is the deepest experience of union with God and with one another.

Belonging to a diverse church community is much the same as singing in a choir and making music together, with the same rewards and challenges. For that reason, the basic, necessary skills of a conflict facilitator, whether pastor or lay leader, will match those of a choral conductor.[6]

- Invite all the voices and help them to express themselves.
- Help the many different voices listen, react and respond to each other.
- Assist each voice to tell more of its story, with the hope of getting to a deeper layer of their hopes, pain or longing.
- Affirm the moments when the various voices discover a place of unity, however momentary, and also note with respect where people are still in different places.
- Frame (summarize, draw attention to) what the group has worked on in the dialog and underline the learning that has taken place.

The congregation is a gathering of people with many different gifts, insights, and passions. It is a chorus of many voices. The skill of conflict facilitation is to use and manage those many different voices and gifts in productive and community- building ways. In the following chapters, we will apply these facilitation skills in more detail to particular aspects of congregational life.

Chapter 2: Addressing our resistance to working with diversity and conflict

Chapter 3: Facilitating the conflicts that come up between sub-groups within the congregation

Chapter 4: The use and mis-use of power in the congregation and common conflicts that follow

Chapter 5 Complications faced by pastors and leaders and how to do self-care

Chapter 2

Our Resistance to Working with Conflict: Addressing the false belief that Conflict = Failure

Before we look at specific leadership skills, it's important to consider the resistance most of us have to working with differences and conflict in our congregations. This resistance is often unconscious, or at least invisible and unspoken. When we spot an issue or topic in our church where there are growing differences of opinion and some "heat" is forming, our rational and conscious response might be, "It will be very productive and good for the congregation if I work with people to resolve this conflict."

In the same moment when we are thinking that, however, a whole set of feelings and reactions churn up that will often freeze us in place. Some of the feelings may have to do with our anxiety about whether we are skillful enough to work productively with the issue. ("This topic is dangerous to open up! I'm not sure if I can manage it if it explodes.") Other feelings have to do with a strong yearning to preserve the "peace" in the congregation, coupled with a reasonable fear that discussing a hard topic will agitate that "peace." ("My job as pastor is to keep people calm and feeling cared-for. Bringing up a conflict for discussion will only get people more upset.")

At the base of our resistance, however, there is often a deeper factor. As Dr. Jan Dworkin states, M**ost of us carry the strong belief that conflict means failure.** This is not an idea that we simply think in our heads. In fact, we may not even consciously be aware of this belief. However, it is something that we feel deeply in our heart and stomach. If tension and conflict happen in our congregation, there is an instinctive reaction of sadness, pain or embarrassment. "We have failed. We have done something wrong. We are not who we should be." We experience conflict as an indictment that we have failed.

We have similar experiences in other arenas. A friend of mine recently had knee surgery to repair injuries that had been plaguing him since his high school football days. The surgery went well but the recovery did not. Twice he had to go in for follow up surgery. When I asked him what was going on, he admitted that he hated using a walker in public because he didn't want to look like an "broken down, old man." Therefore, in the weeks after his first surgery, he put the walker into the closet too early and insisted on walking on his own as if everything were fine. In the process, he damaged some ligaments all over again.

A similar process happened to me when I was learning Spanish to prepare for my first church and attended an intensive Spanish language school in Cuernevaca, Mexico. Along with the six hours of in-class instruction each day, our teachers told us to get all the practice we could by talking with local people. In my head, I knew this would be sensible and productive. However, in my stomach, I was embarrassed by how limited my Spanish was. I was a graduate of eight years of college and seminary education but I sounded like a five-year old! I often

avoided talking to a local person until I had a perfectly formed sentence in my head ready to recite. This meant I didn't do much talking at all for a long time.

Declining health feels like failure. Stumbling words feel like failure. A fractured church community feels like failure. "We have failed. We have done something wrong. We are not who we should be."

These background emotions powerfully shape how we handle conflict and diversity. We may have numerous skills and strategies at our disposal to work with conflict. We may have a clear, spoken resolve to start the work. However, if there is within us and in our congregation the rooted feeling that conflict = failure, then we will have major resistance to moving ahead. It will be easier to ignore, postpone or otherwise avoid addressing the conflict, rather than putting our "failure" out on the table for everyone to see. Resistance freezes us in place. Even if we fight past our resistance and begin to address the issue, our judgments and self-judgment around this feeling of failure will rob our effectiveness every step of the way.

Addressing our resistance to working with conflict

Let's explore this resistance a little more. There are good reasons why we feel that conflict = failure. We have been trained consistently to believe that conflict is wrong. St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, says to them, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been

reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters." (I Corinthians 1:10-11)

Paul clearly is reprimanding them for being in conflict. He goes on to counsel them about how to get out of these conflicts. (He also puts on the table some of the conflicts he has with them! In effect he is saying, "Stop fighting amongst yourselves. But you and I need to fight about this!" I'll say more about that later.)

Jesus also speaks words that seem to frame conflict as a clear failure. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek also….You have heard that it is said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, You shall love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:39-40, 43-45a)

If these Bible stories fail to convince me that conflict = failure, then the voice of my mother comes ringing through in my head, "You kids stop your fighting! I don't want to hear anymore yelling or arguing going on again!"

We grow up with strong feelings that conflict is wrong. We consider conflict to be the sign of a failed relationship. We feel that it is a shameful embarrassment to our character. Therefore, when conflict happens, the instinctive response is to keep it out of sight. Or, if we choose to work on a conflict, we labor the whole time under a heavy burden of self-judgment and

defensiveness. We constantly hear a voice inside our heads that is condemning us for having a conflict in the first place.

I don't want to seem blithe or naïve about the difficulty of working with our differences and tensions. Conflict is indeed a very painful experience for most of us. In our homes, congregations and cities, ongoing conflicts can be very destructive to relationships. We all know of churches that have split or had their ministry greatly diminished for years due to a painful conflict. Constant and all-consuming conflict is clearly not part of God's dream for us, nor our high dream for ourselves. Our dream is harmony, not cacophony. An essential part of our identity and hope as a church is to celebrate the unity and peace that is ours in the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, it is normal and appropriate to approach conflict with caution and respect.

Yet, it is wrong to simply equate conflict with failure. God did not create all of us to be the same. Jesus did not gather a community in which everyone was identical in thought, opinion and style. We are a diverse people with a variety of gifts, callings, needs, and wounds. We live with many mysteries in our life of faith, and one of the mysteries is that we are one and we are many at the same time; we have unity in the Spirit and we have marvelous and challenging differences in so many ways. Therefore, when we find ourselves in different places on a particular issue or problem, this is not an automatic sign of failure, but rather a normal outgrowth of a varied and developing community. Peace and unity do not come from our same-ness, but from wisely addressing and learning from our differences. In this way, conflict pain becomes growing pain.

Therefore, when choosing to work with conflict, the first task of pastors and congregation leaders is to help turn the natural resistance towards conflict into healthy intrigue and exploration. Both the members of the congregation as well as the facilitators (pastor or lay leader) will need to re-frame their view of conflict from conflict = failure to conflict as a stage in learning and growth. Until our inner resistance is addressed, we will tend to stay frozen and immobilized, no matter how many conflict-resolution skills we have studied and memorized.

Here are some new images or metaphors for conflict that will free and energize both the facilitator and the participants to enter into productive conflict dialog and interchange.

Conflict as a window to clarity and growth

I worked as a part of a team of consultants with St. Luke's Lutheran Church, a long established congregation in western Washington State. Reports had come to our bishop's office that the relationship between the lead pastor and the members of St. Luke had become very strained. Therefore, the bishop sent us in as a "Shalom Team", which was the name for a synod-organized reconciliation process at that time.

As a Shalom Team, we began by inviting in all the voices. We sat down and talked with as many people as wanted to talk, first individually and then in a larger group. In talking with members, a common complaint that began to emerge was, "Our pastor seems so distant. I don't even think he knows my name. I'm not sure he cares about what's going on in my life." As we talked alone with the pastor, his criticism sounded very similar. "I've tried for two years now to

get closer to these people, but first they put me up on a pedestal as pastor and then they just seemed to stand back and judge me. They do that to each other, too. This can be a cold group."

When we gathered the pastor and members together and helped them to speak and respond to each other, they were shocked to discover that they desired the same thing. Underneath their hurt and accusation, they came to see that they were all longing for closer relationships. They wanted a community where people stepped forward to know and support each other. As they aired their grievances, they got clearer about what kind of expectations they had of each other. The pastor and the congregation members wrote out a working covenant to practice using five specific new skills that would help their relationships with each other. Interestingly enough, the evangelism committee adapted this covenant into a guide for church members about how they could best welcome new visitors into the congregation.

When a congregation openly explores together a place of tension and conflict, they are giving themselves an opportunity to ask four key questions: "Who do we want to be? What do we want to do? What's not working? How can we fix it?" Therefore, the outcome of a well-managed conflict is a congregation that has greater clarity in its mission and new-found skills and energy to achieve it.

This pattern of "learning through mistakes and problems" is regularly used to productively move ahead in the world of industry and business. A top-level manager of a Portland corporation told me that their weekly executive meetings are called "Ugly Time". The

company CEO, who coined this phrase, tells his top people, "Get the Ugly right out on the table. If you have a problem, put it out there and let's deal with it. It's the only way forward."

An example of this can be found in the story of the Wright brothers. If the Wright brothers would have simply categorized every airplane crash that they experienced as a failure and then resisted investigating its cause, they would have gotten nowhere in their the effort to invent a flying machine. For the Wright brothers, an airplane crash was indeed a momentary failure, but it was also an opportunity to clarify what they needed to do and how they needed to get there. For example, when one of their early planes crashed, the experience allowed them to clarify that they needed more lift from the wings. With clarity of what they wanted, they then went to work building wings that would give them more lift. The next time out they had considerably better luck with the wings, but the plane crashed again! However, that new crash once again helped them to clarify a problem area and investigate how to fix it. Simply said, each crash was not a signal that the whole venture was a failure, rather it was the window that enabled them to get clearer about what they needed to do and then create a means to do it.

The playwright, Samuel Beckett, expressed it more succinctly. In one of his last prose pieces entitled *Worstward Ho*, he writes, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better**.**"[7]

In the life of the church, working through conflicts also becomes a window for clarity and growth. This has been true since the Christian movement first began, as the letters of St. Paul make clear. I referred above to how Paul scolded the Corinthians for their ongoing conflicts.

Yet Paul himself was always ready to open up and escalate a conflict when it had to do with an issue he felt was crucial to resolve.

One of the earliest and most intense conflicts in the Christian church began when Paul initiated his missionary work among Gentile (non-Jewish) people outside of Israel. The conflict centered on the question: do followers of Jesus have to obey the laws and teachings of Jewish scripture (the Old Testament) or not? During the time of Jesus' ministry and in the first years after his resurrection and ascension into heaven, virtually all of Jesus' followers were Jewish. They considered Jesus to be the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel and, as Jesus had instructed them, they continued to see the Torah as a gift from God to instruct and support them in their faithful living. It is true that Jesus had altered and extended some portions of the Torah in order to re-capture what he saw as its deeper meaning and intent. However, for the first Jewish Christians, the laws of Moses continued to be an essential part of following the Way of Jesus.

When Paul began his missionary work outside of Israel around the year 44 CE, a new question arose regarding the required elements for being a Christian. Does a new follower of Jesus, particularly a Gentile follower, have to follow the religious laws and traditions of Jewish scripture or not? This included dietary laws, worship laws and purity laws. The most hotly debated law was the law requiring circumcision of men. Do male, Gentile converts to Christianity have to be circumcised or not? Paul said "no", but the primary leaders of the church at that time, located in Jerusalem, said "yes".

This conflict spread to many of the new Christian communities throughout Asia Minor, as the letters of Paul indicate.[8] It became a pivotal moment in the theology, direction and make up of the Christian movement. Many scholars have documented this conflict and done an excellent job of tracing its theological arguments.[9] My main point in bringing this up is to highlight what it teaches us about how conflict occurs and what its benefits are.

Although the conflict about Mosaic Law was a very painful experience within the Christian community and for Paul himself, the fact that the conflict was occurring was not the result of a failure in ethics or leadership. In other words, the conflict was not occurring because Paul or the Jerusalem leaders had acted irresponsibly, or because one side was trying to impose a position on the other that was simply untrue. Both Paul and the Jerusalem church leaders were acting out of a deep commitment to God's revelation to them both in Scripture and in their lives. Both sides were trying to live faithfully their sense of God's calling and God's instruction. However, for a variety of reasons, they came to different positions on what place Jewish law and practice should have in the Gentile Christian community.

Therefore, the conflict between Paul and the Jewish leaders was not a failure in their practice as Church leaders, but rather it was the inevitable result of attempting to live out their faith in a very new situation. The conflict was an essential step in the growth of the Christian movement because it forced and assisted them to get clarity about who they were, what their mission was and how they would best proceed. Are we one ethnic group or many ethnic groups? Is our framework and identity set or is it expanding? How do we honor and use our origin and roots and also stay open to the new wisdom that God brings to us?

The agreement they finally reached provided the opportunity for diverse expressions of the Christian life.[10] By the time Paul's letter to the Philippians was written, Paul had reached a place of agreement with the leaders in Jerusalem. Paul essentially says to them, "I see that circumcision is an appropriate expression of the gospel as we Jewish people have received it through Moses and Jesus. Yet we are not all Jews, nor must we be in race or practice. Therefore, I see that non-circumcision is also a devout and appropriate response to the Gospel among those outside of Israel. We will honor both ways in the church." Engaging in the conflict and reaching a working agreement of how to proceed allowed the leaders to clarify who they were and also to put into practice the best steps for an effective ministry. The whole process of speaking, reacting and responding helped them to answer the four key questions: "Who do we want to be? What do we want to do? What's not working? How can we fix it?"

Pastors and leaders serve their churches well when they help people view conflict not as a failure but as a natural and inevitable ingredient in our learning and growing. Passionate debate about our differences helps us clarify who we are, what we are here for, and how to best do that work. If Paul and the Jerusalem leaders had not been willing to put this conflict out on the table, this transforming moment in the life of the church would not have happened. We can thank the stirrings of the Spirit that it did!

It would be wonderful, of course, if a conflict dialog could always take place as a friendly discussion, while we sit in comfortable chairs at a retreat center sharing a good bottle of wine! Sometimes it happens that way. But other times it requires intense conversations, as we sort

through muddy and emotion-filled issues, challenging each other in the strongest way possible. In the midst of this, it's vital to increase our skills in working through our conflicts effectively and productively. However, diversity and conflict will always be an essential part of our life together and are signs of normal and healthy growth.

Conflict as the threshold for innovation:

the new wisdom breaks in

Another way of viewing a conflict is to see it as a threshold opportunity for new wisdom to break into the conventional, commonly accepted wisdom that is already there. Once again, when we manage our diversity and conflict in this light, the process brings growth to our community and our mission crosses a new threshold.[11]

In Matthew's Gospel we read about the remarkable encounter that Jesus had with a woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon, which is on the coast of present-day Lebanon. Matthew writes: "Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But Jesus did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' Jesus answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their

master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly." (Matthew 15:21-28)

This was a moment when conflict became an opening point for new wisdom to break into the old. A woman from foreign, enemy territory (viewed as a spiritual and political outsider) comes to Jesus and asks for help. First Jesus ignores her and the disciples want to shoo her away. Jesus then expresses the common belief among Israelites at his time that God's blessing is only for the spiritually clean, namely Israel and those who follow the Torah. "I was sent only to the lost sheep the house of Israel," he says. There is definitely tension and conflict on the table at this point. However, the woman presses further and asks for help again. Jesus responds with an insulting remark about throwing bread crumbs to the dogs. The woman stays with the tension and responds, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Bible scholars debate whether this was a moment of new learning for Jesus, or whether Jesus was simply voicing the conventional wisdom of his disciples that God's blessing was for not for outsiders. In either case, what emerges is a major breakthrough of new wisdom regarding the breadth of God's compassion and, therefore, the ministry of the church. Conventional wisdom was lacking; new wisdom was crucial.

The setting and dynamics of this story become a good metaphor for the wisdom that comes out of diversity and conflict. Diversity means that we are always bumping into each other at the border areas where we suddenly see our differences. It's automatic that, in our communities, we are familiar to each other in some ways and also foreign to each other at the

same time in other ways. We encounter this not only with new people who suddenly come to us from the "outside," but also with people we have known for a long time. Robert Lewis Stevenson once said, "I have traveled the whole world and visited many strange lands, but the strangest people I ever meet are often the neighbors next door."

Conflicts occur when people in a community encounter each other at the "border areas" in their midst, i.e., the places where different people have different wisdom and perspective; the places where people feel "foreign" to each other. Sometimes we ignore each other in such moments, as Jesus first did. Sometimes we try to shoo each other way, like the disciples. The woman in this story was the hero when she persisted in speaking across the "border" in her attempt to make her need known to Jesus. This became the occasion for Jesus and her to speak, react and dialog back and forth, pushing the conversation to a deeper level. In doing so, essential new wisdom entered and transformed the community for all time. A key threshold was crossed.

Conflict as part of our journey into the mystery of God

Collective learning and growth, including the growth that comes through conflict and debate, is especially necessary when it come to encountering the vast mystery of God. While each Christian denomination has core beliefs that it feels quite certain about and which all members are asked to affirm, most Christians also recognize that God's glory is vast and beyond our full knowing. "Who can know the fullness of God!" writes the psalmist. Tradition has it that St. Augustine once said, "If we completely comprehend what we were just saying, we couldn't have been talking about God."

Conflicts arise in churches around all kinds of issues. Sometimes they are program issues: whether to add a third service on Sunday or not. Sometimes they are power issues: who decides which music to use on Sundays. Sometimes they are relationship issues among members and/or staff.

Still other times, church conflicts arise out of the diverse viewpoints that members have about God and God's will for us as we attempt to make sense of the vast mystery and complexity of God. As we live our lives, new theological questions and challenges come up, which we must then sort through together. Jesus himself, just before he left his disciples, told them that their life together would include continuing education. "I have much more to teach you, but you can not contain it all right now. But the Spirit will come to lead you into all truth." (John 16:12-13)

A key, additional factor in this is that there can be two beliefs about God and discipleship that are both true and yet exist in tension with other. In that case, church members in conflict may come to see that they are not facing an either/or choice in which one side is wrong and the other side is right. Rather, they are being led to see the core truth in each of their positions and then to weave both truths together in a supportive fabric.

A number of years back, I worked with First Lutheran Church where there was a conflict underway about how much the church was going to get involved in social issues. Everyone agreed that Jesus calls us to care for the needs of others, but there was disagreement about how that was best done and how they should incorporate that ministry into the life of their

congregation. In particular, there was disagreement about how much they should hear about social events in their worship and sermons on Sunday.

One person said, "I am sick of hearing about world problems and politics in the sermon so often. Don't get me wrong! Those are important things. I follow the news each day and I'm involved in various causes. In fact I'm exhausted with everything I'm doing. When I come to church on Sunday, I just need some peace. I need a quiet place where I can be restored. Church needs to be a place of rest."

Another person said, "It's so important for me that we include the world's concerns in our worship! There are so many people in need and Jesus sends us out to help them. Feed the hungry! Bring good news to the poor! But I need energy for that. I need direction and hope. For me, church is the place that fires us up to go out and do the work of Jesus!"

Who was right in this conflict? Who spoke the truth? "The church is a place of rest!" "The church is a place that fires us up to go out and do the work of Jesus!" Clearly they were both right. They both had their hands on a key element of the truth. However, those two elements also sat in tension to each other.

On the one hand, Jesus says to us, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) There are a multitude of stories in the gospels where Jesus brings relief and rest to people. Therefore, healing and rest need to be regular elements in our church life and worship.

At the same time, Jesus is regularly stirring people up for action and service. "These twelve he sent out with the following instructions, … 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.'" (Matthew 10:5,8) Clearly the fire of the Spirit of Christ ignites us and sends us out for active service. This also needs to be a regular element in our church life and worship. Peace and action; rest and stirring up.

Having identified this polarity of truths sitting side by side, the members of First Lutheran discovered something interesting. The activists admitted that they also needed some healing moments of rest now and then! Those calling for more restful services also admitted that they liked some good stirring moments mixed in! They could see the piece of truth in each other's position. Their work together then moved on to developing a working agreement about how to weave both elements of rest and action into their worship and ministry.

Church conflicts, then, can be important opportunities to discover the various elements of God's truth and learn to hold them in creative tension with each other. In his theology, Martin Luther repeatedly presented two essential truths that existed in tension and polarity with each other: law and Gospel; sinner and saint; the two kingdoms of earthly rule and spiritual grace. In the same way, conflict resolution sometimes becomes the wise art of holding two opposing truths side by side.

Summary

I began this chapter talking about our instinctive feeling that conflict = failure. I went on to offer a variety of images and examples that re-frame conflict as a normal, healthy and useful outgrowth of a diverse congregation.

I want to come back for a moment, however, and acknowledge again the very real pain and turmoil that conflict brings to most of us. I do not want to blithely say, "Conflict is great! Have some today!" Conflicts can and do grow into events that wound us in body and soul. Our society and world has become expert in escalating small conflicts into warfare and violence. Therefore, I stand in great awe (and fear!) of conflicts and for that reason continually search for the best skills to productively manage conflict at the early stages before it becomes doubly painful.

The main point of my effort to re-frame conflict is this: When conflict happens in your church community, you do not need to say, "We have failed." When, as a pastor or church leader you are leading your members to deal with a conflict, you do not have to feel, "I am doing something bad. I am taking people into a painful place. I am hanging our dirty laundry on the line."

Rather, when conflict happens you can say, "We are entering a new growing stage. God has blessed us with diverse gifts, insights and callings. God is now blessing us with new

questions to explore and problems to solve. I will help my congregation walk through this learning time in the most productive and life-giving way possible."

Two important results happens when you, as leaders, begin to switch from "conflict = failure" to "conflict = healthy growth". First, your own heart and mind are able to stay more centered. You are able to better affirm the path of conflict management you take and know that your work will bring greater health to the congregation. Second, church members will sense your wisdom and acceptance around conflict and will feel stronger to address it themselves. As you give them new images for looking at diversity and conflict, they will be able to see that they are healthy, committed church members going through another important time of learning and growth. Instead of being filled with shame, guilt and anger, this re-framing will add elements of hope, curiosity and expectation. In turn, this will help to change the atmosphere and tone of all conversations and meetings that follow.

Chapter 3

Productive management and use of conflict

What are the specific steps and skills that the pastor or church leader can use to effectively guide their community towards a productive use of conflicts? In this chapter, I will analyze more deeply the steps and skills that I outlined at the end of Chapter 1 and apply them specifically to church conflict situations. The same steps/skills can be used in other arenas of church dynamics such as long range planning and staff development. However, I will focus here on addressing the tension and conflict that naturally arises in all congregations as part of our life together. The five basic ingredients in a productive use of conflict are:

1. Inviting all the voices together and help them to speak.

2. Helping dialog take place by empowering participants to listen, react and respond to each other.

3. Helping participants get to a deeper level of their story in order to discover shared experiences, values, hopes and dreams.

4. Affirming the common ground and resolution that is reached; recognize and value the differences that are still there.

5. Framing and learning from the dialog that has taken place.

I am referring to these facilitation elements as both steps and skills. On the one hand, they are the essential steps or stages through which a facilitator will guide a group during a productive dialog process. The sequence described as Steps 1-5 is a simplified, linear description of how the steps unfold and relate to each other. In an actual conflict dialog setting, however, the steps will double back, repeat themselves, and get played out again as a new issue or position comes out in the dialog. Rather than proceeding in a straight line, the dialog may take the form of a series of loops and turns. Yet the steps are helpful as a framework for each loop.

For that reason, these five elements are not only steps for the dialog, but also skills that the pastor or leader will use repeatedly along the way. For example, the skill of helping all the voices to speak (described in Step 1), is a skill that will continue to be used throughout all the stages of the process. The activity described in Step 5, that of framing and learning, will be done in a summary fashion at the end of the dialog as a distinct stage. Yet the skill of framing and learning will be used throughout the process again and again. The same is true for all of the skills described in each of the steps. This will be spelled out more specifically in each of the following sections.

As I describe below the steps and skills essential for a conflict dialog, I use the word "facilitator" to refer to the person who is leading and guiding the group. In the actual church setting, the facilitator might be the pastor, an elected leader, a committee chairperson, or a lay

member to whom other members are naturally drawn by their spiritual depth and guidance. Any and all of these people may find themselves in the role of helping a group sort through a conflict. I want to acknowledge each of these leaders and, for sake of time and printing ink, I am including all of them in the title "facilitator."

Step 1:

Inviting all the voices and helping them to speak

A choir anthem is typically most successful when the choir members are there in the room to sing it! Furthermore, a gifted choir director not only works to get the choir members to physically show up, but also works to bring those voices into the music piece as fully as possible. In the same way, the first element in the productive use of conflict is for the facilitator to invite all of the important parties to the conflict dialog session and then help them to voice their positions, feelings, concerns and hopes. Let me give an example of a church conflict that speaks more specifically about gathering all the voices.

A few years back in my congregation, a conflict surfaced around the question: should our church carry out a ministry of social advocacy and, if so, how should that social advocacy ministry take place? Tension around that question had been brewing for some time. The conflict came out onto the table more openly when our social advocacy task force hosted a discussion forum one evening examining the employment practices at Wal-Mart.

The social advocacy task force carries out a ministry of education around social issues such as poverty, hunger and injustice. It also coordinates opportunities for church members to speak or act on behalf of those who are suffering. The task force came into being spontaneously when a core group of church members volunteered to do advocacy work. Therefore, it is not listed formally in the by-laws as other committees are. However, the social advocacy task force regularly reported its activities to the church council and pastor, and also asked for permission before beginning new activities. Consequently, it was "formal" and "informal" at the same time, which later played a role in the conflict.

Some months prior to the Wal-Mart event, the task force invited the congregation to an evening presentation which examined the reality of poverty in Clark County, Washington, which is where our congregation is located. They provided both data and real life stories about unemployment, poverty, hunger and homelessness in our neighborhood. As a follow up to that presentation and discussion, the task force decided to look more closely at the topic of employment and fair wages for workers. It was then that they asked my permission to show a film at church that examined the employment practices of Wal-Mart and to follow the movie with a discussion. Since the newspapers were already reporting a variety of conflicted responses to this movie, I knew that showing the movie at church could also be a "hot spot" for us. Yet, I also supported bringing up complicated questions and looking at them, so I approved that the movie be shown. About 20 people attended the event and did, in fact, have a very good discussion in which many different positions were expressed.

What were notable were all the conversations that took place outside of the movie night event. In the hallways at church, out in the parking lot, and over the telephone, people debated the Wal-Mart event. Those speaking, however, were not simply divided into "pro-Wal-Mart" and "anti-Wal-Mart". A whole variety of voices spoke from many different positions.

A number of members felt strongly that Wal-Mart's employee and business practices were not fair. Others felt that they were comparatively fair. Two members worked for Wal-Mart and were generally appreciative of their jobs. One member was a wholesale goods distributor for whom Wal-Mart was a major and valuable client. Some members felt torn between their sympathy for the poorly compensated Wal-Mart employees and their appreciation for Wal-Mart's low prices that helped them with their own budget concerns. One person did research on what other retail stores paid their employees and found out that Target and others were worse than Wal-Mart. Still others said that they didn't know much about wages at Wal-Mart, but they just didn't like the "feel" of the store, so they stayed away.

The issue of Wal-Mart's employment practices drew out many different, but a second issue drew additional voices into the conversation. For some in the church, the issue they were reacting to most was not Wal-Mart itself, but the related question of whether our congregation should be involved in social advocacy. Some members were delighted that our church was addressing justice issues in our neighborhood and the world. Other members said that, while Christians should serve society individually according to their own conscience and in their own way, a congregation should stay away from adopting social and political causes that could be divisive.

Still others raised a third issue. They were open to our church getting involved in social issues, but they felt left out of the decision-making process when those issues were chosen. "How come I didn't get to vote on choosing Wal-Mart as a project? Who gets to decide what our congregation is publicly for or against? Who has the power here?"

Congregation members did a great job of strongly speaking their viewpoints and positions. We plunged into an extended conflict dialog process about who we were as a congregation, what our ministry was, and how we would make decisions and work together. It was painful and illuminating. It was shattering and clarifying and bonding. It was a chorus of many voices. In one of life's synchronistic ironies, while all of this was going on, two youth from our congregation, including my son, played with their high school band at the Opening Day celebration of a brand new Wal-Mart in our neighborhood!

The main point in telling this story is to underline the first step in facilitating and productively using conflicts in the congregation. The first, key step and ongoing skill is inviting and helping all the voices to speak. When I say "all the voices", I am stressing that the facilitator should anticipate and be on the look-out for more than just the two, quickly-identified voices of "us" and "them". In a conflict situation, there is a tendency for participants to see themselves divided into two distinct, sharply defined groups. Following this tendency in the case above, participants would be identified as either for Wal-Mart or against Wal-Mart.

Conflicts are virtually always more complex than that. Although there may be two broad groupings to begin with, there is usually diversity within each group. As people who see themselves on the same "side" begin to talk, they discover that they, too, hold different views on different elements of their position. Additional issues, which may be related or very tangential, are intertwined with the first issue.

Therefore, when a facilitator gathers church members for a conflict dialog process, it's important to identify all the various voices that need to be invited. The list should include the following:

A.) Invite those who are directly involved in the conflict. This would certainly include those who have already been actively speaking out on the issue, whether in meeting rooms, hallways or on telephones. It would also include those who may not have actively identified themselves as on a particular "side", but have additional relationships to the issue. In the example above, members who work for or with Wal-Mart should be invited, as well as Church Council members who oversee the decision-making process in a congregation. They have a stake in the outcome and would be affected by whatever resolution takes place.

B.) Invite people who represent diversity within any one "side". In the Wal-Mart case there was the person who didn't like Wal-Mart, but also raised the question of "why pinpoint Wal-Mart when Target and others were worse." There was the person who appreciated his part-time job at Wal-Mart, but admitted that a full-time employee would have a hard time surviving on their compensation. Listening for and bringing in the variety of voices within the various groups

helps avoid over-simplification of a complex issue and also helps to forge a productive working plan to deal with it.

C.) Invite people who are reacting to related issues that grow out of the first issue. For example, out of the debate on Wal-Mart came the important issue of whether our church should involve itself in social and political advocacy. This was a key underlying issue that we needed to resolve in order to get clearer about our own mission as a church. A third issue then surfaced that had to do with how decisions are made within the congregation and who has power to make those decisions. In most conflicts, a variety of issues come forward that are tangentially related. In some cases, the related issues carry with them more emotion and more importance in people's minds than the initiating issue. For example, the issues of whether our church should do social advocacy and how decisions were made brought far stronger reactions from most people than the issue of Wal-Mart itself. A productive outcome depends on hearing the variety of these related voices and addressing their concerns. Therefore, it is important to get all of these various voices into the conversation from the start.

D.) A fourth group that should be invited into the conflict dialog process are those that we could call peripheral voices. This includes people who, up to this point, have not been active in the conversation at all, but would bring helpful input. The facilitator should ask himself/herself, "Who haven't we heard from yet that could have something important to say? Who is out on the periphery that should be invited in? " Perhaps someone who is generally shy to speak, yet has a connection to the topic? Someone whose health or age (young or old) makes it difficult for them to speak or be heard in the congregation?

Another peripheral voice to invite could be a church member who has no direct interest or involvement in the issue, but who is a person whose demeanor or fresh ideas generally help every conversation in which they are involved. Invite someone with a good perceptive or analytical mind who can help the group diagnose what they are in conflict about.

Invite someone who would approach the topic from an entirely different perspective. In the corporate world, companies will sometimes schedule problem-solving sessions where work groups who are ordinarily separate from each other are gathered for a cross-fertilization of ideas. For example, engineers and sales people are brought together and asked to look at an identified problem or goal from their own perspective. The engineers and sales people each analyze and communicate quite differently, yet the cross-fertilization often brings unexpected breakthroughs.

Another peripheral voice to invite is someone whose communication style is different than other member's. Groups typically have certain adopted communication styles for discussing issues. Perhaps they most prefer a calm, deliberative style; a well-worded, analytical style, etc. Consequently, there are often members of the community whose communication style makes it harder for them to be heard or valued by the larger body. This may be a person who takes a longer time expressing what they really want to say. Or, a person who feels awkward to speak at all and, therefore, talks in a very halting manner. Or, a person who immediately gets into anger and attack when they speak, or conversely, a person who quickly seems wounded and withholding. Or, a person who just seems a little "odd" to most members of the group. In each case, inviting a peripheral voice can often bring unexpected contributions to the dialog. Equally

important, it will broaden the benefit and "buy-in" within the congregation when the dialog reaches its outcome.

E.) Invite into the dialog the variety of inner voices that are speaking within each one of us. By inner voices I mean the variety of thoughts, opinions, views and dreams that each one of us has swirling around inside of us at any given time.[12] The phrase "inner voices" is sometimes used to describe the voices that a mentally ill person hears talking to them. However, I am referring to a very normal and healthy reality that we all experience. In most moments and most situations in our lives, we do not have merely one thought or feeling expressing itself internally; we have many.

When I walk into someone's home for a dinner party, there is one voice inside my head saying, "It's great to be here with these people eating good food." There is another self-critical voice saying inside me, "Look what you did! You wore the wrong clothes." Another voice is saying, "I'm tired and would rather be home by myself tonight." Another, "I'm embarrassed that George is here. I never did send a card or call when his brother died. I bet he is hurt."

Each of us, in every setting, has a variety of voices speaking within us. This is also true in a conflict dialog setting. When we are in a conflict dialog, there may be a particular point or position we feel most passionate about, which is probably the voice we will express out loud first to the group. However, inside our heads and hearts, a variety of other inner voices will be speaking out from different angles. It is productive if those inner voices are also brought openly into the dialog.

Let me give you an example of a conflict situation in which inner voices were brought into the conversation. At St. James Church, the pastor and worship staff, with the approval of the church council, had changed the liturgy on Sunday morning from a traditional liturgy accompanied by pipe organ to a new praise liturgy led by a four-piece band. Three months went by and a considerable amount of heat had been generated among church members about whether this was a good idea or not. Very wisely, a church meeting was called to discuss this matter and church members spoke out from a variety of different positions. Some expressed clear delight in the new music, while some strongly wanted to move back to the old. However, one woman stood up and admitted that this same debate was going on in her own head. She said, "I find myself taking both sides on this issue. There are Sundays when I just love the energy and pace of the new liturgy, and I say, 'This is want I want!' Then, there are other Sundays when I really want the peace and strength that traditional worship brought to us and I say, 'No, this is what I want!"

Another member got up and said, "I have some thoughts about worship, but mostly I am feeling really scared right now to say anything. I'm scared that if I take any side, then a bunch of other people will not want me as a friend anymore." Someone else said, "I feel sad right now that we are so divided. I just want to go away." A fourth person said, "I try to think clearly about this, but I feel like I am in a foggy maze. I can't even form a good sentence."

"Inner voices" are the different voices within our own hearts and minds. Sometimes the inner voices are the ambivalent opinions we have as we weigh the pros and cons of a particular path. "This is a good thing to do because..., but this is also a bad thing to do because..." However, the

inner voices may not be rational, diagnostic thoughts. Rather, they are voicing the multiple feelings that seem tangential or even totally unrelated to the issue. "I'm scared right now. I'm sad right now. I want to go home."

A dialog facilitator will invite the variety of inner voices within participants to be expressed. Even though they seem peripheral, the facilitator will make use of these feelings and voices to explore the question, “Andrew says that he’s feeling afraid to speak in the group. What is this voice, this feeling, this physical sense telling us about what we’re working on? What hasn’t been said yet that this inner voice is bringing up? What aspect of our conflict has been ignored so far, or is so scary or complicated to bring up, that the inner voice is telling us to look at it?”

It is also important for the facilitator to listen to the inner voices within himself or herself. When a facilitator hears an inner voice of her own, she is often picking up something the whole group is experiencing.[13] An inner voice gives the facilitator a clue about the atmosphere in the room, which in turn is a clue to some helpful element in the dialog that has not been fully expressed or explored.

As more voices are invited into the dialog and heard, greater wisdom will emerge. In conflict situations, as we said earlier, there is a tendency to view the issue as two either/or alternatives. We then see those involved as being on two sides, "us" and "them". However, as we invite the inner voices into the conversation, we are helped to see that the issue is more complex. Not only are participants spread out over a number of sides and positions, each

individual person carries a number of sides and positions with himself or herself. This includes the ambivalent opinions, odd feelings and noticeable physical sensations that talk to us from within as we sort through very complex topics.

When a voice is ignored or not included in the dialog, it will comes back to press the group for attention at another time. Even when we think that the group has reached agreement and the conflict has been resolved, an ignored voice will speak out a day or a month or three months later. Therefore, resolution to conflict will require hearing all the voices, both outside and inside. Furthermore, when participants admit that they have a number of thoughts and feelings within, including thoughts and feelings that they share in common with those on "the other side", it helps everybody to feel that their viewpoints are being heard and respected. The rigid “us against them” dynamic begins to become more fluid.

By welcoming the variety of inner voices, a church community will also help itself to reach greater clarity and honesty about its current condition. For example, within a church community, it is generally expected that people will be pious, self-giving, and centered in God, especially when they are discussing their ministry. Yet, perhaps church members and even the pastor are presently experiencing a whole set of other deep feelings: confusion, loneliness, questions about God, rage. These additional voices, which are not ordinarily encouraged to speak out at church, nevertheless bring clear messages about where people are in their spiritual path and what their needs are. This information, in turn, will assist the congregation in deciding what it needs most in its ministry, whether that has to do with worship or any other program.

When we think about inviting all the voices into a conflict dialog, it's interesting to note that the four Gospel writers heard a variety of distinctive voices come from Jesus as they recorded his words on the cross. Although we speak of the seven last words of Jesus from the cross, none of the Gospel writers recorded all seven. They each were drawn to specific words.

Matthew and Mark: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Luke: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

John: "Woman, here is your son…Here is your mother." "I am thirsty." "It is finished."

Each of these words deserves individual attention, particularly as they are heard within the theological framework of that particular Gospel. However, bringing the four Gospels together as a mosaic, we see that articulating a profound and sacred moment involves multiple layers of voices all speaking at the same time. Despair, hope, compassion, forgiveness, a loud cry, a sense of completion. By inviting all the voices to speak, the dialog then reaches into the complex, depth of truth. So it is in a church community when we engage and encourage the many different and important voices, both within and without.

Arny Mindell, a gifted teacher of mine, has crafted a great description for this dialog of many voices. He calls it "deep democracy."[14] In our society and in more and more places throughout the world, we humans have been guided by God to develop the practice of

democracy. Democracy guarantees the right of the whole community to participate in the decisions that shape their lives. Deep democracy takes that one step farther by striving to involve those voices that are typically left out: the marginalized, the forgotten, the powerless. A healthy community will take yet another step and cultivate both outer and inner deep democracy. Outer deep democracy involves the focused effort by church leaders to invite all the members of the community who are essential to the conflict dialog, including peripheral members. Inner deep democracy means that church leaders will also welcome into the conversation the variety of inner voices that speak within each of us. With all these voices in dialog, the opportunity to *productively use* our conflicts greatly increases.

One last logistical note: The physical arrangements of the room where you will be meeting, as well as the format and atmosphere, will help to invite participants into the dialog process. In regard to physical arrangements, if the size of the group permits, circular seating works best, because it allows the participants to see and talk to each other face-to-face. The opening remarks by the leader, including a prayer and reflection time, can invite all the voice to speak.

Step 2:

Help dialog take place by empowering participants to listen, react and respond to each other

Once the facilitator has gathered and invited the voices to speak, the facilitator then needs to establish a safe setting for people to listen, react and respond to each other. **This dialog and**

interchange of viewpoints is the heart of making productive use of conflict. Healthy, honest exchange back and forth becomes a learning moment, which in turn provides a possible basis for resolution and movement forward.

However, in a conflict situation, listening becomes an exceedingly difficult task. When a person is expressing something to us that we strongly disagree with, we rarely are able to listen for more than a few moments. Instead we become nervous, angry, or scared. We begin to compose in our head the rebuttal we will make that will defend our position. We interpret their words so that their "meaning" fits the image we have made in our minds of the person and their position.

Listening in a conflict dialog is especially difficult if:

1. We fear there will be no chance for us to say anything back.
2. The other person is going on and on with apparently no one to stop them.
3. It feels like something is being forced down our throats.

If we feel trapped in a setting where we experience any of these three things happening, our internal voice will quickly say, "I just can't listen to this anymore!"

Conflict dialog conversations automatically bring up all three of those fears. As a facilitator, it is impossible to tell people to put those fears and reactions aside and "just listen!" We humans are wired to react and respond when someone is saying something we don't agree with. In fact,

as we shall see, our ability to hold passionately to our position and react back to others is actually a key ingredient in moving ahead.

Therefore, instead of trying to talk participants out of their fears and reactions, the facilitator needs to establish an environment and dialog structure in which those fears are anticipated and addressed. This structure needs to be explained to participants at the beginning of the dialog and also brought up again during the dialog, when the facilitator senses that the fears are naturally coming back.

Specifically, at the beginning of the dialog, the facilitator needs to state clearly that:

1. Everyone will have a chance to speak.
2. Everyone will have a chance to react and respond.
3. No one will be permitted to speak for more than 3 minutes and then someone else will be able to respond. (That's a time limit I suggest; you may wish to modify that depending on the size of the group.) You can help people observe this rule by explaining that it works in their favor when they speak briefly. "If you take too much airtime when a lot of people are wanting to speak, it really reduces their ability to listen. Don't speak more than 3 minutes. That gives you the best chance of getting across your point."

This structure addresses the first two fears that someone will go on and on and that "I won't have a chance to respond. " The third pivotal block to listening is that "It feels like something is being forced down my throat." It is impossible to fully listen if we feel that, by listening, we will

be forced to change our mind and agree with the other side. Therefore, at the beginning of the dialog, the facilitator needs to spend a few moments talking about the purpose and goal of the dialog. **Make clear that the purpose of the dialog is to help participants understand each other's viewpoint and position.** It is **not** the purpose of the dialog to convince a participant to switch to a new position. Rather, to say it again, the purpose of the dialog is to help participants understand what the other person thinks and why they think it.

Humor and exaggeration can be used to get this across to people in a way that is disarming and non-threatening.[15] The facilitator can say:

"I'm not asking you to listen so that you are convinced by the other person of anything. In fact I am going to say something outrageous. Don't let anybody change your mind today! Hold on to your viewpoint! Passionately speak your viewpoint and hold on to it! However, I am asking you to become genuinely curious about the other person's viewpoint. Become a research scientist. What is their point? Why do they think that?"

Then as facilitator you can add, "Also, notice if there is some point along the way where you agree with a piece of what they say. Not the whole thing, but just a piece."

By clarifying the purpose and structure of the dialog at the very beginning, participants will be able to relax a bit. They won't have to stay quite so defensive. It is also important for the facilitator to remind them about this framework a few times during the dialog.

For example, when the dialog becomes more emotional and heated, the facilitator can say, “For some of you, this is hard to listen to right now.” In that way, the participants who are, in fact, having a hard time listening, will feel addressed, seen and understood. They will be relieved and actually able to listen a little bit more.

When someone is speaking at greater length, they will need a reminder of time. The rest of the group will need to be assured that they don’t have listen forever. They will soon get to react. The facilitator can say as the person talks, “We’ll listen one more minute and then we’ll open it up for reactions.”

The facilitator can also say (with a smile) after a number of people have spoken, “We’re having some great input from many sides. Remember, we’re not asking you to agree. Please don’t agree! We’re asking you to learn and discover from each other what your thoughts and reasoning’s are.”

Or, the facilitator can say, “Great! You are all doing such a good job of strongly stating your viewpoint. Speak passionately! All of you who are speaking: Try to convince each other. All of you listeners: don’t let them convince you! But discover their point. How do they get there? Maybe there is something new that you haven’t heard before. And then you can talk back and disagree and passionately speak your view on the matter.” This is all counter-intuitive in a way. To help them to listen better, you are avoiding lecturing them about listening. However, when participants know that they are free to disagree, they also become more free to talk and listen openly with each other.

Part of our resistance to exploring our conflicts comes from our feeling that strong back-and-forth talking is just "arguing" and that arguing is counter-productive to mutual understanding. We tend to equate listening with being silent. We equate peace-making with one side giving up their position for the sake of peace with the other. However, listening happens within the context of everybody speaking and knowing they can speak. Mutual understanding happens in a setting when people energetically explore and challenge each other's words. When we are challenged, we are forced and helped to clarify our position, first to ourselves and then to each other. When we react to what someone else has said, we bring to the other person a piece of the truth that they didn't have before. When they react, they bring a piece of truth to us that we then have to wrestle with and either assimilate or reject. Speaking and reacting deepens the dialog.

Think again about the dialog that took place between Jesus and the Canaanite woman that I referred to in Chapter Two. They did not begin in a place of listening and understanding. Rather, they began by forcefully speaking, reacting and disagreeing. Here is how the dialog went:

> Woman: 'Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'
>
> Jesus ignores her.
>
> Disciples: 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.'
>
> Jesus: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'
>
> Woman: 'Lord, help me.'

Jesus: ‘It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.’

Woman: ‘Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.’

Jesus: ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’

Dialog is a process of people first separating and distinguishing themselves from each other. Where are they different? As they detect something different, they listen more carefully to figure out why they are different. What’s the missing point that the other person left out? What hasn’t been said yet? The chance to react brings in these missing points and the issue becomes more sharply defined. But, of course, that also brings a reaction and response from the first person, and the interchange continues. In this interchange, however, comes greater mutual understanding and in that understanding is the possibility for deepened relationship.

“Framing” as a means to help the participants

speak, react and respond

As the conversation proceeds, the leader should identify or "frame" the key learning moments when the positions, sub-issues and emotions are expressed. What does it mean to frame?[16] When I use the word "frame", I mean that the facilitator will draw attention to a key moment in the dialog, which will help everyone look at it more closely. By putting a frame around it and calling attention to the content of what happened, the participants will be helped to see/hear the significance of that moment and keep it in mind as the conversation continues. In

this way, framing helps those present to "listen" by drawing attention to key moments, before they get lost in the ongoing conversation.

This framing is a skill or technique that the leader should use throughout the dialog. Framing and learning will also be used as a distinct, concluding step to the whole conflict dialog session (see Step 5).

Framing *content*

As the conflict dialog is proceeding, the leader will want to frame moments when

- A new perspective or position is voiced. "Thank you, Stan! You're saying you were completely left out of the decision-making process and that it's harder to support a program when it has been imposed on you by someone else."

- The relationship of two positions can be clearly highlighted. "Marty and Rebecca are helping us break down this issue further. Marty is saying that the church needs to invest more energy and money into our youth program, or the kids are going to feel ignored. Rebecca is saying that parents and kids have to make a commitment to it, too, and not just expect the church to do it all."

- A key discovery or learning has just taken place. "I'm seeing a lot of heads nodding in agreement with what Kathryn has said. Everyone here wants our church to be in active

service to our community, but we have some clear differences about what kind of service is best. That gives us a clearer direction to go exploring together."

- A place of unity has been uncovered. "I'm noticing how everybody is agreeing that the well-being of your children is the top priority."

- Where differences have been sharpened and clarified in a helpful way. "What I am hearing from you is that quality, meaningful worship is something you all want, but there are some big difference about what kind of worship music brings the quality and meaning you are each looking for. That's a place where you are still not together, and so that's what you could talk about next."

Another way to picture "framing" is to use the plane-versus-train image.[17] One skill available to a facilitator is to bring people up to the 30,000-foot level to view their interactions from a distance. When we are flying at 30,000 feet in a plane, we can look down and get a much broader view of the terrain. It releases us from the pressure of each detail and we see the main highlights and patterns of what we are passing over.

When we are in the midst of an emotional dialog, it often becomes like traveling on a fast-moving train. The talking and reacting builds. People hurtle into the points they want to make and emotions escalate. In a sense, the heat of the conversation creates its own track and the train races forward. People get transfixed and even addicted to the mood and energy of the conflict. Caught up in the details and momentum of the moment, it becomes difficult for participants to

catch the key places where the dialog suddenly uncovers some new piece of clarity or potential resolution.

Using the 30,000-foot view, the facilitator is able to say, "Wow, this is interesting! Look at this new issue (question, need, fear, shared value…) that Jerry just brought up." This helps the participants step back from the track for a moment and see the broader horizons of where they are going and what they might learn together.

Framing *communication styles*

Framing is useful not only for clarifying content, it also helps to frame the different communication styles that are being used by different participants.[18] For example, perhaps a group is interacting around the issue of poverty and how they should respond to poverty. One person gets up and reports a long list of facts about poverty. "Here are the poverty statistics in our county right now. This is the number of people malnourished, the numbers of subsidized lunches being served..." He is speaking in a very linear and factual style.

Then someone else gets up and, in a very emotional way, tells the story about some particular people they know. "But the babies! I'm thinking about little Rasheed that I held at the homeless shelter. We have to respond!"

Then a third person gets up and tells their personal story about a time when they were unemployed and on food stamps.

When the communication style makes a switch from one speaker to the next, participants may have a hard time following or understanding what is being said. Their minds get on a factual track and then get surprised by the emotions. Conversely, if participants communicate more often in a personal, emotional style, they may not tune in very well to the factual speakers. Participants may find themselves unconsciously liking or not liking other people based more on their communication style than their position.

The facilitator can help participants "bridge" the shifts in communication style by briefly framing out loud for the group what the style is. "Jeff, you are giving us a good series of facts about the poverty right here in our county." "Beth, you're really speaking from the heart about Rasheed. I can see how much that touched you." "Claire, you're willing to say not just what others go through, but what you have gone through yourself." By framing noticeable shifts in speaking style, the facilitator can help participants to better absorb what the speaker is saying.

Framing *a change of issue*

Another useful framing skill is to note when a completely new issue is brought into the dialog. For example, a church group is in conflict about a Building Committee decision to build more educational space, rather than refurbishing the church sanctuary. Members are interacting about whether that is the best choice. A woman stands up and says to the Building Committee members, "You all made that decision by yourself without asking anybody, and you did that because you are men." The facilitator should frame that moment by saying, " Oh, I see that

sexism is also an issue here." Participants can then choose whether they want to pursue further the new issue sexism. The facilitator can be alert to other issues that may surface, such as ageism issues, staff issues, and reactions to national church body decisions.

Slowing down to help frame

One of the most helpful phrases I have learned to use as a facilitator is: "Let's slow down. Let's slow down for a moment and hear what is really being said." This is especially helpful when two people are speaking with a lot of anger or accusation towards each other. Their words may be coming out very fast, with a lot of heat back-and-forth. As their argument escalates, a lot of anxiety typically fills the whole room. At that point, the leader can say, "Let's slow down for a moment. Something very important is being said by both of you and I want to make sure I understand it. Kathy, I want to first go back to what you are saying, and then, Tom, I'll come back right away to ask for your response."

By asking participants to slow down, it helps each of them to see and express more of their own story and where their position originates. "Slowing down" also enables the facilitator to zero in on a crucial element of the conflict that perhaps has not yet been expressed or that needs to be looked at more closely before the group can get anywhere. After hearing more from one participant for one or two minutes, the leader can turn to the other participant and say, "Tom, what's your response as you hear Kathy speaking?" As you help these two participants speak and respond to each other, you are of course helping the whole group to slow down and listen more effectively as well.

Sometimes the conversation moves along so quickly or so heatedly that the facilitator may not be able to catch and frame a key moment when it happens. In fact, sometimes the facilitator will be so intent on listening to the many things being said, including the facilitator's own inner voices, that it takes a moment to realize that something crucial came up a few minutes back. It's fine at that point for a facilitator to say, "Let's back up for a minute. Suzanne said something very important that I want to come back to. Suzanne said..."

Framing *partial agreement*

The facilitator should listen for and frame those moments when a participant agrees with portions of what another person is saying. In conflict situations, particularly as the conflict escalates, participants tend to see their opponent's position as "totally wrong". There is also the underlying fear that if they agree with any part of what the other person is saying, they will be giving power to their opponent and sabotaging their own position.

However, it is a very transforming moment in a conflict dialog when one participant can say, "Jack, I really agree with you when you say that children have to be the number one priority for us. That's an important truth that we have to keep in mind. The part I don't agree with is when you say..." Agreeing with and affirming at least a portion of what another person is saying does two things. First, it identifies a piece of common ground on which a basis for moving forward together might be built. Secondly, it changes the emotional atmosphere of the room for the

better. It communicates to the other person, "I'm listening to you. I respect your thoughts. And you also need to hear what I'm saying."

When such an interchange happens in the dialog, the facilitator can frame and affirm it by saying, "Sherri is agreeing with Jack when it comes to valuing kids. They are in the same place on that. They are in different places on other points."

Framing *non-verbal communication*

As the conversation proceeds, the facilitator can also model for people the skill of "listening" to nonverbal communication.[19] The facilitator can say, "Carl, I noticed that you really frowned just now when Sam was speaking. I'm wondering what you're thinking right now." Or, "Mary, this conversation is bringing up a lot of emotions for you. If those tears could speak, what would they say?" People communicate through visual signals, sounds, body movement or posture, and also through the general atmosphere in the room. "I'm sensing a lot of tightness and nervousness in the room right now, like we were all holding our breath. I'm curious about that and what might be hard for us to express right now?"

It also helps the dialog when the facilitator acknowledges those who aren't saying anything at all. "I'm noticing and appreciating the people in the room tonight who haven't said anything at all. First of all, I wanted thank you just for being here and I also respect the fact that sometimes sitting silently is exactly the thing to do. If a moment comes when you feel that the time is right to speak, I also support you to do that." Or, "I'm glad to see that we have a lot of the

members of our youth group with us tonight. Thank you for coming. We haven't heard from you yet. I'm wondering if anyone any of you would like to say something. It's also okay to not say anything at all."

Acknowledging and welcoming the

invisible figures in the room

The art of listening also includes listening to the invisible figures in the room.[20] In church conflict dialogs, one frequent example of this is the presence and voice of God in the room. By this I mean two things. First, in the deepest sense, Christians believe and sense that God is always with us wherever we are and that God is constantly speaking to us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore when a church community gathers, we know that God is present with us. Jesus indeed said, “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18) It’s noteworthy that Matthew puts this saying right in the context of Jesus counseling the disciples to get together for conflict dialog. Therefore, we can particularly trust that Jesus is with us and supporting us when we are working through our conflicts.

Secondly, when a church community is sorting through a complicated issue or conflict, most of the people in the room will be basing their position, at least in part, on "This is what God teaches us?" Or "This is what Jesus would do?" This may be non-verbalized or it may be verbalized very strongly when a participant quotes the Bible and says, "This is what God teaches us."

Typically in a church conflict, all the various sides will feel and often state that God is on their side. It is healthy for the facilitator to acknowledge this in a supportive way by saying, “I see how deeply everybody here is trying to follow God's way and do what Jesus would do. I see that you all are taking the Bible very seriously and trying to do what is right. I also see that different people have come to different conclusions about what God wants, so we still have to work that out.” The facilitator can also invite the invisible figure of God into the conversation more fully by saying to the participants, “What is God saying to us right now?” “What does Jesus want us to do right now?” This affirms the effort to bring God’s voice into the dialog and also helps take the dialog to a deeper level.

When church members are sorting through an issue, the invisible figure of "Church Tradition" is often present in the room as well. Whether people vocalize it or not, many members in the room will be thinking about the traditional practice and expectations that have been a part of the congregation or the denomination to which it belongs. For some in the room, church tradition will be looked at as something good and crucial that also supports their position. "This is an important part of who we are. Let’s continue to do it this way." Others in the room will be experiencing church tradition as a heavy burden. "We have been trapped in the same pattern for decades. We need to break through to something better!" Once again, it is helpful if the facilitator acknowledges the invisible figure of Church Tradition in the room. “I can sense that many of us are hearing the voice of Church Tradition. None of you are just speaking that voice. I’m not saying that any of you is Church Tradition, but I think all of us are hearing the voice of Church Tradition and we have a variety of reactions to it.”

Other invisible figures in the room might be described as "the Critic" or "the Judge." Once again, it would be untrue and unfair to identify a particular person in the room as the critic or the judge. However, typically in a conflict dialog, participants will feel judged or criticized for their position. No matter what their "side" or position, each person feels the presence of a critic. It will be helpful for the facilitator to acknowledge out loud the invisible presence of the critic figure. "As we're talking together, I'm sensing some nervousness in the room. It's as if there were this figure of the critic sitting among us. None of you are that critic. However, when each one of us is talking, I suspect we are hearing in our heads the voice of the critic saying, "That's wrong. That's foolish. You have no right to talk."

The invisible figures in a conflict dialog may represent other members of the church community who are not actually present, but the participants are picturing them in their minds and hearing their voices in their heads. “I know what Bill would say if he were here.” Still other examples of invisible figures are the Victim, the Tyrant who is imposing his will on me, the Members Who Will Leave The Church, and so forth.

To summarize, when the facilitator perceives the presence of one of these invisible figures, it is helpful for the facilitator to identify it to the group. This is helpful for three reasons.

First, it helps bring to the conscious level the words, messages, and atmospheric mood that the participants are sensing at a deeper level, but perhaps are not able to totally express. By making this invisible figure more conscious, the participants can better know how to respond.

Second, when the facilitator identifies an invisible figure or presence in the room, it helps the participants avoid projecting that voice onto one particular person in the room. For example, when one participant is sensing that they are being judged for what they have just said, they will often try to identify the judge as a particular person or group of persons who are on another side of the issue. The participant feeling judged will then often focus all of their discomfort and anger against those particular people. While it's true that people on another side will probably have some judgments, there is more to them than just being “the judge”. They will have a variety of opinions and values, some of which may be in total agreement with the first person speaking. When the facilitator identifies an invisible figure in the room, participants can better avoid minimizing or stereotyping each other into limited identities or roles.

This leads to the third benefit in naming of the invisible voices. In a conflict dialog, all the participants are not only experiencing the invisible voice or figure in the room which they project onto someone else, they may also be playing out that figure themselves. For example, while each person feels judged or tyrannized in one moment, each of them may be the judge or the tyrant in another moment. Once again, by identifying the invisible figures in the room and expressing their voices, facilitators are bringing in both outer and inner deep democracy. Along with benefiting from the message of each voice, the participants discover that they may have more in common with each other than they thought.

Step 3:

Help participants get to a deeper level of their story in order to discover shared experiences, values, hopes and dreams.

When a conflict dialog begins, participants will quite naturally talk about the basic, immediate elements of the issue. What happened? What they didn't like? What do they think should happen next time? Participants will also give their reasoning as to why their position is right. For example, they will talk about what the Bible teaches, or they will say what they think is best for the long-term health of the church, or they will say what they expect from their church in order for them to continue to be a member. These are all very important pieces of information as the participants sort through what the issue is and where they agree or disagree. Understanding each other's position is the fundamental purpose of the dialog, as was outlined in Step 1. Therefore, the dialog begins as participants state their own position and then react and respond to each other.

As the dialog continues, however, the facilitator should also listen for moments when he or she can invite the participants to tell more of their story, namely, what motivated or brought the participant to the position they now have. This in turn will take the group to a deeper level of conversation. By "deeper level", I mean that they will begin to discover the values, fears, hopes and dreams that lie underneath the positions they are stating in the dialog. When the dialog participants are able to enter this deeper level, however momentarily, there are three benefits.

First, when a participant is invited to talk about what it is that is driving and motivating their position, the facilitator is helping them to speak from the level of their heart and soul. The

speaker will be able to feel that they have given voice to things that count most to them. They will sense that, not only are their words being listened to, their life experience is also being recognized and valued. **Second**, they will be able to see and hear each other in a more multi-dimensional way. They will discover that a person is always more than their position. **Third**, when participants from various sides speak at this deeper level, the participants often are surprised to discover that they share more in common than they realized. They may differ on various points, but they may also share certain key values, hopes, fears and dreams. This discovery offers a common basis and relationship for them to proceed ahead and address the exterior elements of the issue they are facing.

Here is an example that will clarify the benefits of helping people to speak at a deeper level. While I was a pastor in San Francisco in the late 1980's, I facilitated a conflict dialog in a neighboring Lutheran church on the issue of homosexuality. The conflict was around whether or not the congregation should welcome and affirm gay and lesbian members. It was a very relevant question for that San Francisco congregation, and continues to be an intensely debated topic nationally in the Lutheran church today and in many other denominations as well.

The participants began by stating their position on the matter and giving their reasoning. People referred to God, the Bible, church tradition, moral standards and their own "gut" feelings on the matter. It was a good opening stage in the dialog that served to sharpen the issue and allow people to react and respond to each other in useful interchange.

An opportune moment came in the dialog when I said, "John, you are speaking very deeply about this topic with a lot of emotion. Would you be willing to say more? What is it that's really moving you to speak to the?" John, joined by his wife Sandra, told the group that their daughter had come to them two years previously and told them that she was lesbian. It was a huge shock to them and in a number of ways their family was still sorting through this issue. "However," said John, "our daughter is someone we clearly love and will always love. It would break our hearts to think that she couldn't come to church with us."

After John and Sandra spoke, a number of other people in the room began talking about family members or friends who were gay or lesbian. The tone in the conversation shifted, but they had not all arrived at the same place about this. One of the participants said, "my cousin, James, is gay and I continue to welcome him to our home every Thanksgiving. He's a good guy. But that doesn't make it right. We still have to follow what God says on this matter."

The participants were still at different places on the issue, however the dialog was at a new level. In sharing their personal stories, they were allowing each other a deeper look into the complexity of experiences, emotions and beliefs. It was no longer a third-person, academic discussion. As they told their stories, they discovered some places where they shared the same values and hopes. They also got clearer about the places where they still differed.

At another point in the dialog, one of the participants was telling the group quite strongly, "If we are a church, we have to follow God's will in this matter. The Bible makes it very clear that homosexuality is a sin and not to be tolerated by the church." A number of people in the

group voiced their strong approval of this, while others gave a very different interpretation of the Bible. At that point, as facilitator, I said the group, "I notice how so many of you are taking the Bible seriously and wanting to follow what God is saying to us. That's certainly an important part of what we do as the people of God. But, I'm curious about something. You are debating what the Bible says about homosexuality with a lot of intense emotion, and I'm wondering what is producing that emotion. If we were discussing another ethical topic,... for example if we were discussing divorce and asking whether the Bible and God's word permits divorce, I'm sure we could have a good debate on that matter. But I suspect there wouldn't be the same emotional intensity as what we are experiencing right now. So my question is: "What brings up all the intensity when you talk about homosexuality? What are you most worried about? What are you most wanting?"

The group thought for a minute and then one woman raised her hand and said, "I'm thinking about the children in our church, especially my daughter and son. I want them to be safe. I think about them coming to church and seeing a gay couple, or having a Sunday school teacher who was gay or lesbian, and I worry about what risk that puts them into." The woman's willingness to share at a deeper level took the whole dialog to a deeper level. It brought up a number of underlying questions and fears that the group had not yet been able to talk about. Is a gay teacher more likely to abuse a student than a heterosexual teacher? Will the presence of a gay or lesbian couple influence a young person to choose to be gay or lesbian as well? Members of the group then began to discuss what medical research and even crime reports had to say about these matters. The conversation had uncovered what the deeper feelings were underneath the positions, so that those feelings and assumptions could be addressed as well.

A second important moment happened when the first speaker talked about how important her children were to her. As the conversation went on, another mother in the room said to her, "I see how much you love your children, and I really love mine too. Therefore, I want them to be part of a church where they will know that they are loved no matter what. Whether they grow up straight or gay, I want them to know that they are loved here. I also want them to be safe no matter what. We're together on that. But I believe that having a gay Sunday school teacher will not make them less safe."

The two mothers were not in the same place on the issue. Yet, in the course of telling more of their story, they caught a glimpse of where they shared something very important: their love for their children. In doing so, they also clarified one of the key elements that would have to be addressed in order for there to be any resolution of the issue, namely the safety of their children. They clarified a key element to work on, but they also now had a relationship as mothers to support them on the road ahead.

The third key step, then, in facilitating a conflict is to help the participants tell more of their story. Very often, they will express more of their story in a narrative form. "This is what happened that makes me feel this way." The facilitator can be listening for the pivotal moments and the chief values or hopes that come through in the story. By framing these for the whole group, the facilitator both affirms to the speaker that he/she is being heard and also highlights for the group the places where they might connect or have a much different response.

As group members enter into the deeper levels of telling their stories, it's common that they will switch among various styles of communication. As I described in the section on "framing" in Step 2, the facilitator should not only frame the content of what speakers are saying, but also their communication style or mode. For example, one person will quote a passage from the Bible, the next person will tell a personal story, the next will give a list of statistics, and the next will report feelings. This is all genuine and useful input for the dialog. However, as speakers switch from one form to another, the listeners may have a hard time tracking what is being said. In fact, they may have a negative reaction to what is being said, not so much because of the content, but because the style sounds too different from what they had just heard from the previous speaker. They say to themselves, "What is this person talking about, anyway?" The facilitator can assist by briefly framing the speaking form being used. "Judy is telling us a personal story." "Jeff, you're giving us some medical statistics."

Tip: Throughout the discussion, the facilitator should shift between looking at the speaker and glancing around the room in order to look for facial reactions, body movement and other non-verbal expressions by the listeners. These signals will tell the facilitator where a key element has been touched on and where another person has a response or connection. The facilitator can then say, "Joan, I saw that you really leaned forward when Mary talked about her children. I'm wonder what that brings up for you?"

Step 4:

Affirm the common ground and resolution that is reached; recognize and value the differences that still are there

Throughout the dialog and again at the conclusion of the dialog, the facilitator should catch and affirm those moments and places where the participants find themselves standing on common ground, or at least taking a step towards it. At the same time, the facilitator should acknowledge and honor the differences that still exist among the participants.

When two or more groups find themselves in extended conflict, it's normal that they will begin to see and categorize each other according to the position they have taken. "My opponent, John, is anti-gay. Period." "My opponent, Gail, is pro-gay. Period." When the dialog begins, the first steps are to help all the voices state their positions very clearly and then to react to each other. These steps can actually increase the sense among the participants that they are different and separate. Though often discomfiting, this process of differentiation is essential to the process of helping participants diagnose and understand each other's position. In fact, the facilitator should affirm the participants for stating their positions so strongly. "Pete, you did a great job of saying so clearly that you can't stand guitar music in church!" "Sue and Gloria, you both did a great job of voicing two very different viewpoints on this issue!"

As I described in Step 3, the participants will then be helped by the facilitator to tell more of their story. In the process, this interaction will begin to uncover at least some glimpses of common ground, values and goals.

The complication at that point is that participants are so programmed to see only their differences and the distance between each other that they are not able to catch it when they take a step towards some common ground. They are on the conflict train and the train is racing forward. The facilitator's job in those moments is to slow down the process and frame and affirm what has happened. It may be just the smallest of movements that has taken place, but it gives hope, power and direction to the group when they are helped to notice it. For example, "John and Sam, you are in different place about whether we should open a pre-school at church, but I'm hearing that you both want our church to be financially healthy."

Together with affirming the progress and common ground reached by participants, it is equally important to acknowledge the differences that still exist. This is especially true at the conclusion of the conflict dialog session. Pointing out the remaining differences and disagreements at the end of a dialog session, however, will require the facilitator to ignore a deep internal wish. It is normal for every facilitator to wish that every conflict dialog they facilitate will end in complete agreement and reconciliation. This is due partly to the ego need of facilitators that they be a "success". It also expresses the collective wish of the group that the conflict can be resolved and peace can once again be enjoyed by all. In all of this, the fear that conflict = failure is still at work. But also at work is an honest and appropriate yearning by both the facilitator and the group that their dialog effort will bring them to a place of greater safety and more satisfying relationships. All of that underscores the importance of affirming the places where progress has been made.

The complication is this: If a remaining difference or tension is glossed over or ignored at the end of the dialog session, it sharply escalates the conflict among those participants who are still in different places.

Picture this: two participants are sitting across from each other in a group dialog sharply attacking each other's position on whether or not their church should bless same-sex marriages. One states that same-sex marriages are clearly against God's Word and the other states that same-sex marriages are supported by God's word. During the course of the conflict dialog session, the group has done a good job of speaking, reacting and getting clearer about various facets of the issue. For some participants, there have even been moments of discovering shared ground and common values. However, at the end of the dialog, the two participants are still talking very heatedly about God's will in all of this. Others in the group are nodding their heads in support of one or the other. The facilitator then says, "I'm noticing that our agreed upon time is up. I need to bring our dialog to a close. I want to thank all of you for the good work you did today. You really investigated the topic of same-sex marriage very well and I think that we have come to a deeper place of unity and agreement. "

What will be the response of the two participants and their supporters? Either verbally out loud or intensely in their heads, they will be screaming, "We have <u>not</u> worked this out! We are not in agreement! Has the facilitator even been listening to us? Why is he trying to push something on us?!"

In order to promote peace at the conclusion of a dialog, a facilitator may be inclined to highlight the agreements and downplay or gloss over the disagreements. However, this escalates the conflict among those who feel ignored.

The facilitator is a more effective peacemaker when she/he acknowledges the places where peace still doesn't exist. This assures the participants that their voices have been heard and also helps outline where more interaction is needed. It catalyzes further dialog.

An additional facilitative skill is useful here. When the facilitator acknowledges the differences and conflict points that continue to exist, this can still be done in an affirming and encouraging manner.[21] The facilitator can say: "You all did such good work today! You spoke very clearly and strongly about what you believe. This has helped us make a good beginning to the dialog. You came to some places of clear agreement when you talked about wanting a community that is both safe and welcoming. At the same time, there is also some strong disagreement among you about what the Bible and God have to say about this issue. That is an important issue to many of you and it's one place where further dialog and study would be useful. Our time is up and there is still so much say. But, you've done such a good job of pinpointing where you agree and where you disagree and this is a good step forward. It helps clarify where we can take the dialog from here. Good work!"

Step 5:

Framing and learning

The fifth and concluding step in facilitating conflict is framing for the group where they have traveled and what they have learned. Like framing a picture and putting it on the wall for everyone to see, the facilitator's framing will highlight the key elements and discoveries of the dialog. As I stated in Step 2, the facilitator should frame key moments throughout the dialog. However, at the close of the dialog session, a summary framing and learning is key to transforming the conflict process into a productive, growing experience.

The skills described in Step 4 (affirming progress towards agreement, noticing remaining differences) are very much related to the Step 5 skill of summary framing, yet different in a key way. In Step 4, the facilitator is saying, "Look at where we arrived!" In Step 5, the facilitator is saying, "Look at what we learned along the way, both in the content that came up and also the process of interacting that we went through." This final step of framing and learning helps the participants to see that the success and value of their dialog is measured not only by the final outcome, but also by the learning they achieved along the way. In other words, today's interaction may not have taken them where they wanted, but the process of dialog they went through has taken them to a better and wiser place. The insights and skills they learned today will give them a much better journey tomorrow.

As an example of this, consider again the conflict my congregation experienced around social advocacy ministry. At the very beginning, members seemed to be starkly divided into two

distinct groups: those who wanted the church to do social advocacy and those who were opposed to it. As they began to dialog with each other, three discoveries were made. (1) There weren't just two positions among them. Rather, there were a variety of positions about social ministry and advocacy. (2) They all wanted to serve people who were in a time of crisis. (3) Their conflict could be more accurately defined as a disagreement about how best to serve people.

The learning that came from these discoveries would help them to better manage future conflicts. They learned that a stark "us" versus "them" analysis is typically inadequate and misleading when diagnosing a conflict. They now had skill in investigating where they were unified, where they were different, and how the conflict points could be more precisely identified.

Furthermore, there was learning for the congregation around the value of entering into a dialog, rather than avoiding talking about a hot topic. Participants were able to say, "When we weren't talking to each other, we became isolated and suspicious towards each other. Talking is crucial to sorting through things."

Also, as the participants talked, they realized that there were other issues involved, e.g., who has the power to make decisions? Will I still be respected even though I am in the minority? How do we make decisions? How do we respect differences? The learning in these areas would help them pay attention in the future to the content of the initial issue that comes up and also keep their eyes open to additional, related issues that appear, such as fairness in decision-making.

This gets us to a key question: Why is "framing and learning" the final step of the facilitation process and not something more definite and positive, like "Conflict Resolution!" Participants and facilitators would, of course, prefer the final result of every conflict dialog to be complete resolution and lasting peace.

There are occasions when broad agreement and reconciliation is reached by a group at the conclusion of their conflict dialog. Those moments are certainly to be celebrated. However, given the complexities of church communities and the multi-faceted issues we deal with, our conflict dialogs more often end with partial resolutions, ongoing differences, places of healing and some remaining wounds. If we defined a successful dialog outcome only in terms of complete resolution, we would experience feelings of failure 93% of the time and our resistance to dealing with conflict in the first place would skyrocket. However, by choosing "framing and learning" as the concluding step in conflict facilitation, we help the participants find a satisfying meaning in what they have accomplished and also help them build the skills and perspectives that will enable them to move ahead as a healthy community.

Summary framing and learning also relates very deeply to a fundamental Biblical theme. Consider again the discussion in Chapter 2 about our resistance to conflict and the ways in which we can use conflict productively as a gift. Our resistance comes when we view conflict as failure. Life becomes a pass/fail test for us. We pass when there's peace; we fail when there's conflict.

Even though there are numerous passages in the Bible that portray life as a pass/fail test with God as the judge, there is another stream of Biblical passages that portray life as a journey of learning and transformation, with God as the patient teacher. Think of all the journey stories in Scripture where God calls people to venture out into the unknown. Think as well about the discovery, faith and wisdom that these journeys bring.

- Abraham and Sarah following God's call to the new land
- The emerging twelve tribes of Israel, making their forty year journey from Egypt to the promised land
- The nation of Judah suffering their Exile in Babylon and God cutting a way through the wilderness for them to come home again
- Jesus taking his disciples on a journey of teaching and service throughout Galilee and finally down to Jerusalem
- Paul and the new Christian community venturing out into the whole world.

A journey of faith and learning is one of the key ways in which the biblical writers picture life. The journey begins with pure, surprising grace with God at the center. Out of deep love, God creates and calls us to be in relationship. When we say "yes" to that call, life is an ongoing journey of learning in which we discover more and more of the wisdom, purpose and joy which God wants for us.

It's true that there are moments in which we make disastrous turns and terrible choices. We grieve such moments and God grieves with us. Yet, with boundless grace, God invites and enables us to learn from what happened and begin again in a new direction. Rather than life

being a stressful test of three strikes and you're out, life becomes a process of learning and growing. With patience and grace, God uses life to draw us deeper into wisdom.

Seeing life as a journey of discovery is meaningful for many areas of our life, but I talk about it now because of its usefulness to congregations in conflict. A congregation in which there are differences and diversity (as there always are) repeatedly finds itself journeying through passages of tension and conflict. As the congregation repeatedly experiences this conflict, a number of things can happen. The dream of a joyful, community life can begin to seem hopeless and futile. Congregation members may feel stuck in a life pattern that seems out of control, unsatisfying and meaningless. They might begin to look at the people around them, not as family and travel partners, but as competitors or even enemies in a win/lose game.

However, when the facilitator concludes the dialog process with a final framing and learning, he/she reinforces for the group that they are traveling together on a journey of meaning and purpose. This is beneficial at a number of levels.

> At the *spiritual level*, participants are reminded that they are not failures, nor are they trapped in something that is senseless. Rather, they are walking the same path of discovery that the people of God have always walked. God is very much with them on this journey and God is work helping them to grow in wisdom. They are doing good work!

At the *personal level*, the framing helps the participants know that their voices have been heard and that what they have said is part of the new learning that has happened. By engaging in the dialog, they have been teachers as well as students. Their voices count and have helped to make the community wiser.

At the *relationship level*, the framing and learning step provides both a present and future benefit for participants. The facilitator underlines the present progress the participants have achieved together in productively addressing their current conflict. Through this journey together, the participants have also gained skills to better manage their life together in the future. When the next conflict comes along, they will already have experience at asking themselves, "How do we communicate when we disagree? How do we best work this through this conflict?"

At the *congregation level*, the framing and learning step highlights the increased clarity regarding the congregation's ministry that conflict dialog experience has brought to participants. It helps the congregation members consider these questions: How has our dialog clarified who we are and what we want to do together? What new skills has it taught us to better do our work? What do we all agree is essential and non-negotiable for our community? What are the places where we can compromise, or search for a new alternative, or take turns?

By using framing and learning as the concluding step in the dialog process, rather than expecting and promoting complete resolution, the facilitator is offering an outcome that is both

more realistic and encouraging at the same time. Generally, at the conclusion of a dialog session, the participants sense that there are still some unresolved issues and tensions that will need to be addressed in the future. Perhaps, for example, the group has made good progress addressing the main issue that brought them together. However, secondary issues or tangential issues came up during the dialog that are still hanging in the air. More dialog will be necessary. However, the framing and learning step helps them to see that some good clarity has been gained and that they have learned new skills, which will enable them to take the journey further.

The summary framing and learning step will also be the time to clarify what's next. The "what's next" will depend upon what the group has accomplished in the dialog session just completed. Here are two possible options for "what's next".

1.) The group may feel that they made a good start at diagnosing their conflict, but also feel that there are a number of issues unresolved that they need to discuss more. Therefore, they may decide that the next step is another dialog session. The facilitator should help them clarify the specific unresolved issues that they want to address in the next meeting. This will help them begin to think and talk about those issue points before they meet and those pre-conversations will bring good substance into the next planned meeting.

2.) The second possibility for "what's next" is that the group may agree to put into action a working agreement that they will try out for a set amount of time. This will be coupled with an agreement to meet again to assess how effective the working agreement is. A

> "working agreement" is a concrete plan formulated and agreed upon by the whole group that addresses the conflict issues and describes what will be done around those issues on a trial basis. For example, if the conflict is around the kind of music and liturgy being used in worship, the working plan would spell out what liturgy or combination of liturgies would be used over the next six months, with a follow up assessment scheduled at that point. If the issue centers on people feeling left out of the decision-making process in the congregation, the working agreement would spell out which church entity (pastor, committee, council, congregation assembly) will handle which kinds of decisions. The concrete details of the working agreement will often emerge during the dialog meeting and should be framed and highlighted as they happen. "Here's a proposal that seems to speak to both sides. What do you think?"

A working agreement may also be formulated by a delegation representing all sides that meets between dialog sessions and then present their proposals to the whole group at the following session. It's crucial for a working agreement to address all of the voices that have spoken during the dialog process. Voices and positions that feel ignored in the working agreement will come back stronger than ever on another occasion, even when everyone else thinks the conflict has been settled.

It is best if the facilitator helps the group adopt a working agreement after one or two dialog sessions, rather than letting the dialog extend into three, four and five sessions. The opposite often happens. When conflicted groups in a congregation begin talking about their issues, it is very natural that there will still be unsettled feelings and disagreements at the end of

the session. Therefore, they plan another session to continue the dialog. Given the complexity of the issue and the layers of feelings that are in play, it certainly may be necessary to have another meeting to talk more. However, when the conflict dialog gets into its third, fourth and fifth session, the group often gets stuck in a pattern of re-cycling the same arguments and accusations again and again. Wounds actually are added rather than addressed. The issues start to feel more complicated and irresolvable than before.

The best approach is to move towards a working agreement by the end of the first session, or the second session at the latest. While it must address the main points of conflict, the plan does not have to be seen as perfect and set for all time. The fact that the working plan is adopted for a fixed trial period and will be assessed at that time helps the group to enter into it with a sense of "let's see if this works."

A working plan communicates to participants that their voices have been heard and acted on. Rather than feeling "we're stuck in this mess and nothing can be done," a seed of hope is planted as concrete steps are taken. Furthermore, as participants of the various sides in the conflict carry out this working plan together, they will reinforce their sense that they are co-workers with shared dreams rather than enemies on opposite sides of the wall.

Chapter 4

The Use and Misuse of Power in the Congregation and Common Conflicts that Follow

In every community, including church communities, there is a continual, on-going use of power and authority. It is part of the dynamic of how decisions are made, plans adopted, assignments given and taken, and problems worked out. Much of the time, church members will not consciously think of all this as an expression of "power and authority". When there is broad agreement around plans and priorities, the decisions and work will just seem to flow. No one talks about the power structure. However, when conflicts arise between members, leaders or staff, the issue of "power" then enters into the conversation.

For example, if there is disagreement over a proposed remodeling of the church sanctuary, the conversation will usually begin with members debating the pros and cons of the remodel plan. However, as emotions rise, the issue of power will most likely emerge as well. "Who decides this? Do I get a voice in this? Why is this being forced on us?" Or, from those in favor of a particular remodel plan, the comments might be, "Why are people complaining? This was a fair and proper decision by the council. Why are people over-reacting and stopping something that's good?"

The way in which power is exercised within a congregation is a crucial factor for shaping both the character and atmosphere of that community. People *gather* into communities around

shared goals, beliefs, and needs. People *stay* in the community, however, not only when these goals, beliefs and needs are supported, but also because they feel served, respected and safe within that community. Power and authority dynamics within the community directly impact whether a person feels valued and secure.

Christian congregations, however, generally avoid talking openly or even thinking consciously about the dynamics of power in the church, until they find themselves in conflict. In his book *Money, Sex, and Power,* Richard J. Foster, points out that Christians are very ambivalent about power. "Power is a genuine paradox to believers. We love it and we hate it. We despise its evil and appreciate its good. We would like to do without it, but we know it is part and parcel of human life."[22]

This ambivalence about power originates in part from the mixed messages we get in scripture. On the one hand, there is a good degree of wariness and criticism within scripture towards power and authority. Amos, Hosea, and all the Jewish prophets are scathing in their criticism of the kings of Israel when they misused their God-given power and oppressed the people. Jesus also denounces the temple authorities that financially extort widows and refers to the Galilean ruler, Herod, as "that fox," which in 1st century Palestine was viewed as a dirty, conniving animal. (Luke 13:32)

Furthermore, Jesus' teachings on "servanthood" seem, at first glance, to be a further indictment against the use of power. "You know how the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are like tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; rather whoever

wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Humanity came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28) In light of these words about servanthood, which seem to require the relinquishment of power, pastors and church leaders usually feel awkward to even talk about their power, let alone make deliberate and public decisions to use it.

Yet, in many other places, Jesus demonstrates how serving others is not a relinquishment of power, but a clear and intentional use of one's power to bring life and blessing to others. "And he called his twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." (Luke 9:1-2).

Putting these scriptural passages about power side-by-side helps to clarify that, while the misuse and abuse of power is condemned, the right use of power, which is to serve God's people and all creation, is legitimate, necessary and useful. Within that framework, we are able to analyze more specifically the nature of power conflicts in a congregation.

Power, Authority and Rank.

As we begin to examine common power conflicts in congregations, it's important to notice that power and authority expresses itself in a variety of ways. Arny Mindell, Julie Diamond and other teachers/consultants who use the Process Work framework for understanding group dynamics, describe power and authority in terms of the different kinds of "rank" that

people have relative to each other.[23] In all of our relationships and communities, including our congregations, there are different kinds of authority and rank at work. For example, there are predictable rank dynamics between parents and children, bosses and workers, pastors and church members. Rank is sometimes earned by personal effort and sometimes simply inherited or given by the society and institutions around us, or by the concrete situations that arise.

Social rank is granted by the society we live in and reflects the value system, including the biases and prejudices, of the mainstream culture. Social rank is based on factors like gender, race/skin color, age, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, education, health, beauty and other factors that are largely beyond our control. For example, in most mainstream congregations, a pastor who is white, male and 45 will have greater rank than a pastor who is Latina, female and 25.

Structural rank depends on our position in different institutional settings: military, corporate, educational, medical, family, church, etc. Each institution or structure has its own hierarchy: generals and privates, upper management and middle management, principals and teachers, parents and children. In a church, too, there will be pastor and youth worker, council president and new church member, committee chair and once-a-year visitor.

Situational rank (also called contextual rank) shifts as a person moves from setting to setting. For example, a woman may be the president of her church council and highly esteemed in that setting, but when she goes to work as a newly hired office worker, she

may be viewed through condescending eyes by those with seniority. On Sunday, a pastor may experience high rank preaching in the pulpit and then, on Tuesday at the dentist's office, he will experience low rank as the dental hygienist lectures him about flossing his teeth more often.

Rank also arises from the more subjective transformation that happens within a person through their life experiences. This kind of rank can carry different names, related to the nature of the life experience that was transforming for the person.[24]

Psychological rank is an inner sense of wisdom and power that comes from having survived challenging or abusive situations. Psychological power often comes from people reflecting on their complex and difficult life experiences, using meditation and therapy. A recovering drug addict or ex-convict, who has worked to significantly deepen their self-understanding, has psychological rank.

Spiritual rank comes from a deep sense of connection and peace with the divine. In church settings, we might speak of a person as having spiritual maturity, or being very "centered." Most of us can readily think of a person in our church community who, however unassuming and plain-talking they might be, conveys in their conversation and actions a deep wisdom, compassion and connection to God. They naturally draw respect and are "listened to" by others in the community. They hold high spiritual rank.

Justice or democratic rank: When a person has a strong sense that justice is on their side, that gives them an internal strength and moral centeredness. Think of Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King, Jr. Their strength was also an expression of spiritual rank, but was further fueled by the justice of the cause they led. In a local church setting, for example, imagine a generally quiet member who has no elected church position and becomes moved by the number of low-income children attending the neighborhood school. She organizes and mobilizes the whole congregation to provide school supplies and start an after-school program for the children. The justice of her cause gives her focus, power and rank. Another name for both justice rank and spiritual rank is moral authority.

Notice that a person will have multiple kinds of rank, high or low, in any one context and that his/her rank will vary from context to context. For example, when I go to the grocery store, I notice that the words, feelings and interactions that come up when I meet the store manager are different than those with the check-out person. Then I interact with the boy collecting shopping carts in the parking lot. Then I see my ophthalmologist who is just arriving in his BMW. Interactions vary based in part on the relative rank that I am instinctively assigning people and the rank that they assign to me. Typically, these rank assignments are unspoken and even unconscious. However, they will affect all the various interchanges that people have with each other.

As we investigate common power conflicts in congregations, an awareness of rank and authority dynamics is important for this reason: The more *aware and conscious* we are of our authority and rank in a given relationship, the more equipped we are to put it to constructive use.

The more *unaware* we are of our authority and rank, the more likely we are to misuse it, often without even realizing we are doing so. Awareness of power, authority and rank is crucial for all leaders, including pastors and leaders of a church community.

I will discuss later in this chapter how pastors and leaders can misuse and even abuse people with their authority and power. First, however, I would like to examine how power conflicts in congregations often escalate when people fear they are about to overpowered by another party.

We Fight When We Feel Weak or Powerless

Differences always exist within a community of people. Sometimes those differences are a complete non-issue, such as being left-handed or right-handed. Sometimes those differences are welcomed in delight, such as when the community holds an international food potluck. Sometimes those differences produce conflicts. Why is that? What are the factors that cause differences to escalate into a fight? A key element is this: We fight when we feel weak, powerless, and at risk of "losing" something important.

Consider first an example where there are differences but not an apparent fight. The Youth and Education Committee at First United Methodist is made up of six members, including Pastor Jan Stewart, who have served together on the committee for three years. Over the years they have nurtured youth groups and the Sunday School, recruited and supported teachers and volunteers, and planned retreats and special educational events. Their efforts have produced

good results. The youth and education ministries are flourishing. On Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, kids are filling the church. In fact, their success has put a big decision in front of them. They need more building space and they also need another paid staff person for the youth and education programs. However, they can't afford both at the same time. Their Church Council has asked them to make a recommendation on how to proceed.

Not surprisingly, the committee members discover that they have different opinions about what to do. Margaret, the chair of the committee, and Pastor Jan both favor hiring a Youth Minister now and building in a year. Stan and Melanie want to build a youth wing now and rely on volunteers until they can afford more staff. Mitchell and Sarah suggest a part-time worker and renting a portable classroom.

They are in different places. There positions are in conflict. However, at the feeling level, they do not perceive themselves to be in a fight. The reason is that they still perceive each other as allies who are working towards the same goal. From their three years of working together, they know that they will brainstorm various ideas, weigh the pros and cons, consider each other's ideas and then use a fair process to make a decision. They are in fact working through a conflict together, but the nature of their relationship and their skills in decision making help to keep their dialog at a very rational, collegial, collaborative level. George Bullard, who is a strategic leadership coach to congregations and denominational leaders, describes this as the first intensity, or level, of conflict, out of a possible eight levels of intensity.[25]

Consider the same setting and decision-point, but with different relationship dynamics. Let us imagine that, over the three years they have worked together, tensions have grown between committee members. Stan feels that Margaret, the chairwoman, asks for members' comments, but doesn't really listen to people. To Stan, it seems that Margaret almost always gets her way. Pastor Jan wants to project strength and clear leadership, but she is also exhausted by her workload and has asked for more staff for the past two years. To Sarah, it seems that the committee has gotten paralyzed with all this tension and she just wants everyone to make a decision and get on with their work.

Stan, Pastor Jan and Sarah all feel weak in relation to another person on the committee or the whole committee itself. Something important for them is at stake but, in the face of a powerful opponent, they feel helpless to achieve it *unless they act with even greater force and power*. Emotions, volume and the recruitment of allies rise. The other members, fearing their own loss in the face of this powerful response, comes back with even more force. The conversation escalates into a conflict. Collegial discussion gets filled with attack and defensiveness.

We fight when we feel weak or helpless and at risk of losing something important. However, there is another element to this that adds further complexity to the conflict.

We underestimate our own power and overestimate the power of the other side.

The social action committee at Beautiful Savior took form shortly after the beginning of the second war in Iraq. Their opposition to the war and their desire to change American policy in the Middle East drew members together for mutual support and action. Even as they proceeded to address a variety of other social issues (homelessness, poverty, hunger), the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued to be a chief concern for them. They organized congregation open forums to discuss the wars, informed members about war-protest events in the community and took leadership in organizing a county-wide Peace Fair each September, where they also staffed a booth representing our church.

Understandably, there were other members of the congregation who supported the Iraq war as a valid response to a terrorist threat. They did not agree with the anti-war position of the social action committee and did not like it that the anti-war events were being promoted by a group of fellow church members. At first, their opposition to the social action group was expressed in one-on-one conversations in the hallways after church with like-minded members. As time passed by, those opposed to the social action group coalesced into a group of approximately 20 people who brought their concerns to the Church Council. Some in the opposition group didn't like the *content* of what the social action committee was doing (i.e., they disagreed with their stance on the war). Others didn't like *how* the committee was doing their work. They felt that the social action group was imposing their views and positions on the whole congregation, without giving other members the chance to have any say in the process. The

Church Council initiated a mediation process at this point to bring the two groups, plus all interested members, into a process of dialog and conflict management.

One dynamic clearly at work in this conflict was that both sides underestimated their own power and overestimated the power of the other side. This dynamic is generally present in every conflict situation. Until it is brought to the conscious level, it predictably leads to conflict escalation as both sides act in fear that they are being overpowered and respond with greater force than necessary.

How specifically did the two groups at Beautiful Savior underestimate their own power and overestimate the other's power? The social action group accurately perceived themselves to be a discounted, marginal group on the national scene. Particularly in the beginning years of the war, a clear majority of Americans supported going to war. Media coverage and the ongoing pronouncements of our government leaders made it clear that the war would be waged. Those who opposed it were labeled both foolish and unpatriotic. Within this pervasive, national environment, the social action committee understandably viewed themselves as the weaker party that was being overrun by a stronger party. In turn, when the committee looked at the church members who were opposing their work, it was natural for them to see that group as being part of the powerful national movement that was imposing war on the country and wanting to silence the social action group in the process. In that national framework, the social action group saw themselves as weak and the opposing group as strong.

What the social action committee did not see was the dominant power they had in the local setting of the congregation. Although the committee itself numbered around 20 people, it was clear in congregation open forums that a much larger number of members sided with them in their judgments against the war. The committee, in this local setting, represented the majority. Furthermore, the social action committee was very strong and effective in carrying out their work. They were one of the most focused and organized ministry groups in the congregation. They were adept at using the congregation's publicity media, both print and electronic. They put on dramatic plays and hosted workshops. Through both their energy and skill level, they had a high impact on the congregation.

At the inner feeling level, however, the social action committee primarily saw their weakness on the national level and didn't see as clearly their power at the local level. They underestimated their own power. At the same time, they overestimated the power of those who opposed them. They saw their opponents as part of the dominant national force and didn't see that, at the congregation level, their opponents were an ad hoc group, fewer in number and without the same strength of organization and media use that they had.

The members opposing the social action committee also underestimated their own power and overestimated the power of the other side. They saw quite clearly and accurately that the social action committee exercised great power in the congregation. Given this power, they feared that the political positions and programs of the committee would overrun the church and be imposed on everyone. In the face of that local power, they felt they were weak and the other side was dangerously strong. What they did not see was the power and position they had within

the whole national setting. At the level of national events and media coverage, they were the group in control. Their message washed over the whole country day after day. They were unaware of the power they carried, just as they were unaware of the sense of weakness and helplessness the social action committee felt when they looked at the national scene.

In a conflict situation, it is predictably common that we feel our own fears, helplessness and weakness, and so we "steel ourselves" for each encounter. What we don't realize is that the other side also carries those same feelings as well. Each side views the other side as stronger than they actually are. Therefore, each side escalates to a higher level of combat, believing that only by using greater power can they defend themselves against a foe that is about to overpower them. This dynamic of misreading the power of an opponent and oneself shows up in conflict situations at every level of our relationships.

Julie Diamond, a professor at the Process Work Institute in Portland, OR, and also a therapist and consultant, tells about a surprising interchange she had with a tenant in the building where she had her therapy office. A massage therapist had his studio in the room right below her office. She felt like they were on friendly terms with each other. If they happened to be arriving at work at the same time, they would greet each other in the lobby with a smile and a friendly "hello". They were not best friends but they were certainly cordial with each other.

What Julie didn't know was that the other tenant was becoming upset with the noise that occasionally came down from her office when she and her clients were processing strong emotions or laughing together . One day Julie came out of her office and found a letter in an

envelope laying outside her door. She opened it up and found a message that sounded like a stern legal indictment: "LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THE NOISE LEVEL ISSUING FROM YOUR OFFICE EXCEEDS ALL APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES! IF THIS SITUATION IS NOT CORRECTED, I WILL IMMEDIATELY TAKE THIS CASE TO THE HIGHER AUTHORITIES!"

Julie was surprised that her downstairs neighbor felt he needed such a forceful, combative approach. From her standpoint, he could have just knocked on her door and said, "Hi, it's me from downstairs. You know, sometimes there is some noise that comes down through the floor that is distracting for my massage clients. If you could just keep it down a little, that would be great." And Julie knows she would have said, "Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't realize that. I'll make sure we're more quiet from now on."

She realized, however, the man was underestimating his own power and overestimating hers. He was convinced that a calm, face-to-face conversation wouldn't do it. He was imaging that he didn't have enough standing with her to successfully move her to change. She was stronger and would come back at him forcefully. He wouldn't be heard and she would win the fight. So he decided that he needed to come out blasting with a "legal" document.

An internal process like this regularly happens to most of us when we find ourselves in a conflict situation. It is rarely a clear, conscious process. We are not typically saying to ourselves, "I feel weak. I feel helpless." Rather, it is a reaction marked by tightness in our bodies, racing thoughts and a fight-or-flight response. In a conflict, both sides fear at some level

that they are the endangered underdogs. Therefore, a quick escalation of words and force happens. We do this in one-on-one conflicts with a spouse or co-worker; in group-to-group conflicts; and even nation-to-nation issues, as evidenced by the arms build-up during the Cold War years. A current international example of this is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many people see Israel as a strong bully, constantly abusing the Palestinians. Israel sees itself on the brink of annihilation and therefore taking appropriate steps to defend itself against a very dangerous enemy.

The use and misuse of power is shaped by a variety of factors, not only our fears. In a later section, I will give examples of how our unawareness of power shapes how we use and misuse it. But our fears of the "other" and the underestimating of our own power can quickly escalate into a conflict. As Julie Diamond summarizes it, "When we feel threatened and scared by someone, we don't reach for a small pocketknife to defend ourselves; we reach for a shotgun. Pretty soon everybody has his or her shotguns out." Let's take a look at how a pastor or church leader can productively facilitate that kind of conflict.

How to facilitate power issues in conflicts

A key step for a facilitator working with groups and individuals in conflict is to help each side become more consciously aware of both their fears and their power, as well as the fears and power of the other side. As the conflict dialog proceeds, the facilitator should verbally frame what she/he is hearing from the participants in terms of power and fear. For example, one person might say, "Every Sunday when I come to church, the social action committee is handing out big

flyers to advertise a protest event and signing up people to go. If you are one of the few that doesn't support them, they make you feel that you're not even a Christian." The facilitator could then say, "When they are pushing their agenda and getting people to their side, does that make you afraid? What are you afraid will happen?" Similarly, to the other side, the facilitator can say, "When hear people tell you that you can't be doing this in church, does that make you afraid?"

The facilitator should frame not only what people say verbally, but also what they communicate with body language. "Sam, I notice that you really pulled back in your chair and folded you arms when Mark was talking. I'm wondering what was going on inside when you did that." "Jean and Rachel, you are looking back and forth between each other with very unhappy looks on you faces. Is there something you are afraid will happen?"

The facilitator can also verbally chart the escalation of conflict that the different sides describe. "First there was this. Then, you came back with this. Then, they did this. It seems that each of you were afraid you were about to be overrun, so you came back even stronger."

Naming the fears and making them visible helps all participants. First, it helps each person realize more clearly what is stirring and motivating them. Naming the fears helps the whole group to address those fears more specifically and also to assess whether the fear is completely accurate. For example, one side might say, "I'm afraid you're going to force this decision on us no matter what we think." That gives the other side the chance to say, "No, we're

not going to force you. But we're afraid that you won't even let us talk about this topic. We want to have a good, open discussion on all of this and then take a vote."

Helping all sides name their fears provides a second benefit. It can draw out some compassion and empathy among participants. Instead of seeing the other side only as strong, steely, dangerous people, it reveals that they, too, have fears and vulnerabilities. Participants can begin to feel with each other, as they discover that, underneath the fears, there are often hopes and values that they share in common.

Along with naming fears, the facilitator should also help the participants see and name their own power, which they probably underestimate. The very fact that they are in a conflict shows that they each have enough power to scare the other side! The facilitator can help them see their power by naming the different kinds and power and rank that are operating. One side may have structural power in the church, e.g. the Church Council. Another side may have the spiritual power of deep-seated moral commitments. One side may have local power within the community; another side may have the power of a broad social movement behind them.

When a person or a group sees their own power, it can disarm them a bit. They realize they don't have to be so polemical and forceful. They will have greater confidence that, when they speak, they will be heard. When they are more centered in their own strength, each side will be able to step off the escalating train ride they have been on, and take a broader look. The issues of the conflicts will still need to be sorted through. However, participants can put away their shotguns.

Misusing power through unawareness

A second major category of power conflicts in congregations occurs when a pastor, leader or group misuses their power. This is rarely done with conscious, deliberate or malicious intent. Rather, people more often misuse their power because they are unaware or unclear about the power and rank they have.[26] When people hold positions of authority and rank in an organization, it is common that, sooner or later, they become so accustomed to that place of privilege and power, that they become less aware of how they are using that power. They also become unaware of how their actions affect others. Finally, a leader may not only be unaware of the extent and limits of her/his own power, but also may fail to recognize or accept the authority and rank of the other person. Here are a number of examples that could occur in any church.

Example 1:

Making decisions unilaterally

without asking for input from affected parties.

> Pastor Miller receives word that a top-notch church drama group is traveling through his area and is available to do performances at local congregations. He calls their scheduling agent and is able to book the drama group for the last date they have available, which is a Sunday afternoon just four weeks away. He remembers that the Social Ministry team is hosting a neighborhood

workshop on recycling that same afternoon at church. He does not consciously consider whether he should consult with the Social Ministry team about this matter. He is sure they will understand the importance of taking advantage of this opportunity to host a nationally known drama group and automatically makes the decision on his own. He emails the Social Ministry chairperson to let him know that they need to reschedule.

A leader who is unaware of the nature and responsibilities of his/her rank will often feel entitled to make decisions without group input or buy-in. An unaware leader may also do the opposite and not take action when the situation and their role call for it. (See #6 below.) It is crucial for leaders to consciously decide how they will use their power. In particular, they need to make a conscious decision about how decisions will be made and who will have a voice in making the decision. There are a variety of legitimate options, depending on the circumstances.

(a) Unilateral decisions are not automatically wrong. There are many decisions in various areas of church life where the pastor has the right and responsibility to make a solo, on-the-spot decision.

(b) At other times, the pastor will want to gather input about an issue from various involved people. Yet, the pastor will state clearly from the start that s/he will be the one who will finally make the decision.

(c) In still other situations, the pastor will be clear from the start, both internally and with the congregation, that the issue will be decided by the larger group (a committee, the council, the whole congregation, etc.). Once the pastor has announced that the group will make the decision, the the pastor must abide by that. There is often a temptation to switch mid-stream, if the group is clearly heading towards a decision that the pastor disagrees with.

A wise leader will identify in advance the various factors and values which will determine how the healthiest decision can be made. The leader will also be clear with members about why s/he chose a particular decision-making process and will welcome their reaction and feedback.

Example 2:

Going through the motions of listening to people,

but sending signals that their opinions or feelings are unimportant.

A church member approaches Pastor Kurtz after church one Sunday and expresses dissatisfaction that drums and guitars are being used in worship each Sunday. The church member says that using them from time to time would be okay, but that it is just getting too noisy having them every Sunday. Pastor Kurtz replies, “I'm glad you're telling me about this, Glenn. I value your opinion. But you need to understand that we are making a major outreach effort to the new people in our neighborhood.” As she talked, Pastor Kurtz’

eyes diverted around to other people in the room with whom she wanted to talk. Glenn said, "I'm all in favor of outreach, but I don't want to lose what I like best about worship." With a smile, Pastor Kurtz said "Let's talk more about this some other time." With that, she patted Glenn on the back and walked away.

We communicate with our whole body and presence. At the verbal level, the person with higher rank may be saying, "I want to hear you and have you hear me so that we can come to agreement." With other signals, the person of higher rank is communicating, "I am the wisest person here and my mind is made up." Or, "There are more important people I would rather be talking to." Or, "You are worth just 20 seconds of my time and your time is up!"

Example 3:

Using structural rank (the position of pastor or leader) to force an outcome, rather than developing spiritual rank and trust within the church that fosters a decision-making process with group buy-in.

Pastor Lindley had been at his new church eight months. He felt that he had done a good job listening to his members and determining what the priorities for ministry should be. At the next church Council meeting, he said to the council members, "It's time for us to take the next step forward. I propose that we begin a search process and hire a youth pastor. That's the key for our growth." Many of the Council members replied, "That's a good medium-range

> goal, but we're just barely able to pay our current staff salary. We need to build our financial base a bit more before we add staff." Pastor Lindley responded, "When you called me to be your pastor, you asked me to provide good leadership for growing this congregation. I'm convinced this is the right step and that it's worth it to move ahead. The money will follow. I want you to have the courage to move with me on this." By a slim vote, the Council voted "yes" to this proposal and referred it to the whole coronation. After a contentious debate and despite many strong urgings from Pastor Lindley, the motion to hire a youth pastor failed.

Karen Salter, an East Coast consultant to churches in conflict, regularly coaches pastors by telling them, "Don't use your authority until you have it!" A pastor is often referred to as the spiritual leader of a congregation, but this does not guarantee that the pastor has spiritual rank in the eyes of the congregation members. The job description of a pastor generally assigns leadership to her/him in the areas of worship, teaching and administration. This is a *structural rank* that is given to the pastor on the first day they walk through the door.

This structural rank is useful and productive within its own purpose and limits. However, a problem frequently occurs when a pastor is trying to lead the congregation to take some step, but does not yet have enough spiritual rank in the congregation for such a step. Acquiring spiritual rank requires being at the church sufficient time for members to see and trust the pastor's spiritual maturity. For some pastors, this will happen in one day; for others, a longer time. More importantly, of course, having spiritual rank depends on the pastor actually having a

sufficient measure of centeredness and spiritual wisdom, which others will experience and respect. In congregational decisions, the more weighty and conflicted the issue, the more crucial spiritual rank becomes.

When the pastor senses that the people are not readily following her or him, the pastor, often unconsciously, resorts to her/his structural rank as pastor to try to force the decision. "I'm the pastor. You hired me to lead!" At that point, people increasingly feel that they are being forced to agree to something they don't want. Opposition and emotions escalate. The unfortunate irony is that, the more that a pastor or leader uses their structural power to push a certain decision, their overall power and esteem in the congregation declines. Pastors who overuse their structural authority are often operating out of a fear of their own low spiritual authority.

There certainly may be cases where a pastor feels conscience-bound to take a stand on an issue where s/he is the complete minority, and then must be ready to deal with the reactions of the congregation. In many cases, however, leadership involves cultivating good working relationship through clear communication, inviting reactions and a responsible use of power.

Examples 4:

Leaders having difficulty dealing with the rank of others.

Pastor Billings generally felt pretty comfortable and at ease in working with church members. He did notice that there were few members he often felt more

uncertain around. Darcy, the church secretary, was one of these. She had been church secretary for 32 years and everybody in the congregation loved her. Many members referred to her as “Mama Darcy". In general, she was a very productive worker, but Pastor Billings did wish that she would do a few things differently. He noticed, however, that it was hard for him to tell her clearly what he wanted or to hold her accountable when she did something wrong. He found himself hoping that she would soon retire.

Carl was another member he often felt some cautiousness around. Carl was a committed member who generously supported the church's ministry. Out of his considerable wealth, Carl contributed 20% of the church's income each year. Pastor Billings realized that, inwardly, he was feeling two things at the same time. He appreciated Carl and wanted his support. He also resented how much time he spent worrying about whether or not Carl was happy with the congregation. He was scared that Carl would get mad and leave.

Finally, Pastor Billings was also uneasy at times with Sue. Sue was a single mother who had come out of a situation of considerable poverty, but now worked for local social agency serving women and children at risk. Sue was successful at organizing all kinds of service ministries in the congregation that helped poor families in the neighborhood. Pastor Billings loved this ministry and all the work that Sue did to make it happen. He was aware, however, that in church and committee meetings, people sometimes listened to Sue more

> closely than they listened to him. His experience was that, if he was going to get something accomplished that was different than what Sue favored, he would have to push very hard.

Pastor Billings was experiencing something very common for leaders of all communities, corporations and churches. As a person of high structural and spiritual rank in his church, he was regularly encountering and working with other people of high rank, who in some moments and situations had a higher rank than he did. Darcy had high situational rank in the congregation as a long-term, "mothering" staff person. Carl had social (money) rank. Sue had spiritual/justice rank and the moral authority that goes with it. So Pastor Billings was faced with the complex issue: "How does power work with power? How do I cope when I am high rank one moment and lower rank the next?"

When we encounter other people with high rank, a number of different reactions can come up: fear, withdrawal, competition, desire to resort to force, delight, collaboration, confusion. Productive rank awareness goes beyond having an awareness of our own power and authority in a given context and how our use of power affects other people. Rank awareness also involves an awareness of the power and authority held by the people we meet in each context and noticing how we ourselves typically react to their rank. Out of this awareness, we can make conscious choices about what to do with our power and theirs, rather than being controlled by our first, immediate response. This illustrates the important truth that rank is not a fixed, eternal assignment of authority. Rank is always fluid from one context and moment to another. We make choices, often unconsciously, about the power we give to others and the power we assume

for ourselves. The collective choices we make about rank (from hierarchy to anarchy) each have their consequences for relationships in the present moment. As our rank awareness increases, then each new moment gives us new and various choices to make about how we will use our power.

Example 5:

Presenting oneself continually as the authority who knows what's right and true, with the result that other people feel discounted or unwelcome to offer their opinions.

> Pastor Durkin was a very competent Bible scholar and enjoyed leading Bible studies. She was adept at bringing the latest biblical scholarship into the discussion of any text. When participants in the Bible study offered their viewpoint about what the text meant, Pastor Durkin explained to them in detail how their viewpoint was right or wrong. After a period of time, participants in her classes rarely offered their own viewpoints.

When a pastor is given high rank and authority in a congregation, it is common that the pastor begins to feel that s/he should act and talk with high rank in every moment. It is hard for a leader to say, "I don't know what the answer is. I don't know what to do right now." Sometimes leaders assume that people expect them to know everything, and so they begin to act as if they did. Other leaders actually think that they do know everything!

However, when pastor/leader presents him/herself as being the gifted authority in every situation, people begin to feel that their viewpoint and ideas are not good enough or are not welcome. Withdrawal and resentment enters in. Meanwhile, the leader feels this mounting pressure to always have the right answer!

Pastors/leaders do need to offer their knowledge and skill. They do have insights, skills and information that their training and experience has given them. Pastor Durkin had both talent and passion for Biblical scholarship. It would be irresponsible to withhold it. However, at this point, the metaskills of leadership enter in.[27] In her book, *Metaskills: The Spiritual Art of Therapy,* Amy Mindell distinguishes between the skills and metaskills used by a therapist. A competent therapist will used specific skills in working with a client, e.g. role play, dream work, etc. However, the client will also be deeply affected by the feelings and attitudes which the therapist is communicating more subtly in the tone of her voice, the mix of empathy and challenge, an openness to hear more communicated by words and body language, etc. These metaskills communicate the feeling attitudes of the therapist to the client.

An adept use of such metaskills is crucial for pastors and in fact for every person in a relationship. In the example above, Pastor Durkin is right to use her skills of Biblical scholarship. However, she also communicating a feeling attitude that says, "I know more than all of you and there is nothing that you can teach me or add to the discussion." She would benefit from learning the metaskill of an encouraging and open tone with her students. Her voice and style of responsiveness to the class participants could convey more of a sense of, "We're exploring this topic together. I will bring my knowledge and insights and I look forward to you doing the same." Spiritual rank gets added to structural rank when a pastor/leader can display both how

s/he is a bright, competent practitioner and also a student who is still on the learning journey and welcomes other people stepping into the role of teacher.

Example 6:

Avoiding using rank.

> Pastor Lindberg, the senior pastor at Trinity Church, was upset that his associate pastor, Pastor Bell, was very haphazard about following through on his responsibilities. Pastor Lindberg spoke to Pastor Bell a number of times in a general way about the importance of completing assignments in a timely way. Soon he gave up and rarely talked to Pastor Bell at all. Church members sensed the tension between them, but weren't sure what it was about or what to do. Some council members wished that Pastor Lindberg would take action and solve this problem, while other council members found themselves favoring Pastor Bell. Even as the tension grew to a considerable level, an open conversation never took place.

In the same way that an unaware use of rank and power will often harm relationships and productivity, an unaware avoidance of using rank and power will do the same. In the example above, Pastor Lindberg had both the right and the responsibility to supervise, support, and hold accountable other members of the staff. The effective ministry of the staff and congregation depended on him making good use of his leadership skills, including staff supervision. Pastor Lindberg, however, was uncomfortable exercising his rank. He chose to avoid confrontation or

even communication, resulting in a breakdown in staff and church member relationships. As Pastor Lindberg avoided exercising his authority, the church council also became uncertain of what role it should take. Confusion and conflict grew.

When leaders do not use their rank and authority, chaos typically breaks out in the organization. Sometimes a leader is not clear about what his/her rank or authority is and so hesitates to act. In other cases, a leader is uncomfortable with using power, either for fear of misusing it or in fear of reaction and opposition. However, when a leader becomes passive, then ministry and relationships freeze. Uncertainty turns to resentment. Voices begin to murmur and shout, but no one feels heard, including the pastor.

Awareness of rank – doing a rank self-assessment

Power, authority, and rank clearly are instruments of leadership that can be used to do good. We also know how they can be misused with destructive results. I want to repeat something I stated earlier. The more *unaware* we are of our rank, the more likely we are to misuse it. The more *aware and conscious* we are of our rank, the more equipped we are to put it to constructive use. Therefore, it is crucial to become consciously aware of rank so that it can be properly and effectively used for the good of the community.

How do we become aware of our rank? We can begin by doing a rank self-assessment. Take a few moments and go through the different types of rank that we reviewed earlier. Take

note where your own personal characteristics and circumstances place you in the hierarchy of each ranking system.

Social rank: where do your personal characteristics of gender, race, age, etc., place you in the hierarchy that your surrounding society has established?

Structural rank: think of the various structures and institutions that you are a part of, such as job structure, church structure, family structure, committee or a task force structure, and so on. What is your rank within each structure? What power do you have? What is your rank and power relative to the rank and power of other people within that structure?

Situational rank: Picture yourself going from one setting to another in the course a typical week. Notice how your rank or authority shifts in each setting. For example, do you have the same rank when you're attending a church council meeting as when you are going on a laser tag outing with the high school youth? What rank shift might occur as you leave a Bible study group and visit a church family that has become inactive in the previous months? How does your power shift when you leave the church setting completely and go to a parent/teacher meeting at your daughter's middle school? How do relationship dynamics shift in each new situation? How do your feelings about yourself and other people shift in each new situation?

Psychological, spiritual, and justice rank: It is perhaps hardest to assess our own psychological, spiritual, or justice rank. Sometimes we're overly impressed with

> ourselves! At other times we miss seeing the maturity and wisdom we have acquired. It is easier, perhaps, to see the spiritual strength of another person than it is to be fully conscious of our own spiritual strength. We can learn about ourselves through their feedback or by mentally viewing ourselves alongside of them. For example, think of a person in your community who you sense to be deeply centered and wise, someone who carries out their work with passion and integrity and is respected by those around her. Now think of yourself. Where are the places where your passion, wisdom, patience and calm come through? What feedback do you get from others regarding the spiritual depth they see in you?

Now that you've considered your standing in each of these areas of power and rank, think about how that informs your actions and the reactions of those around you. Think also about the conflicts that have occurred and how the consideration of power and rank changes your perception of why the conflict occurred. You can even invite other key members of your group, such as church council members, to examine and discuss their perceptions of the power and rank of the group members.

Chapter 5

Complications Faced by Pastors and Leaders

Up to this point we have primarily considered examples of how pastors and church leaders, when they are not aware of their authority and rank, may misuse their power in ineffective, counter-productive and even abusive ways. If we stopped there and talked only about the dangers and risks of misusing rank, we could put ourselves back in the church tradition of fearing power and wishing to ignore it altogether. Therefore, it is important to say again that power, authority and rank exist in every relationship, calling and institution, including congregations, and that they are essential for a productive, creative life together. Power rightly used is a gift and opportunity from God. Therefore, part of the healthy functioning of a pastor or leader is to recognize, honor and use well the power they have been given. In turn, part of the healthy functioning of a congregation is to support pastors and leaders, so that they will best use their gifts.

This is especially true in light of the complications and burden that leadership brings with it. Pastors need to be consciously aware of these burdens of leadership so that effective means can be put in place that will give them the care and support they need to continue doing an effective, satisfying job.

Loneliness and isolation

Among the burdens that come with high rank are the burdens of loneliness, isolation, and pressure, particularly the pressure to measure up to the high expectations placed upon a leader.

Every so often at family gatherings, we encouraged my father to tell us again the story of the little girl who always called him "Jesus". Five-year-old Marie was a member of the Lutheran church in Seattle where my father was pastor for many years. On her way out of church one Sunday, Marie gave him a little wave and said, "Goodbye, Jesus!" Dad was momentarily speechless. The next Sunday, the same thing happened. Dad took a few moments to gently tell Marie that he was not Jesus; rather, he was Pastor Jaech. Marie wasn't convinced. All of her Sunday School books had pictures of Jesus with long hair, wearing a white robe and teaching the crowds. Every Sunday, she would see my dad dressed in a long white robe, teaching the whole congregation and saying prayers. He didn't have long hair, but he did have a moustache. It had to be Jesus. So that's what she continued to call him.

Two or three times over the following months, my dad again explained to Marie that he was not Jesus. The title was flattering, but he in no way wanted her to be confused about either him or Jesus. However, Marie remained convinced. Then one summer weekday, when Vacation Bible School classes were letting out and kids were scurrying everywhere, Marie came running up to my dad and said, "Jesus, I need your help. I'm supposed to walk home with my brother, but I can't find him. Where is he, Jesus?" My father scanned the crowd of kids around him and said, "Gee, Marie, I don't know where your brother is, but I bet if you go look around the church

some more, you'll find him." Marie's eyes first grew wide with shock and then she walked silently away. This man didn't even know where her brother was! She never called him "Jesus" again.

How do we see each other? More specifically, what power, authority or rank do we assign each other? What are the expectations and consequences of such power, authority and rank? It is not only children who expect the pastor to be Jesus. Children may more literally expect this to be true, but all church members expect their pastor to reflect and live out the teachings and the love of Christ. That is not a wild and wrong expectation. As St. Paul puts it, not just pastors, but all followers of Jesus are called to be the body of Christ in the world. (1 Corinthians 12) As leaders of the church community, pastors are especially expected to exhibit the way of Christ in all that they do. Therefore, there is a legitimate basis for church members to want to "see Jesus" when they look at their pastor. However, as their esteem and respect for their pastor grows, with it grows higher expectations yet. Out of these expectations comes the imagined role of the "perfect pastor".

The "perfect pastor" is a role to which both church members and pastors are attracted. In 21st century mainline Protestant congregations, the "perfect pastor" not only is spiritually grounded and mature, s/he is also expected to be highly competent in a number of other specific roles: counselor, teacher, administrator, small group leader, stewardship and financial overseer, community organizer, mediator, preacher, and worship leader. The minute a pastor walks through the door of the congregation, s/he is given top structural rank in a variety of areas,

together with the expectation that s/he will quickly display spiritual rank and maturity in all that s/he does. This high pedestal on which the pastor is placed also brings isolation and loneliness.

The CEO of a Fortune 500 company was talking to a corporate consultant I know and said, "No one ever gives me a clear and honest reactions to the work I'm doing. I've led this company for 10 years and not once has HR or the Board of Directors initiated a performance review of my work. My management staff naturally wants me to like them, so they always act very happy and approving of what I do and say. What that means, however, is that I am always walking around in a bubble created by the power I have in this company."

The pastor's rank can similarly create loneliness and isolation in a number of subtle ways. When teaching a Bible class, preaching a sermon or leading a meeting, the pastor is looked upon as the theological authority in the room. Therefore, many members will feel awkward about openly challenging or disagreeing with something that the pastor says. If they do disagree, the members will often become silent around the pastor and instead express their disagreements to other members of the church. This leaves the pastor out of the feedback loop.

Church members and pastors will also have difficulty simply relaxing with each other and being "completely themselves." The pastor will feel a need to stay in the role of pastor, which means staying alert and attentive to other people’s need and emotions, rather than expressing their own. Meanwhile, the members will have a hard time being totally at ease in the presence of someone to whom they give very high stature. They will be willing to bring up some topics and personal issues, but not others.

It is especially hard for a pastor to be open about her own personal or professional problem with their members. This relates once again to taking on the role of “perfect pastor”, who surely has all the right answers and best advice. If the pastor, however, is feeling confused or split about what the congregation should do next, or if the pastor is struggling with her own faith issue, or if she is feeling exhausted and tired right when the congregation seems to need strong leadership, the pastor will understandably have a hard time revealing her need, confusion, or struggle. In such a situation, over-identification with the role and rank of being pastor will often keep the pastor locked in a solitary role, with a voice in her head constantly saying, "You need to do this exactly right. You need to have the answer for every question. You need to be the perfect pastor at every step."

Addiction to “Perfect Pastor” role

It is not only church members who place “perfect pastor” expectations on their pastor. Pastors regularly place that expectation on themselves and become addicted to those satisfying moments when they seem to achieve it. Once again, this is not generally done with a conscious or unethical intent. Most pastors will naturally feel very flattered that a congregation sees in them the capacity of a “perfect pastor”. Like a baseball player being hired to be the star hitter, a pastor will be very attracted to stepping into the “perfect pastor” role and fulfilling everybody’s dreams, including his own. But with this role comes the huge pressure to measure up to the standing that has been given him.

Stepping into a pressurized role is not the same thing as a pastor setting high goals and standards for his/her ministry. A line from a current hymn goes, "I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus."[28] It is entirely appropriate and healthy for the pastor to want to be "like Jesus". With the power, rank and authority of the pastoral offices comes the responsibility and genuine desire to use it in a responsible and life-giving manner. In their effort to be like Jesus, however, pastors tend to forget that part of what Jesus did was to regularly take time off for prayer and renewal, practice compassion more fervently than perfection, and draw on the company of friends and God when the demands were just too much. Jesus even said, "No!" to his mother once when she was pressuring him to hurry up and do something! (John 2:1-11) Jesus modeled for us both the productive use or power and also the necessity of honesty, confession and renewal when our power has run out or gotten off track.

Pastors begin by wanting to reflect Jesus and along the way often step into the alluring role of "perfect pastor". At that place, the inner pressure of the pastor and the outer pressure of the congregation's expectations combine to produce a very heavy load. Together with this inner and outer pressure regularly comes loneliness and isolation. Even as a pastor is loved and appreciated for their spiritual depth and leadership talents, both church members and pastor inadvertently create heavy and isolating walls of expectations. This is true for high-ranking members of any institution. When both the congregation and pastor understand the pressure that exists, they can create a dialog and structure that decreases the pressure and loneliness that the pastor feels.

Juggling Multiple Roles

First Presbyterian Church was going through a process of deciding how to help the homeless in their community. There was general agreement that their church should actively help people in economic crisis. However, there were quite a few different opinions about what was the right way or the best strategy to help the homeless. Some members were strongly in favor of starting a food kitchen at their church that would provide a free dinner each week to anyone in need. Other church members wanted to band together with other churches in their city and create a homeless shelter. Their vision was to do this in cooperation with city and county officials as a church/government joint venture. Still other members thought that providing shelter and meals would reinforce dependency among the homeless and that the key effort should be to start a jobs program to help unemployed people find work.

First Presbyterian found itself in the midst of conflict and disagreement around this issue of how to help and so they decided to have a meeting of all interested people to decide what to do. Their pastor, Pastor Jane McClaren, would facilitate this discussion.

As Pastor McClaren prepared for this meeting, she realized that she would be playing a variety of roles at that meeting, which related to the multiple roles she played as pastor. First, as the facilitator of the meeting, she knew that her role was to help a fair, open discussion take place in which each person could speak their views and react to others. In that role, it was important for her to be just and neutral in how she directed the conversation.

Second, Pastor McClaren also knew that she had her own preference and opinion about what she would like the congregation to do for the homeless. She was in favor of organizing local churches and city officials to establish a homeless shelter. In previous, informal conversations at church, she had expressed her viewpoint to others. While she was in favor of the congregation making a decision by majority vote, she did want to express her own viewpoint during the meeting. She realized that, when she expressed her viewpoint, she would be stepping out of the role of neutral facilitator and into the role of a partisan or activist, attempting to win over the group to her choice.

As Pastor McClaren pictured who would be at the meeting, she knew that she would be seen in other roles as well. Herb was certain to be there. Herb was passionately in favor of having a food program at their church but warned against getting involved with city politicians. Herb was also just coming out of six months of chemotherapy and Pastor McClaren had visited and prayed with him regularly during that time. She carried the role of pastor and caregiver in the group. Furthermore, Pastor McClaren had just completed a Sunday morning Bible class series on Jesus' ministry to the poor and hungry. She knew that she potentially would be called into the role of teacher at the meeting. Therefore, within the context of the approaching meeting, Pastor McClaren would potentially be called upon to play a variety of roles that had different purposes and a fair degree of tension among them.

Pastors and church leaders regularly exercise a diverse combination of roles and duties as they carry out their work. For a pastor, this includes the role of preacher, teacher, facilitator,

leader, counselor, administrator, caregiver (in both the hospital setting and the home), and supervisor of church staff and key volunteers.

Church lay leaders also typically play multiple roles. One member may be the church treasurer and also the 5th grade Sunday School teacher. Another will be a Church Council members and a Care Team volunteer who visits the hospitalized. Yet another will be the Chair of the Youth Committee and also the father of two teenagers who have definite views of what they want the Youth Program to offer. In different moments and different settings, their primary role changes with the context, and they also carry multiple roles with them throughout.

There is good precedent for playing multiple roles. When we look at the Gospels, we see Jesus regularly switching among a variety of roles. Entering a village, Jesus would spend the morning teaching. As people heard his words and sensed his power, they would also bring to him their sick and Jesus would spend the afternoon being a healer. Walking through the center of town, Jesus would one moment speak a word of comfort and encouragement to someone in distress and in the next moment Jesus would agitate and challenge a prominent community leader to more faithfully reflect God's love and justice. Marcus Borg and other New Testament scholars have done a marvelous job of describing the various elements of Jesus ministry.[29] Jesus would calm and stir up, listen and teach, feed and make hungry, forgive and call to account.

In the same way, working as a pastor and leader in a congregation requires stepping into a variety of roles. This is a natural result of the multiple needs and multiple ministries of a congregation. Clarity about these multiple roles is useful in the whole, broad field of planning

and carrying out ministry. It is even more crucial to be aware of multiple roles when a pastor or church leader wishes to facilitate conflict in a productive way. The skills and stages described in chapter 3 focused on what a neutral facilitator would do. In many conflict situations, however, the pastor or leader will not be neutral on the conflict issue. They will have their own position or preference and, therefore, bring the role of partisan to the dialogue. In addition, they may feel called to play the role of leader, teacher, or care-giver during the course of the interaction. While it might be ideal and sometimes necessary to bring in a neutral facilitator for every church decision or conflict, that is not practical or affordable for most churches. It is not even necessarily the wisest choice. Pastors will regularly be called on to help guide a decision-making process in which they also have a preference for the outcome. Personal preference and attention to the community's needs will have to be balanced. Like a CEO in a corporation or a parent in a family, the pastor and church leader will be responsible both for helping good dialogue to take place and for leading and guiding from their own place of experience and wisdom.

Productive use of multiple roles as a facilitator

There are three steps that will help pastors and leaders effectively manage the use of their multiple roles within the context of group conflict facilitation. All three have to do with clear discernment and clear communication.

1. Before the conflict dialog session takes place, assess and decide on *the purpose of the session*. There are various possibilities. Is the purpose to explore the issue and gain better understanding of the various positions, but no action step will be decided on in that

session? Is the purpose both to explore an issue and choose an action step in the same session? This purpose should be stated by the facilitator at the beginning of the dialog session.

2. If a decision on an action step will be made as a result of the dialog, assess and decide in advance *how the decision will be made and by whom*. Will the pastor make the decision after hearing all viewpoints? Will the dialogue participants themselves make the action-step decision at the conclusion of the dialog? Will the Church Council, leadership board or voting assembly make the decision? This decision-making process should be clearly stated at the beginning of the dialog session
3. The pastor/leader should decide which *role or roles to play during the dialog session*. They should describe to the participants what their role is and how they will alert the participants should they need to step from one role to another.

Let's go back for a moment to First Presbyterian. Pastor McClaren, in consultation with the church Session, decided that the purpose of their congregation dialog meeting would be to discuss and choose what kind of support program their congregation would start for the homeless.

Secondly, it was also decided that the congregation members who came to this meeting, whether they were an official quorum or not, would vote to decide on a program at the end of the dialog session. The reasoning behind this was that those people who came to the meeting would probably have the highest interest in the program and would turn out to be the "worker bees" that

would make it happen. Therefore, to increase their sense of "buy in", they would make the decision.

In another situation or with another issue, the congregation's constitution might state that a decision would need to be made by a full quorum vote of the congregation. This is often true when there is a large financial implication to the decision or a broad area of ministry is being defined. In still other cases, the history and tradition of a congregation will place the final decision in the hands of the pastor, who will make use of the dialog session to gain information and feedback before making his or her decision. The pastor or church leader will need to be aware of their congregation's or denomination's particular tradition or structure regarding who has the power and right to decide.

Thirdly, Pastor McClaren decided that she would primarily play the role of facilitator at the dialog session, but she would also step into the role of partisan two or three times to state her view. Therefore, she stated very clearly at the beginning of the meeting that she saw her primary role to be that of a neutral facilitator. Her first job, she said, was to do a good job of helping everybody express their views, react to one another, and work towards identifying the possible actions steps, which they would vote on at the end. She then told everyone that she had her own preference about which path she would like First Presbyterian Church to take and that she would state her preference as the meeting went ahead. She explained that she would tell them when she was about to step out of the role of facilitator to state her own view and would then tell them again when she was stepping back into the facilitator role. She repeated again that she wanted to be a fair and neutral facilitator and if people felt that she was giving too much support to those

who favored the same action step that she did, they should let her know that. She asked for their help in creating a fair and open conversation.

When a facilitator has decided to also be a partisan in a dialog, another way of communicating fairness to the group is to ask a person in the congregation who has a different position or preference from the facilitator to help facilitate the meeting. Even if they are not as active or experienced in their facilitation, their involvement will help maintain the trust of the group.

A facilitator may also choose to refrain from being a partisan and stay in the role of facilitator throughout the dialog session. Since the group may know from previous discussions that the facilitator does have a preference, the facilitator can say to the group, "I have my own thoughts and positions on this issue, as you know. However, during this dialog session I will not express those. I will speak only as a facilitator. If you think at some moment that I am speaking from my favored position, please say so."

To maintain the trust of the group and remain effective, the facilitator must be clear with themselves and the group about which roles they are expressing. The mix and balance of roles will switch from situation to situation. This will include roles beyond that of facilitator and partisan. Consider, for example, a congregation that is grappling with the issue of same-sex marriage or the blessing of same-sex unions. The pastor organizes a dialog session that has the purpose of community discussion and deepening understanding of the issue. Quite probably during the dialog, statements will be made by participants about what the Bible says or doesn't

say on this matter. The pastor, as facilitator, has a choice to make about whether and how often to step out of the role of facilitator and into the role of Biblical teacher. The pastor can choose to stay in the role of facilitator and let others in the group express current Biblical scholarship on the matter. Alternatively, the pastor could announce to the group a few times during the dialog that he/she is stepping out of the role of facilitator into the role of Bible teacher. Another option is for the pastor to ask the group if they would want to do some focused Bible study together on the topic, either right there in that moment or (more probably) at another time.

If the group switches to or gathers at another time for a Bible study session, the primary role of the pastor changes. In the teacher role, it is appropriate and necessary for the pastor to give in greater detail his/her understanding of the Bible texts being considered and how they apply to the issue of same-sex marriage. A good teacher, of course, will not just lecture but will foster discussion and reactions in order to engage the students in the learning task. Furthermore, a good biblical teacher will acknowledge the diversity of interpretations among scholars and the variety of questions that come up. In that sense, a teacher, as part of their teaching technique, also plays the role of dialog facilitator. However, in the context of a class setting, the pastor will be more teacher than conflict facilitator. In a conflict dialog setting, the pastor will be more facilitator than teacher. The crucial step is for the pastor or leader to be aware of the various roles they carry and make a conscious decision about which roles they will play in a particular situation. Furthermore, they need to communicate to the group what they are doing.

Group feedback to playing multiple roles

After a dialog session in which a leader has stepped out of the facilitator role momentarily to speak their partisan position, someone may come up to the facilitator and say, "It just doesn't work for you to try to be neutral and take a side at the same time! Don't try to do that!" What is being said by the person?

Possibly the person is speaking from a very rational and objective place and is simply commenting on how switching between roles in a given setting requires complex and challenging skill. Coincidentally, the person may be expressing the facilitator's own inner voice, which is saying, "Boy, this is really complicated. I'm not sure how well I pulled it off."

The person may also be giving some valuable feedback about how the facilitation went. Perhaps they noticed a moment when the facilitator did not communicate clearly that they were switching from a neutral role into a partisan role. The facilitator should ask for specific feedback in order to clarify the intent of the comment, such as "Tell me more about that. I would like to learn from you. Was there a particular moment when I wasn't clear about switching roles, when I wasn't fair, or when I favored one side too much?"

Here are other possibilities for why the person is saying, "It just doesn't work":

They are speaking out of their own partisan position. If their position is different than the facilitator's, they may not want the facilitator to voice his or her personal viewpoint at all. Complete neutrality is preferable to them because it means one less opponent.

They may be wishing that the facilitator would be less neutral and more visibly on their side. In effect they are saying, "Why are you neutral and giving equal time to the other side when you and I both know that they are wrong?"

They feel that, because the pastor's voice carries extra power within the group, having the pastor-facilitator express a position puts undue pressure on others to agree with that position or silence their own voice.

Dialog participants will often unconsciously push a role on the pastor or leader that they want them to take. "Be neutral, especially if you're against my side!" "Fight for our side." "Don't take any side." "Stop bringing this topic up because it's too scary to be fighting!"

In any of these cases, it is important for the facilitator to ask the speaker to say more about what they do not like. Digging deeper will bring more awareness to both the facilitator and the person about their own position and the dialog process itself. As the person gives this feedback, the facilitator can also practice some on-the-spot framing and learning, which will benefit all parties.

In summary, here are some guidelines for the productive use of multiple roles.[30]

1. Let the contextual situation determine the *primary* role you will play. When in doubt about the role, the deepest need of the other person or the group is the deciding factor.
2. Get clear on what the primary role requires of you and how that might challenge you in terms of fulfilling your *other* roles.
3. Know the limits of your capacity to fill that role and its expectations.
4. At the start of the meeting, communicate clearly how you will handle your multiple roles and how you will signal that you are switching between roles.
5. Clarify and frame any conflict or tension that you or others may perceive about your multiple roles, particularly if you have a personal vested interest that may express itself through a particular role.

The need for self-care among pastors and congregations

There is great benefit when a congregation and its leaders learn to productively use differences and conflicts. There is also huge stress and turmoil along the way. As they engage in this journey of learning, pastors and congregational members need to have in place a regular program of self-care and support. Here are ways that pastors and congregation can care for themselves.[31]

Self-care and support for pastors

1. Develop for yourself a regular, structured activity that provides support for the loneliness, struggles and questions that pastors regularly experience. A monthly support

group or regular sessions with a mentor, coach or therapist could serve in this way. Design this structured activity so that it not only supports you in difficult times and places, but also provides affirmation and celebration of the gifts you have.

2. Give yourself opportunity and time for receiving love, friendship, and care from others. Work is satisfying, yet it needs to be balanced with fun and play. When you are making your weekly schedule, add in time blocks where you get away and "escape" your responsibilities. Jesus did that! You can, too!
3. Build awareness of your own inner diversity. What are the voices that talk and argue with each other within your mind and heart? Listen and learn from each voice. Which voices do you listen to the most and shape how you act or feel? Which voices usually get their way and which ones don't? Notice how you manage that diversity within you. Compare your inner diversity of voices with the diversity of voices you are facilitating in your congregation. Knowing your own inner diversity keeps you from getting caught off guard by the issues that others bring up. Knowing and dealing with your diversity also helps you to productively facilitate diversity among your members.
4. Identify those places where you feel on the verge of being pushed aside and overpowered by others. We fight when we feel weak or helpless. Our fear of being weak escalates in situations where we don't have authority or privilege and someone else does. Does that sense of being the weaker, more vulnerable party have to do with our personal history…past trauma or abuse…our social characteristics? What are the situations and issues where you will more likely react with defensiveness, fear and readiness to fight and protect? We have a difficult time facilitating someone else's conflict when it brings up an issue where we also feel exposed and weak. Consider whether you are

underestimating your strength and overestimating the strength of the "other side". Consider whether this is a place where you need an extra measure of support, exploration and growth.

5. Investigate the places in your life and work where you have authority and privilege. What is your rank in various situations and with different people? How do you feel about having that rank? Do you hide it? Avoid it? Tentatively and infrequently use it? Notice where you are more likely to unconsciously misuse your authority.
6. Remind yourself regularly that conflict does not equal failure and that you are not a failure when conflict occurs in your congregation. Conflict is a natural part of a healthy, diverse congregation. When managed well, conflict dialog will produce clarity, energy, and a more effective ministry.
7. You preach grace to others; practice grace with yourself. Your work as a facilitator will not be flawless and error-free. Like the congregation, you are on a journey of learning when it comes to managing differences and conflict. Model to the congregation how our mistakes and collisions, when handled with awareness, openness and compassion, lead to growth.

Self-care and support for congregations

Members of congregations also struggle with the weight of pain and self-judgment as they experience their differences and conflicts. In the same way that pastors care for themselves, pastors and church leaders should also establish programs and structures that support and care for congregation members. Here are a variety of strategies to try.

1. Foster a community of learning and growth around diversity and conflict. Don't wait for a conflict to arrive before you discuss the nature of conflict and how to productively prevent, resolve and learn from it. In forums, seminars and sermons, help members ask themselves:
   - What does Jesus teach us about conflict?
   - We have conflicts in our families, workplace and communities around various issues. How do those conflicts affect and overlap into our conflicts at church? What do they teach us?
2. When a conflict arises, don't shy away from it. Rather, learn from it. Learn to manage and productively use a conflict. Form a volunteer task force in your congregation that dedicates itself to the process of managing and learning from conflicts. Develop a volunteer peer mediation group available to members, groups, and families within the congregation. Have peer mediation training for youth. Incorporate it into Sunday School, Summer Camp, etc.
3. After a conflict occurs and the involved parties have developed a working plan to address it, also encourage the parties sit down and write out a statement together, e.g., "Here is what we learned about the issue, about each other and about ourselves. Here are some suggestions for future conflict resolution."
4. Self-care is finding a way to understand your own reactions when people you love are fighting. Create an environment in your congregation that values self-awareness and also mutual support. Make clear that people do not need to feel ashamed if they feel stressed,

threatened or in need of support. Help your congregation to also deepen its awareness of differences as well as commonalities. “Who are “we”?”

5. Practice dealing with your own differences by holding dialogs with other groups that are “different”, for example, evangelical churches, liberal or conservative groups, interfaith groups, and groups focused on hot social issues. Explore issues and areas of conflict, both to learn about those specific areas and also to grow more adept at living productively with conflict.
6. Balance work and play. In the life of your church, keep a mix of challenge and celebration. Members also need to have a regular experience of feeling loved, supported and cared for. In worship and fellowship, affirm your unity at the same time that you explore your differences. Build in time to rest and escape, even as you dedicate time to explore challenging issues.

Conclusion

In the course of writing weekly sermons for Sunday worship at my parish, I have noticed this irony: I preach a message of grace each week to my congregation, but I have a much harder time practicing grace with myself. I talk about God embracing us all with compassion as we journey through life. Meanwhile, I hold myself up to the most rigid, unforgiving standards when I approach each task. In doing so, the fear of failure creeps in and I can become paralyzed and discouraged in advance. Therefore, I would like to conclude this book by encouraging you, the

reader, to practice grace. In every venture, practice using God's deepest gifts of grace, compassion and understanding, beginning with yourself and then with others.

This includes your work of facilitating times of conflict in your congregation. It bears repeating again that conflict is not a sign of failure. It is a natural outgrowth of the differences and diversity that God creates within and among us. Conflict is the passionate singing of many voices, which is often difficult in the moment. Yet, through conflict dialog, we reach a deeper understanding and unity with one another than we had at the start. Therefore, a healthy congregation is not a congregation in which there is a permanent absence of conflict. Rather, a healthy congregation is a congregation that is willing to enter into the complexities of its conflicts and differences in search of learning, wisdom and fuller relationships.

In the same way, a healthy conflict facilitator is not one who is able to carry out a facilitation plan flawlessly and without failure. The countless surprises and unique elements of each conflict dialog process make that impossible. Rather, a healthy facilitator is willing to enter into the conflict dialog process with the simple focus of staying aware and responsive to everything that arises: voices, attitudes, reactions, misunderstandings, and even the facilitator's own missteps and the need to correct course.

There is never one, preordained way to resolve a conflict and so there is never one perfect way to facilitate. Therefore, with a sense of freedom and grace, experiment using the various steps and skills that regularly prove useful in a dialog process. Encourage all the voices to speak, including inner and outer voices. Support people to respond and react to each other. Help

participants explore the deeper feelings and values beneath their positions. Clarify and frame for the group where they have reached places of agreement and where they still differ. Affirm them for their willingness to undertake together a journey of learning and community building.

Along the way, it will be important for the facilitator to practice both self-exploration and self-care. In the same way that conflict dialog will be a time of new clarity, growth and effectiveness for the congregation, the facilitator can make this a time of deepening and enrichment for herself, as well. A supportive framework of care and self-exploration is crucial for this.

The Christian tradition holds the vision of a future time when all of God's creation will be united in a glorious chorus of many voices. As Psalm 85 expresses it, "Kindness and truth will meet; justice and peace shall kiss." Each time you lead your congregation through a productive conflict dialog, you are giving them a taste of that moment and sharpening their skills to follow that vision. As we do this together, relationships are deepened. The world itself is changed. Blessings in this adventure!

Notes

[1] Arnold Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2002), 3-12. Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made by Walking: Process Work in Practice* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 2004), 1-15.
[2] Mindell, op cit, 13-14.
[3] William James, "*The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature",* Gifford Lectures, University of Edinburgh in Scotland, 1902.

[4] Marcus Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 159.
[5] See Mark 3:13-35 and the commentary on this text provided by Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 198-201. Jesus' broadening of "family" was noticeably distressing to his biological family, who thought he had gone out of his mind!
[6] This basic outline for conflict facilitation is deeply indebted to my graduate studies faculty at the Process Work Institute, Portland, OR. In particular, the framework was sharpened in conversations with three faculty members: Julie Diamond, Jan Dworkin and Caroline Spark. For a general overview of this framework, see Mindell, op cit, and Arnold Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 1995).
[7] Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1983)
[8] Roman 2:25-28; Galatians 3; Philippians 3:2-6; Acts 15.
[9] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 271-272.* John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reid, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
[10] Eung Chun Park, *Either Jew or Gentile: Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2003) Especially pages 69-73.
[11] Lee Spark Jones, "Margins of Uncertainty: A Qualitative Study of Marginality in Multiple Dimensions of Experience" (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 2000), 116-126.
[12] Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made by Walking: Process Work in Practice* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 2004) 23-28.
[13] *Ibid, 53-54.*
[14] Arnold Mindell, *The Leader as Martial Artist* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 1992), 13-14
[15] Jan Dworkin, provided in class lecture materials, 2008.
[16] Arnold Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums,* 77-78.
[17] Julie Diamond, provided in class lecture materials, 2008.
[18] Julie Diamond, provided in class lecture materials, 2008.
[19] Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made by Walking: Process Work in Practice,* 49-56.
[20] In Process Work literature, the invisible figures that are part of the dialog are referred to as "ghosts". Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made by Walking: Process Work in Practice,* 49-50, and Mindell, The Deep Democracy of Open Forums, 69-70
[21] Amy Mindell, *Metaskills: The Spiritual Art of Therapy* (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publication, 1995) 43-51.
[22] Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985) 228
[23] Arnold Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity.* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 1995) 28, 42. Julie Diamond, "*Where Roles, Rank and Relationship Meet: a Framework for Working with Multiple role Relationships in Process Work Learning Communities"* 11-13.
[24] Diamond, ibid.

[25] George W. Bullard, *Every Congregation Needs a Good Fight.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008) 18-27.
[26] Diamond, op cit,19-20.
[27] Amy Mindell, op cit, 167-177.
[28] Kathleen Thomerson *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light* (Celebration, 1975)
[29] Marcus Borg, op cit, 163-164.
[30] NoteDiamond, op cit, 16-17
[31] I thank Process Work Institute faculty members Julie Diamond and Jan Dworkin for their extensive input into these self-care strategies.

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