

Conflict

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Factions to Families

BY C.K. ROBERTSON

Lessons from 1 Corinthians

“And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” So the song goes. And yet congregations are communities, and where communities exist, conflict is never too far away. There is nothing new about this. From the Church’s earliest days, there were tensions and rivalries and clashes over any number of issues.

Just ask the Apostle Paul. Throughout his letters, and throughout the account of his mission in Acts, we see a leader who constantly found himself embroiled in conflict management. Nowhere do we see this more than in his first epistle to the Christians in Corinth. If we take on the role of scriptural detectives, we just might discover in that letter some helpful principles for us in our own congregational disputes.

- 1. Keep coming back to Christ.** From the start of 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks about rival factions: “Some say, ‘I belong to Paul,’ ‘I belong to Cephas,’ ‘I belong to Apollos,’ ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided?” How easy it would have been for Paul to succumb to ego and ally himself with those who “belonged” to him, while belittling the other leaders. Instead, he chose the harder road and called on all the people to keep their focus on Christ...and not Christ glorified, but rather Christ crucified: humbled, sacrificing for others. The more everyone focused on Christ, the less time or energy they would have for petty party politics.
- 2. Clarify roles and relationships.** Rather than speak ill of his potential rivals, Paul affirmed the various leaders

and their complementary roles: “I planted, Apollos watered, but it is God who gives the growth.” In this way, he not only stepped out of the win-lose paradigm that accompanies petty rivalries, but he also modeled a genuine graciousness. At the same time, he remained clear about his own position vis-à-vis the congregation: “Though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. I became your father through the gospel.”

3. **Act like adults:** As Paul dealt with one issue after another, he continually challenged the Corinthian Christians to put aside childish behaviors and act like grown ups! “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” Immature siblings bicker and fight constantly, always demanding their own way, while adult siblings can differ vehemently about any number of things, but ultimately remember that what binds them together is far more important than what divides them.
4. **Focus on responsibilities rather than rights:** The church members to whom Paul wrote made much ado about their

rights and what they expected. Paul reminded them “All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial.” As long as they acted according to their presumed needs, desires, and rights, they would fail to acknowledge their responsibilities to one another. It is the age-old cry, “Am I my brother’s (or sister’s) keeper?” Paul admitted that they, and he even more, might indeed be “free with respect to all,” but then reminded them of the many ways in which he instead disciplined himself and found ways to put others before himself, all for the sake of the gospel.

5. **Honor the differences.** While there were some who were quick to disregard those whose gifts, or backgrounds, or life situations were different from their own, Paul used one of his most memorable analogies to show how everyone had something to contribute to the larger whole. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” He showed them the absurdity of an eye disregarding the usefulness of a hand. A body works best when its members work together, each utilizing their complementary gifts for the good of the whole. “To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

6. **Consider the newcomers in your midst.** Intentional welcome of the outsider directly counters insider battles. Paul noted that by becoming more conscious of the outsider in their midst, they could let go of their preoccupation with themselves. In a wonderfully subversive discussion of spiritual gifts in worship, Paul avoided debating the claims of church members to be spiritual because they had been gifted with ecstatic tongues, and instead challenged them to speak and preach with the newcomer in mind. “I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”
7. **Above all, love!** Although the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians has become associated primarily with weddings, the fact is that his magnificent treatise on love was, and remains today, a message about how to coexist in Christian community. The words, while familiar, remain as challenging as ever. What would our congregations look like if we all started each day by asking ourselves, “Am I patient, am I kind, or am I envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude? Do I insist on my own way? Am I irritable or resentful?” Such honest self-

examination can lead each of us into a richer and fuller life and help create not simply a Christian, but a truly Christ-like, community.

The Christian community in Corinth chose to ignore Paul's words, and divisions and conflict continued, as evident in 2 Corinthians and even later in the epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. We, however, can choose to listen and take seriously the challenge. Yes, perhaps the world *will* know that we are Christians by our love, *but only if we dare to let Paul's words become our own.*

C. K. Robertson, PhD, is an Episcopal priest and Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Ministry Beyond the Episcopal Church, a Fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation, Distinguished Visiting Professor at General Theological Seminary, and author of many books and articles, including *Barnabas vs. Paul* (Abingdon) and *Hazardous Saints* (Church Publishing).

Try This

In this article, the author identifies seven helpful principles for us in our own congregational disputes. Thinking about your own congregation, in which of these areas do you feel you are modeling, or close to modeling the behaviors recommended by Paul to the Corinthians. Which areas do you find challenging? How might you apply Paul's advice to the Corinthians to your leadership team and/or congregation?

Resources

- Acts of the Apostles by CK Robertson, (Morehouse/Church Publishing) <https://www.churchpublishing.org/actsoft-heapostles>
- Barnabas vs. Paul by CK Robertson, (Abingdon Press) <http://www.abingdonpress.com/product/9781630882778#VtW2Yrzxkio>

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Editor's Letter

What is it about human behavior that lends itself to conflict? As followers of Christ, rather than pretending differences or bad behaviors don't exist, can we break the cycle and instead learn new ways of building up the beloved community?

Our articles this month may help congregations to do just that:

- We start by looking back to the early days of Christianity. In "Factions to Families: Lessons from 1 Corinthians," C.K. Robertson reminds us that Paul's advice to the Corinthians has stood the test of time. He suggests we have a choice: Unlike the Corinthians who ignored Paul's advice, we can choose to listen and take seriously the challenge he offers us.
- Leadership and finances are the areas most cited by Episcopal churches as sources of conflict. Often, the response is to accept this conflict and try to manage it. Jerry Keucher's, "Treat the Disease, Not the Symptom" suggests a different approach: addressing the underlying problem(s) fueling that conflict.
- "One size fits all" never fits anyone well. In "Conflict: Is Everyone Being Heard?" Anna Olson reminds us that cultural expectations related to accepted forms of communication vary. She identifies two dominant norms for managing conflict that, given the cultural context of a congregation, may undermine attempts to support healthier communication.
- Can we learn new ways of dealing with conflict? Kay Collier McLaughlin's "Getting Along in a Really Strange, Big Family" offers an approach to help congregational leaders identify destructive behaviors and replace them with healthier alternatives. The bishop's committee or vestry in Spanish-speaking/bilingual congregations has unique challenges. In "Preparing Members for Vestry Service" Anna B. Lange-Soto mentions some and gives us advice on how to face and get past them.
- Are you conflict averse? Most of us learn at an early age to sometimes give the expected answer - rather than a truthful answer - as a way to avoid conflict. In "Overcome Being Conflict Averse" Rich Simpson names this phenomenon and invites leaders to help their congregations move past this conflict avoiding behavior and instead discover how having difficult conversations may lead to deeper relationship, healing, and reconciliation.
- Speaking up is important in congregations headed down the path of - or embroiled in - conflict and angst. In "The Courage to Speak" Bonnie Anderson reminds congregational leaders of the promise we made in our baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being. She offers approaches for clergy and laity to consider that might head off these difficult situations.
- Encontrar a gente para llenar posiciones de liderazgo puede ser un reto. Un método consiste en ofrecer oportunidades para toda la feligresía, incluyendo la juventud y las personas jóvenes adultas, para desarrollar habilidades de liderazgo - como ayudantes, asistentes, como parte de algún comité. Cuando era una joven adolescente, Liz

Luna comenzó como voluntaria en de la Escuela Dominical de su iglesia, pasando de ayudante a líder durante un período de tres años. En “¿Demasiado joven para liderar?” Liz describe la tensión creada cuando algunas personas adultas en su iglesia plantearon preguntas acerca de quién está calificado o calificada para ser un o una líder.

■ Finding people to fill leadership roles can be a challenging. One approach is to provide opportunities for members, including youth and young adults, to develop leadership skills - as helpers, assistants, or committee members. As a young teenager, Liz Luna started volunteering at her church’s Sunday school, moving from helper to leader over a three year period. In “Too Young to Lead?” Liz describes the tension created when some adults in her church raised questions regarding who is qualified to be a leader in a particular setting.

■ What can a church learn from a

soccer referee? In “Conflict Resolution from a Referee” Scott Petersen, priest and a soccer referee, draws our attention to the ways an experienced referee, in the heat of the moment restores order and engenders trust in his/her decisions. He offers the referee’s steps as a guide for reacting to conflict when it flares up in a church setting.

We encourage you to think about how the ideas presented in this and every issue can provide an impetus for evaluating and reflecting on what you could learn from the experiences of others. To help in your discernment, we offer a list of resources related to the topic at the end of each article. If you have a resource you’d like to share, please email me at editor@episcopalfoundation.org with the link or add it to the site using the Your Turn feature. (<http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/>)

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Faithfully,

Nancy

Nancy Davidge

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Treat the Disease, Not the Symptom

BY JERRY KEUCHER

At a meeting I attended a few years ago, Kirk Hadaway, the congregational research officer for The Episcopal Church, noted, “conflict over leadership and conflict over finances were the areas most strongly related to decline in average Sunday attendance.” In other words, conflict is usually a symptom of a leadership or financial problem. Several of the participants in the meeting said that this information made them want to learn more about how to manage conflict. No one said that the information made her want to address the leadership problems that are usually the cause of conflict.

It is important to remember that conflict is almost always a symptom of an underlying problem. Yes, there are difficult and even crazy people in our churches who seem to delight in causing arguments and ill feeling, and it is easy to think that if those people just went away, everything would be fine. However, the fact is that usually conflict is the sign that something else — normally a combination of finances, buildings, and leadership — is not right in the life of the congregation. Trying to

treat the symptom without treating the underlying condition is like concentrating only on treating a pneumonia patient’s cough. The cough will subside only when the infection causing the cough is healed. We might wish that the concerns were more “spiritual,” but each parish church is a local incarnation of the Body of Christ; the physical aspects of the institution must be healthy for the congregation to thrive.

There is more conflict in our congregations today because more of our congregations are declining. Declining congregations tend to have more conflicts and more serious conflicts. When there has been no leadership or bad leadership, when there are more and more urgent appeals for money, and when people see the steady deterioration of the buildings they love, they become anxious and fearful about the future of the parish. That anxiety and fear usually cause people to turn on one another because there is no vision that inspires people to think things can get better.

Here are some things I have learned from leading turnarounds

in three congregations that were on the brink of failure when I arrived.

- “First, it is necessary that there be at least one leader — and it is most effective if this is the priest — who not only sincerely believes that things can get better, but also has some concrete ideas for how things can begin to get better.
- Second, it is necessary to identify and address in a visual and tangible way the major immediate cause of people’s anxiety. This is often a building issue or a budget shortfall. If you can figure out how to get the roof repaired or the boiler fixed, or if you can develop a new stream of revenue from renting out an underused part of your plant, you will not cause the conflict to cease, but you will have demonstrated that something can indeed be done to make things better, and that will increase your credibility when you suggest other things that can be done.

Keep making incremental changes that improve the state

of the buildings and generate more cash flow. Celebrate every success, and don't be daunted by the fact that some ideas will fail. Acknowledge what went wrong, and suggest something else.

- Third, do not change anything that doesn't absolutely need to be changed in order to get the buildings in shape and the budget in a healthier state. Keep the main thing the main thing. Here's why.

Suspicion is a powerful corrosive. Trust is the lubricant that permits a system to move. In a conflicted situation there will be very little trust. It takes time and patience to build up enough trust so things can start to move. Every change will cost you a chunk of people's goodwill; so do not sweat the small stuff. If the ship is taking on water, you want everyone focused on bailing and fixing the hole. Leave the deck chairs where they are even if you hate their configuration. Be transparently devoted only to bringing things to a healthier state.

Finally, remember that the people are the solution, not the problem. Most people want to be healthy and want to be part of a healthy congregation. As you address the underlying problems—and

remember, these problems are usually about buildings, finances, and leadership—people will begin to catch the vision that things can get better, and the conflict will begin to subside, and people will begin to work together better.

For the first three years in my current parish, while I was trying to bring about a real estate development project, vestry meetings were long and loud, with a lot of acting-out. From the moment the vestry voted to enter into formal negotiations with the developer, all of that almost immediately disappeared. We had identified and agreed on a viable path that would bring long-term financial stability to the congregation. The underlying condition (no vision of the future) had been addressed, so the symptoms (conflict) subsided.

Jerry Keucher, an Episcopal priest, is the author of *Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations* (2006) and *Back from the Dead: The Book of Congregational Growth* (2012). He serves as priest-in-charge at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, New York, and works with ECF as a consultant.

Jerry has served as chief of finance and operations for the Episcopal

Diocese of New York. He has held similar positions in financial leadership, including Staten Island Botanical Garden and Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. A gifted linguist he has taught Greek and Hebrew at Princeton Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School.

Try This

If your congregation is experiencing conflict, think about what aspect of the life of the congregation might be causing anxiety among the members. Don't think about troublesome individuals, but rather about the systemic things that might be causing people to lose a vision for a better future. Is there anything concrete you can think of that might make an incremental improvement in that aspect of the congregation's life?

Resources

- **Back from the Dead: The Book of Congregational Growth** by Gerald W. Keucher, New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2012 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/backfromthedead>

- Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue by Edwin H. Friedman, New York: The Guilford Press, 1985. <http://www.guilford.com/books/Generation-to-Generation/Edwin-Friedman/9781609182366/reviews>

- Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior by Arthur Paul Boers, Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1999 <http://www.amazon.com/Never-Call-Jerks-Arthur-Boers/dp/1566992184> Read an excerpt here. <http://www.pbs.org/thecongregation/indepth/nevercall.html>

- Remember the Future: Financial Leadership and Asset Management for Congregations by Gerald W. Keucher, New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2006 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/rememberthefuture>

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Conflict: Is Everyone Being Heard?

BY ANNA OLSON

We all do conflict. But we don't all do it quite the same way. Finding live-giving ways forward in times of congregational conflict requires some awareness of and attention to the ways that culture and personality affect communication and participation in community conversations.

People of every culture, every shade of human experience, and every personality type, end up in conflict with others from time to time. Cultural expectations about communication in times of conflict vary widely. At the same time, conflict heightens our sensitivity to offense, rigidifying our sense of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable communication. In a multicultural environment, tensions and misunderstandings can arise quickly when we find ourselves without a mutually agreed upon set of rules and strategies for opening up communication. Norms developed in one cultural context may serve to silence some of the voices that need to be part of the conversation in order to move forward. Limits on acceptable ways of communicating will privilege some voices over others. Multicultural and multi-

generational congregations will often need multifaceted strategies for eliciting input, and even for detecting the presence of conflict as it develops. Even in a congregation that is relatively homogeneous, a wide-open approach to seeking feedback may balance differences in personality and personal style.

Even knowing that conflict is brewing can be tricky if we aren't attuned to the range of ways that people communicate. In cultures that prize direct communication, someone will usually tell you they are upset. A letter will be written, an item put on the vestry agenda, a combative question asked at the annual meeting. This may mean that the person who brings up the issue is the primary one with this problem. Or it may mean that there has been a long series of conversations among the disgruntled, and someone was finally designated to speak up. In less direct cultures, the cues may be much more subtle. Conflict may whisper around the edges, manifesting in general irritability over small issues, coming to the surface in the course of long, convoluted conversations that seem to be

about anything and everything but the issue at hand. People who expect directness may be frustrated in trying to "get at the issue," or may even miss the signs that conflict is happening. Those who have been raised to show respect through indirect communications may find direct expressions shocking or rude, and may find it impossible to bring their concerns straight to the table.

Some of the norms that come out of the dominant Episcopal culture are meant to make communication healthier. Yet they may have the opposite effect in a multicultural setting. For example, I often hear blanket condemnations of anonymity. Anonymous communications are viewed as cowardly and poisonous. My experience, however, is that there are some people who will never feel comfortable expressing their concerns without the option of anonymity. Putting a name on a critique of a position held by an elder, clergy person, or member of a dominant group may seem impossible. If we insist that all input must come with a name attached, some people will simply opt out of the conversation. Another dominant

norm is the bias against “triangulation.” Triangulation is an oversimplification of an otherwise helpful concept in systems theory, but it has come to mean any communication involving a third party. I have a problem with you, so I tell someone else and they tell you. In a culture that values directness above all, this creates unnecessary obstacles and thwarts the goal of resolution through direct exchange or confrontation. In many cultural contexts, however, an indirect approach is a sign of respect for the status, age, or how beloved the person or people involved. Using a third party or even a complicated chain of third parties to effect communication can be a sign of the weight of the issues involved and the desire to preserve relationships.

If our primary goal in approaching conflict is strengthening our relationships in the service of ministry, we will want to find ways to bring as many voices into the conversation as possible. We will want to keep an eye out and an ear to the ground for both obvious and subtle signs that conflict is brewing. Being flexible enough to receive and perceive both direct and indirect communications will be essential. We will sometimes have to listen through long stories that wind through various subjects

and territories before arriving at the most important points. Checking our impulses to assign negative labels to other people’s approaches and dismiss input that comes in surprising, unfamiliar or even rude-seeming formats will help us to hear what others are saying rather than focusing on how they are saying it. Moving forward in love will likely only be truly possible if everyone can find a way to be heard.

Anna Olson is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and Stanford University, and was ordained in the Diocese of Los Angeles in 2000. She lives and works in the diverse Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles, serving since 2011 as rector of Saint Mary’s Episcopal Church, Los Angeles’ only historic Japanese-American Episcopal church. Her interests and expertise in parish ministry include working with historic congregations to connect with the needs and gifts of new neighbors; developing models for multilingual and inculturated liturgy; liturgy in public spaces; and opening space for marginalized communities to reshape and revitalize the church. She has a partner and two daughters, is fluent in Spanish and holds a second-degree black belt in taekwondo.

Try This

Understanding your congregation’s communication patterns (verbal and nonverbal) is a good first step towards strengthening relationships by encouraging healthier behaviors. Anna Olson suggests congregational leaders consider these questions:

1. What are the signs that conflict is brewing in your congregation?
2. What styles of communication are considered acceptable and unacceptable in your congregation?
3. Who tends to be heard in times of conflict? Whose voices get left out?
4. Are there ways you might expand the number of voices at the table?
5. Could you create opportunities for both written and spoken feedback?
6. Could you use small groups or mutual invitation to encourage people who are uncomfortable speaking up?
7. How do you help people who tend to talk a lot to make space for people who tend to talk less?

8. Are there patterns that reflect the diversity of race and culture in your congregation?

9. Can you find respectful ways to ask people how they are most comfortable handling conflict?

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Resources

- “Facing Differences” William M. Kondrath, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/cultivating-leaders/facing-differences/>
- God’s Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences, by William M. Kondrath, Alban Institute, 2008 <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00K73VK68/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?ie=UTF8&btkr=1>
- “Making Room,” Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices’ Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/making-room/>
- “Wisdom Gathered, Lessons Learned,” Loren Mead, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/uncertain-times/wisdom-gathered-lessons-learned/>

Getting Along in a Really Strange, Big Family

BY KAY COLLIER MCLAUGHLIN

The finalists in St. Christopher's search for a new rector were due in town in two days. The church, grounds, and parish house were in readiness; the staff and nominating committee were busy with last minute preparations for hospitality and transportation. The monthly vestry meeting was underway.

"We have an issue here," Joe the senior warden began. "A member of the nominating committee is not eligible to serve – he is not a regular giver so this is an invalid process."

*A stunned silence held the group for a few seconds. Then a young woman rose. Facing the warden she spoke firmly, with an energy that filled the room. "You," she said clearly, "do not get to sabotage this process." **

Conflict is often a lightning rod for fear, in individuals and organizations. Looking at a sampling of the definitions in various modern dictionaries makes that fear understandable!

- **Conflict as defined in dictionaries beginning with Merriam-Webster:** fight, battle war;

competitive or opposing action of incompatibles; antagonistic state or action as of divergent ideas, interests or persons; mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes or external and internal demands.

- **The Business Dictionary:** friction or opposition resulting from actual or perceived differences or incompatibilities
- **Collins English Dictionary:** opposition between two simultaneous but incompatible wishes or drives, sometimes leading to a state of emotional tension; a struggle or clash between opposing forces.

Most of us are not interested in living with fights, battles, or wars and despite other, milder definitions, too many people carry scars from very real personal or professional conflicts that influence their present encounters with people.

In the church, adding to that fear is a subliminal belief that real Christians shouldn't have conflict, but live in perfect love and charity. If conflict does rear its head, good

Christians simply turn the other cheek; accepting any behavior, regardless of how detrimental to community or individuals.

Brené Brown (<http://brenebrown.com>), in her book *Rising Strong*, (<http://brenebrown.com/books/>) writes:

"We don't like how difficult emotions feel. We don't know what to do with discomfort and vulnerability. Emotion can feel terrible, even physically overwhelming. We can feel exposed, at risk, and uncertain. Our instinct is to run from pain. In fact, most of us were never taught how to hold discomfort, sit with it, or communicate it, only to discharge or dump it, or pretend it's not happening."

The words *never taught* lead to the alternative choice, the one I teach: Instead of disengaging or dumping differences, or wading into a battle of verbal hand grenades, with guidance it is possible to, wade into the middle of the behavioral stew, learning how to approach differences that lead to conflict and the ensuing emotions.

A different response to conflict

In my work, there are three particular concepts that form an approach to living and working together in community, which is the setting for what the culture and the dictionaries call “conflict.”

1. Identification and naming or calling out of behaviors.
2. Understanding the impact, regardless of intention (assumed or spoken).
3. Knowing positive alternatives to practice, model and teach.

My definition of this approach to living and working together in community comes from Story People creator Brian Andreas: (<http://www.storypeople.com>)

“I’m not trying to bring world peace. I’m just trying to get along in a really strange, big family.”

Every family in every system, regardless of size, has differences of perceptions and beliefs. Accepting such differences as normative, even intentional in God’s creation, is foundational. We were not intended to be identical cookies, made from the same cutter. How a family, nuclear or corporate, academic or religious, responds to those differences

on an every day basis, as well as in crisis, is a choice. The fearful “hunker-down-in-the-bunker” choice is to hope that differences don’t escalate into conflict, and when they inevitably do, the response is to bring in an expert for conflict ‘management’ and hopefully ‘resolution.’ Until differences again flare into conflict and the cycle begins anew.

Understanding behavioral impacts

We can all learn to think in terms of human behaviors, learning to identify those that are healthy and build up the community, and those that are unhealthy and lead to dysfunction in the community. The next step is developing an understanding of the impact of each behavior on the community and testing that impact against goals for community health and development. If the impact is not healthy for the community, it is important to know alternative behaviors to teach and model. The third step is realizing that *intent does not matter*. That’s right. *Impact happens, regardless of the intention*. If we must resort to using intent to explain a destructive impact of a behavior, we are reflecting on something that has already happened, and no understanding of what was intended can change that impact. If we are *living intentionally*, we

are looking forward and making choices about the impact we want to have.

A word about anxiety

“I didn’t know exactly what was wrong,” Tom, a parish leader told me. “Things just felt off-kilter. I could sense that others must have felt this, too by the way they were reacting, the ways they were treating each other. But there was nothing I could put my finger on.”

Tom was halfway to the first step in incorporating a process for healthy organizations into his church: his awareness meter was on high, registering that the anxiety in the system was revving up - often a prelude to more severe differences in opinions, and reactive behaviors.

Anxiety is like a virus in any system, personal or professional. It is additive. Catching. Tom, his vestry, and I, working together, set about learning how to put the finger on or recognize behaviors that escalate into full-blown battles, passive or aggressive, and what alternative behaviors might be.

Identifying destructive behaviors

According to Rabbi Ed Friedman,

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Friedman) there are eight behaviors that can lead to conflict or dysfunction: Triangulating, over functioning, under functioning, distancing, conflict, sabotage, bullying, and cut off.

Turning these behaviors involves the aforementioned three-step process:

1. Identification and naming or calling out of behaviors.
2. Understanding the impact, regardless of intention (assumed or spoken).
3. Knowing positive alternatives to practice, model and teach.

When working with groups, I begin by asking:

“What images come to mind when you think of Jesus?”

In most participant groups, both clergy and lay, immediate answers have to do with “gentle Jesus meek and mild;” images having to do with love, peace, lambs, and small children. Occasionally, someone will mention the overturning of the tables in the temple.

We then spend a few minutes talking about “what is Christian

behavior?” This discussion is foundational to creating an organizational environment where healthy, acceptable behaviors are normative. The goal is for informed, educated leaders in all levels of the organization to pass the model on to others, strengthening the entire system against unhealthy viruses that lead to dis - ease in the organization. All too often the unhealthy behaviors go unnamed and accepted as ‘normal.’ “That’s just Jean!” “He really means well.” “It wouldn’t be the Christian thing to do to confront them; as Christians we need to accept everyone.”

A brief discussion of scripture that show Jesus setting boundaries and naming behaviors that are not acceptable are an important prelude to the next part of the conversation. See John 18:33-37; Matthew 16:23; Matthew 18:15-16.

Defining behavioral impacts and exploring acceptable responses

We next spend time defining and then deconstructing each destructive behavior, (triangulating, over functioning, under functioning, distancing, conflict, sabotage, bullying, and cut off), with the goal of identifying healthy behavior to use in its place.

For each destructive behavior, the group is asked to:

1. Define the behavior.
2. Describe where they have seen or experienced the behavior within their system.
3. Share an example of when they’ve been drawn into the behavior themselves.
4. Describe the impact of the behavior
5. Ask themselves if the impact described is the desired impact.

As the facilitator, I remind them that as adults, if they can identify the behavior and know its impact, they have a choice between a dysfunctional, destructive behavior and a healthy behavior. The group then is invited to brainstorm healthy alternatives.

It is important to note that after the “ah- ha” of recognition: *Wow! That behavior has a **name**, and a real impact, and I don’t have to accept that behavior*, comes the courage to step up, speak out, and teach others how to do so. Leadership groups need to understand and teach others that when they sit quietly, allowing destructive behaviors to

continue, it will be assumed that they agree with the behavior. They are unintentionally supporting destructive behavior in their organization.

Some history

A leadership team developed this exercise during a meeting when a congregation was exhibiting several of the above behaviors; behaviors that had long marked life in this particular place. Their participation in the exercise was the beginning of a turnaround. Members recognized themselves in the model and the impact in their congregational life.

The next week handmade signs listing the behaviors, impacts, and alternatives started appearing around the building. Naming a behavior became a normal part of congregational life, now that they had identification and vocabulary. Differences still existed in the congregation, but now there was a way to deal with them civility when necessary.

The handmade signs created by St. John's inspired a poster, created by the Leadership Team for all congregations in the diocese.

If you choose to try this new approach to an ongoing process

for "getting along in a really strange, big family," I hope you will download the two images to support your work; a reminder that we can acknowledge our differences, respect those individual ways of being in the world, and live and work together, in God's name.

** Becoming the Transformative Church: Beyond Sacred Cows, Fantasies, and Fears, Kay Collier McLaughlin, Morehouse Publishing, 2013.*

Kay Collier McLaughlin, PhD is author of *Becoming the Transformative Church: Beyond Sacred Cows, Fantasies and Fears*. (<https://www.churchpublishing.org/>) *becomingthetransformativechurch* Further insights on these ideas may be studied in this book. Formerly deputy for leadership development and transition ministries for the Diocese of Lexington, she speaks and consults across the Church (KayCMconsulting.com) on transformative leadership and civil dialogue as well as continuing to research and write for her blog and forthcoming books.

Try This

Reflection: Luke 15:11-32, The Prodigal Son

"He came to himself..."

1. What do these words mean in light of this article?
2. Self awareness: How well am I practicing honesty with and about myself? Do I have a place where it is safe to tell the truth, to name things as I see them?
3. Other awareness: How much is honesty valued in my community? Is a safe environment and instruction on being honest provided?
4. Practice: What is one thing I can do to make a difference in the area of honesty in my own life? In the life of my community?

Resources

- A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix, Edwin H. Friedman, Seabury, 1999, 2007 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/afailureofnerve>
- Becoming the Transformative Church: Beyond Sacred Cows, Fantasies and Fears by Kay Collier McLaughlin, Church Publishing, 2012 <https://www.churchpublishing.org/becomingthetransformativechurch>

- “Building Strong Teams: A Tool for Identifying and Addressing Five Common Areas of Dysfunction” by Rosa Lindahl, ECF Vital Practices’ Tool <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/building-strong-teams-a-tool-for-identifying-and-addressing-five-common-areas-of-dysfunction/>
- “Elephants in the Sanctuary” by Ward Richards, ECF Vital Practices’ Vestry Papers, 2005 <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/conflict-and-controversy/elephants-in-the-sanctuary/>
- Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior by Arthur Paul Boers, Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1999 <http://www.amazon.com/Never-Call-Jerks-Arthur-Boers/dp/1566992184> Read an excerpt here. <http://www.pbs.org/thecongregation/indepth/nevercall.html>

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Overcome Being Conflict Averse

BY RICH SIMPSON

When my children were younger their pediatrician would ask them at their annual check-ups, “*what color is your bike helmet?*” Not “*do you have a bike helmet?*”

After my kids answered the question, he’d turn to me and say that kids know the right answer to the second question is yes, even if they don’t have one. But that the first question gets more consistently at the truth.

In a similar way, when I am coaching search committees in the call process for a new rector, I encourage them to not ask a generic question about conflict but to get specific. “*Tell me about a time when conflict led to positive change in your ministry.*” Or “*tell me about a time when a conflict you were involved in did not lead to reconciliation – and what did you learn from that?*” We learn, after all, not only from those accomplishments that delight and satisfy us, but also from those “disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on God alone.” (See *Book of Common Prayer* pg. 836)

Too many clergy confide in me, at

least privately, that they are conflict averse. They know, of course, that this is not the right answer in an interview, but there are deeply ingrained behaviors in most Christian congregations that confuse being “nice” with Christian fidelity. This too often keeps us from “leaning in” to conflict and this is a problem. We need to work together – clergy and laity – to change those behaviors.

Recently I led a workshop at our Diocesan Parish Leadership Day on conflict, using a case study where conflict escalates for all the usual reasons that it does in real-life congregations. Those early signs of dissent are ignored, rather than engaged. There is poor communication in all directions. There is a sense of “urgency” in moments where process (and prayer) matter, and slowing down a bit (NOT stopping) would actually get to the end much faster.

It all begins innocently enough: with a desire to do good and initiate a positive change toward inclusivity. Who is against that? No one, of course, until you actually introduce some new hymns or change the liturgy or make any

other number of changes that will inevitably meet with some resistance. Sadly, like too many real-life situations, the case study ends with staff and vestry on the verge of resigning and a bewildered priest asking, “*where is God in all of this?*”

At any given point in the case study, however, there are choices that can be made that might lead to a different result if people were not so conflict averse. Choices that, if made, could lead to positive change. It’s similar, I think, to what we’ve grown accustomed to hearing when we travel through airports: *if you see something, say something*. At some point, conflict that is not dealt with will escalate to the point of no return; the kind of conflict that too often leads to the dissolution of pastoral relationships. This, of course, is what conflict-averse people fear: that worst-case scenario. But ironically we add fuel to the fire by avoiding (sometimes at all costs) the steps we might take along the way that may potentially lead to deeper intimacy, healing, and reconciliation. So when we see something we must say something.

What does that look like? I wonder what would happen if a vestry or congregation began by collecting “good news” stories of conflicts that led to a deeper level of trust and fidelity. In our most intimate relationships, there is no way to avoid fighting. But we can learn (at least in healthy relationships) to fight fair. This, of course, takes practice. And since we won’t always get it right, it takes forgiveness. But alas, practice and forgiveness have a lot more to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ than being nice does!

This is the kind of love the world needs to see modeled by the Church – not a community where everyone is always holding hands, but a community that fearlessly leans into conflict as a gift, trusting in God’s mercy every step of the way. It seems to me that the two biggest first steps we can take are to get clearer about the mission and to acknowledge the challenges around who has power and authority in the system. Too often I see leaders (usually clergy) who are either too timid to do anything that might lead to conflict OR who think they have more authority than they really do. Even when the canons may be on their side, leadership is about bringing people along – not issuing edicts. *When we are clear about what the work is, we can begin to focus on the deeper questions.* Together.

When we ask “where is God in the midst of this fight?” we need to stay with that question long enough to hear one another. This is about more than trying to create win-win situations or avoiding lose-lose situations. In my experience it’s about a kind of radical hospitality that requires listening to each other and to God. I’ll share an example.

For many years I served a parish that fought about music styles. When it came time for me to finish a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Project I focused on (so-called) secular music that people listened to that brought them closer to God, music that touched their souls. We were a diverse group. Some of us liked country music and some of us liked classical music and some of us liked rock and roll. Although people can be judgmental from any of these places and few people like all kinds of music the same, the key to the project was focused on listening for the “why?” questions. I’m a huge Bruce Springsteen fan – but the question is not ultimately about whether or not I can convince other people how great Bruce is – but why it is that his poetry and music touch a place deep within me, what it is that makes a song like “The Rising,” dare I say, sacred.

My DMin project didn’t end the

“fights” about church music. People have different tastes. But I think it contributed to a deeper understanding of one another and clearly this is part of the invitation that conflict offers to us; a deeper sense of trust and intimacy on the other side.

I am convinced that finding healthier ways of to deal with conflict is a big part of the work that God has given the Church to do in a polarized society and that doing so holds within it the potential to rebuild Christ’s Church. The fruits are the same as they were in those conflicted congregations in first-century Corinth where Paul counseled faith, hope, and love – but especially love.

Richard Simpson is an Episcopal priest and Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts. His ministry is to support clergy and congregations toward the larger goal of furthering God’s Reign of mercy, compassion, and hope. Rich writes a blog on contemporary faith called *Rich’s Ruminations*. <http://rmsimpson.blogspot.com>

Try This

How might we train ourselves to be less conflict averse? Perhaps, as Rich suggests by collecting “good news” stories of conflicts that led to deeper levels of

trust and fidelity. You might start by taking a look back – in the life of your church or perhaps another group you are involved with. Are there any “good news” stories there?

Plan time at a meeting to talk about – and dissect – these stories. Revisit what happened. If you could go back in time, what parts of the process would you do differently and why? What behaviors would you like to lift up as an example of the kind of loving behavior the world needs to see modeled by the Church – not a community where everyone is always holding hands, but a community that fearlessly leans into conflict as a gift, trusting in God’s mercy every step of the way. What steps could you take to help your congregation feel more comfortable about ‘leaning into conflict as a gift?’

Resources

- Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences by Gil Rendle, Alban Institute, 1998 <https://www.cokesbury.com/product/9781566992091/behavioral-covenants-in-congregations/>
- Building Strong Teams: A Tool for Identifying and Addressing Five Common Areas of Conflict, an ECF Vital Practices’ resource <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/building-strong-teams-a-tool-for-identifying-and-addressing-five-common-areas-of-dysfunction/>
- “Cocky Driver Syndrome and How it Can Put Your Ministry in the Ditch” by Melissa Rau, ECF Vital Practices’ Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/cocky-driver-syndrome-and-how-it-can-put-your-ministry-in-the-ditch/>
- “Fostering Respect in Church Settings” Dignity at Work Task Force, Episcopal Diocese of Newark http://www.dioceseof-newark.org/sites/default/files/resources/2015_CONV_141_DAW_Report.pdf
- “Open and Honest Conversations” by Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices’ Vital Post <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/open-and-honest-conversations/>

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The Courage to Speak

BY BONNIE ANDERSON

“Our lives begin to end the day we keep silent about things that matter.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

In every congregation there are lay people who hold a certain kind of personal authority. I’m sure you know these folks. Among them, they share some common characteristics. They are kind, have a positive outlook, often see the “big picture” and are usually soft spoken, but not always. They possess a certain kind of wisdom that is steeped in humility. Most importantly, they are brave and not afraid to speak the truth.

I knew a matriarch (used in the best sense of the word) with personal authority. At 93 years she would stand at the microphone at diocesan convention, having thoroughly researched the topic about which she is speaking, and convince a whole diocese to vote for her cause, controversial though it may be. Mary was fearless.

There was standing room only at her funeral, and the preacher recalled many situations of conflict and distress that were prayerfully and gracefully resolved when Mary spoke. She spoke up when

she saw things going wrong. She headed off parish situations that could have divided the parish, sent the rector away, and put the congregation’s ministry into a tailspin for years to come. She spoke the truth in difficult situations and, in [the Episcopal] Church that is not easy to do. After all, we have no language in the Church for telling each other the hard truth in love, even though the One we follow, told the truth all his life on earth. Even when it “hurt other people’s feelings.”

What keeps us, the laity, from speaking the truth in parish situations where parishioners have “ganged up” on the rector? What keeps us from speaking up, what keeps us silent, is fear. We are afraid of losing the friends we have had for many years. We are afraid that our fellow parishioners won’t like us anymore. We are afraid that telling the truth from our own perspective will alienate us from our parish community. Our own self-interest keeps us silent while we sit by and watch our clergy person eviscerated.

My grandmother (of all knowledge and wisdom) told me once, on the

occasion of me not speaking up for a bunch of little kids in our neighborhood who were being bullied by bigger kids, that fear is the opposite of faith. Since I was a very obedient Roman Catholic at the time, I was having none of fear from then on. As I grew in faith (and became an Episcopalian) I learned to live by 2 Timothy 1:7 “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self control.”

As for speaking up in congregations headed down a path of conflict and angst, as laity, we need to be not only courageous but we have to remember that we are actually called to speak up. We promise to do so in our baptismal covenant (respect the dignity of every human being.) How? By speaking up when we see someone being diminished.

C.S. Lewis reminds us “Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.” Courage animates all our virtues: honesty, confidence, humility, compassion, integrity, valor. Without courage all these virtues lie dormant. Without regular use, our courage becomes harder for us to conjure up, less available to us. If we are not regularly courageous,

our courage dries up. “Courageous” becomes only a memory of how we used to be.

Please now, allow me to share some ideas for possibly heading off these difficult situations in the future:

To the clergy: When you are called to a congregation, look to identify the laity who you see as those having personal authority. Get to know them. Invite them to get to know you. Really know you. Pick their brains about the “culture” of the congregation. Ask them to tell you their hopes and dreams and you tell them yours. Then cast the net wider, and do the same thing with the whole congregation, a little at a time. It may take a long time depending on the size of the congregation.

H. Coleman McGehee, Bishop in the Diocese of Michigan (now deceased) was a “dove” when it came to war and military action. At his parish in Virginia he had many parishioners with military vocations. He devoted several years to developing authentic relationships. He got to know the parishioners (called “one on ones” in the community organizing community). He got to really know them, not to change people’s minds, but to hear their viewpoints and to share his views with them. Love and respect transcend

all sorts of mindsets when people cannot agree on issues. This is not news to you, but “It’s all about relationship.”

To the laity: Read the Catechism regarding the ministry of the laity. Find out what your job is. Look it up in the Book of Common Prayer (page 855). Know your gifts, know what your ministry is, and really commit to it. This is one of the most important things you will do in your life. When you say the baptismal covenant, mean it (after all it is a promise). If you can’t promise that you will respect the dignity of every human being, with God’s help, then don’t say those words when the baptismal covenant is renewed. Have generosity of spirit. Be kind. Love your neighbor and be in partnership with the clergy that God has given us. Have courage to speak the truth in love. Commit to being a loving and responsible member of your Christian community. If you have your baptism certificate, as a daily reminder of your primary vocation in life, hang it on the wall near where you get dressed in the morning. Most importantly, get over the fear. Take a deep breath and speak the truth in love. It will set you free.

These suggestions may sound simplistic, but they can be life changing. We are Christ’s beloved. Know that we are called to com-

munity to do our work of reconciliation, and always keep in the forefront of your mind that we have promised to respect the dignity of every human being.

Henri Nouwen reminds us “we are cast into communities of people that we would never, in all our life, choose for ourselves.” There’s a life message there: Everything comes from God.

Bonnie Anderson recently completed her term as senior warden at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pontiac, Michigan. She served as President of the House of Deputies from 2006-2012, Vice-President of the House of Deputies from 2003-2006, and served as chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Program Budget and Finance for six years. She has been an elected member of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church and has served on many other Episcopal Church committees on both the diocesan and national level. She is the recipient of five Episcopal Seminary honorary doctorate degrees in Theology and Canon Law. She is a Canon in the Diocese of Ecuador. To learn more about her effort in 2010 to develop Circles of Ministries, building up Laity, Deacon, Priests, and Bishops see “Celebrating the ‘Circle’ of Ministries.” http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/79425_122437_ENG_HTML.htm

The above essay was written out of a partnership between The Episcopal Women's Caucus (EWC) and The Network of Episcopal Clergy (NECA.). It is reprinted with permission. This project developed following a watershed moment when in January 2014 the **Episcopal Diocese of Newark** passed a resolution seeking that their Bishop appoint a task force to explore Dignity of Work issues related to clergy and workplace bullying. This essay was written as part of a collection of essays written to begin to address the challenge of challenging calls and the issue of workplace bullying. See the all the essays at **The Episcopal Women's Caucus blog** http://episcopalwomenscaucus.blogspot.com/2014_09_01_archive.html and **The Care for Clergy in Difficult Calls Writing Project**. <http://episcopalclergy.org/community/topic/the-project/>

Try This

How healthy is your church when it comes to dealing with conflict? Does your leadership team model ways to build trust within the congregation? How are disagreements handled? Are there opportunities for sharing different viewpoints in a setting where participants feel safe to give their honest opinion? Like many congregations, your church may have

some work to do in this area. One place to start? Consider crafting a behavioral covenant that lays out the ground rules: We will start—and end—on time. We will commit to full participation. We will listen attentively. We will turn off our cell phones and computers. We will make our best attempt to attend every meeting. And when we can't, we will notify the leader in advance. We will not be an air hog, bog, or frog. We agree the content of the meeting is the property of the group; we will not engage in side conversations in the parking lot, restroom, or by email. (See "Covenant of Courtesy" by Richelle Thompson) <http://www.ecfvp.org/posts/covenant-of-courtesy-2/>

Resources

- "Avoiding the Quick Fix" by Peggy Treadwell, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/uncertain-times/avoiding-the-quick-fix/>
- "Celebrating the 'Circle' of Ministries" by Bonnie Anderson, a resource for The Episcopal Church http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/79425_122437_ENG_HTML.htm

- "Fit to Go the Distance" by William G. Anderson, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/uncertain-times/fit-to-go-the-distance/>
- "Fostering Respect in Church Settings" Dignity at Work Task Force, Episcopal Diocese of Newark http://www.dioceseof-newark.org/sites/default/files/resources/2015_CONV_141_DAW_Report.pdf
- The Care for Clergy in Difficult Calls Writing Project, sponsored by The Episcopal Women's Caucus and the Network of Episcopal Clergy Association <http://episcopalclergy.org/community/topic/the-project/> and http://episcopalwomenscaucus.blogspot.com/2014_09_01_archive.html

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¿Demasiado joven para liderar?

POR LIZ LUNA

Veo a mi iglesia como una gran familia. Me encanta hablar con todos las personas, hacer que la gente interactúe o que participe en diferentes actividades de la iglesia y simplemente saber que hay gente que realmente se interesa y se preocupa por mí. Al igual que todas las familias, tenemos nuestros problemas y desacuerdos, pero siempre logramos sobreponerlos a ellos.

Cuando tenía 15 años de edad empecé a trabajar como voluntaria en las clases de la escuela dominical. Mi primer trabajo fue ser asistente de la maestra del programa Jugar junto a Dios para preescolares.

Varios años después me uní a un grupo de adultos y adultas jóvenes, de 17 a 21 años de edad, que llevaban niños y niñas a la cafetería y los mantenían allí por un rato durante el servicio religioso. Les dábamos un pequeño refrigerio, a menudo donuts de la mañana con un poco de jugo. A veces cortábamos los donuts por la mitad o en cuartos porque teníamos tantos niños. Pero después del refrigerio jugábamos juegos, cantábamos canciones y les dábamos una lección breve. Nos divertíamos muchísimo

con los niños y niñas, enseñándoles y cantando con ellos y ellas, haciendo pequeñas representaciones teatrales para la Navidad y cantando villancicos en el servicio religioso para los padres y las madres.

Si bien la mayor parte del tiempo lo pasábamos súper bien con los niños y niñas, algunos padres y algunas madres pensaban que los adultos y las adultas jóvenes no estábamos listos y listas para afrontar esa responsabilidad. Yo acababa de cumplir 18 años y me habían pedido que enseñara una clase junto con una amiga, una muchacha que también tenía 18 años de edad. Se habían hecho arreglos para tener a un padre o una madre presente durante la clase. Recuerdo que una madre estaba especialmente indignada por el hecho de que los y las líderes de la iglesia hubieran permitido que dos muchachas de 18 años enseñaran una clase. Nos sorprendió y dolió que ella se sintiera así. Las cosas llegaron hasta el punto en que dejé de sentirme cómoda enseñándoles a los niños y las niñas y el sacerdote de ese entonces decidió que sería mejor que los adultos y las adultas jóvenes dejaran de llevar a los niños y las niñas a clases duran-

te el servicio religioso, para evitar que surgieran más problemas.

Ojalá pudiera decir que las cosas mejoraron, que nos sentamos a conversar sobre eso como personas maduras, pero no lo hicimos. En ese entonces nuestro sacerdote se ausentó para ocuparse de ciertas responsabilidades familiares en su país de origen; la feligresía era como un rebaño de ovejas sin rumbo tratando de encontrar a alguien que poner a cargo. Algunas personas se estaban yendo de la iglesia porque no teníamos un sacerdote permanente y la gente no sabía qué hacer sin un liderazgo del sacerdocio.

Era un momento muy difícil en mi vida, porque en vez de estimularme a que hiciera mejor las cosas sentía que algunos adultos y adultas estaban tratando de impedirme que ayudara a la iglesia. Los sentimientos de enojo, incredulidad y la sensación de no estar apoyada estaban siempre presentes en mi mente. Decidí que no me echaría atrás y que no dejaría que esos sentimientos se apoderaran de mi autoestima. Seguí enseñándoles a los niños y las niñas. En otras palabras, opté por actuar por bondad.

Durante ese tiempo mi feligresía había estado tratando de encontrar un sacerdote para que nos sirviera. Recuerdo que cuando llegó nuestro sacerdote actual la iglesia estaba dividida y la gente no quería dialogar entre sí. Había diferentes motivos para ello. Yo nunca pregunté por qué, pero se podía ver. Lo que el sacerdote estaba tratando de infundirnos era que éramos una familia, todos nosotros, un cuerpo en Cristo. Que deberíamos amar a nuestros vecinos y vecinas y que la única manera de levantarnos de donde estábamos era trabajando en equipo. Poco a poco la gente empezó a unirse y a pedirse perdón entre sí. No pasó de la noche a la mañana. Llevó tiempo y mucha oración y meditación.

Avanzar al 2016

Ahora estoy enseñando en el servicio religioso dominical para niños y niñas. Lo que aprendí de todo esto es que a veces es mejor dejar que las cosas se solucionen por sí solas. Si uno sabe que está haciendo algo bien no se debe dar por vencido. Siempre podrá haber alguien que lo menosprecie a uno por su edad, su etnia, ser mujer o por sus antecedentes. Le sorprenderá ver cuánta gente quiere verlo fracasar. Todo eso es parte normal de la vida. Todos tienen una batalla que pelear y a veces desquitan sus frustraciones

con gente que no tenían la intención de hacerlo. A fin de cuentas, cuando uno guarda rencor el más perjudicado es uno mismo, no los demás, así que lo mejor es seguir derrotándolos con bondad y demostrándoles cómo es el amor incondicional.

Ojalá algún líder de la iglesia se hubiera pronunciado en ese momento e intentado ayudar a los jóvenes a luchar por su derecho a seguir enseñando. Siempre oigo que “los jóvenes son el futuro de la iglesia”, pero ¿cómo podemos esperar que se conviertan en líderes si no les damos la oportunidad de crecer y demostrar sus habilidades? Entiendo que en ese momento la iglesia estaba luchando y que era difícil que ello ocurriera, pero me hubiera dado mucho aliento.

En esta situación me dio resultado quedarme callada y persistir. Pero a veces hay que hacerse oír y tratar de hablar con la persona que tiene un problema con uno. Especialmente a las personas más jóvenes les puede parecer imposible lograr algo. Recuerden 1 Timoteo 4:12 **“Que nadie te menosprecie por tu juventud; sé, en cambio, un modelo para los fieles en la palabra, la conducta, el amor, la fe, la pureza”**.

Liz Luna, de 23 años de edad,

asiste a la Iglesia Episcopal St. Peters/San Pedro en Pasadena, Texas. Lidera los Ministerios de la Capilla de Niños y Niñas es pastora de jóvenes. Trabaja como voluntaria todos los primeros y terceros sábados de los meses en el banco de alimentos de la iglesia. Fuera de la iglesia trabaja a tiempo completo y pasa su tiempo libre con familiares y amigos y amigas.

Pruebe lo siguiente

En la historia que comparte Liz parece ser que no todos los padres estaban complacidos con que adolescentes de mayor edad lideraran la clase de la escuela dominical. El hecho de que había falta de liderazgo por la necesidad del sacerdote de renunciar a su puesto y ocuparse de un asunto familiar en su país de origen complicó la situación.

¿Cómo está preparando líderes jóvenes en su feligresía?

¿Cómo maneja los desacuerdos en su feligresía relacionados con quiénes están cualificados para liderar?

¿Hay diferentes requisitos para diferentes posiciones, tales como escuela dominical, miembro o presidente de comité, miembro de la junta parroquial, coadjutor, etc.?

¿En qué se basan esas cualificaciones? ¿Son suficientemente amplias como para estimular la participación de miembros más recientes o más jóvenes? Si no, ¿por qué no?

Recursos

- Citas Bíblicas para resolución de conflictos, por Sandra Montes http://www.ecfvp.org/files/uploads/Citas_Biblicas_para_la_resolucion_de_conflictos1.pdf
- Peacemaker Ministries <http://peacemaker.net/espanol/>
- El método usado en el Libro de los Hechos para resolver conflictos en la iglesia http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal_sp/200502/200502_062_acts.cfm
- Tratando con el conflicto en la iglesia pequeña http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal_sp/200502/200502_086_squabble.cfm

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Too Young to Lead?

BY LIZ LUNA

I see my church as a big family. I love talking to everyone, getting people involved with each other or in different church activities, and just knowing that I have people who truly care about me. Like most families, we have our trials and tribulations but we always get through it.

When I was 15 years old, I started volunteering at the Sunday school classes. My first assignment was being the teacher's helper at the Godly play for preschoolers.

A few years later, I joined the group of young adults, ages 17 to 21, who would take the kids to the cafeteria and keep them there for a while during the worship service. We would give them a little snack, often donuts from the morning with a little juice. Sometimes we would cut the donuts in half or into fourths because we would have so many kids. But after the snack we would play games, sing songs, and give them a short lesson. We had lots of fun with the children, teaching them and singing with them, doing skits for Christmas, and singing carols in the service for the parents.

While most of the time it was amazing with the kids, there were some parents who thought that the young adults weren't ready to handle the responsibility. I had just turned 18 and was asked to teach a class along with my friend, another 18-year-old girl. Arrangements had been made to have a parent present during the class. I remember one parent was especially mad that church leaders were letting two 18-year-old girls teach a class. We were surprised and hurt at the fact that she felt that way. It got to the point I wasn't comfortable teaching the kids anymore, and the priest at the time decided it would be better if the young adults stopped taking the kids out during the service for classes to avoid more issues.

I wish I could say that it got better, that we sat down and talked about it like mature people, but we didn't. During this time our priest left to take care of some family responsibilities in his home country; the congregation was like lost sheep trying to find someone to put in charge. Some people were leaving the church because we didn't have a regular priest and people didn't really know what to do without clergy leadership.

It was a very tough moment in my life because instead of encouraging me to do better, I felt like some adults were trying to stop me from helping the church. The feelings of anger, disbelief, and the thought of being unsupported stayed with me in the back of my mind. I decided not to let those feelings overcome my self-esteem. I kept teaching the kids. In other words, I chose to act out of kindness.

During this time my parish was trying to find a priest to serve us. When our current priest came I remember the church was divided, and people wouldn't really talk to one another. There were different reasons for this; I never really asked why but you could see it. What the new priest kept trying to instill in us was that we were a family, all of us, one body in Christ. That we should love our neighbors and that the only way to get up from where we were was to work as a team. Slowly people started coming together and apologizing to one another. It didn't happen overnight. It took time and a lot of prayer and meditation.

Fast forward to 2016

Now I'm teaching the Sunday children's service. The thing that I learned from this earlier event is that sometimes it's best to just let things work out by themselves. If you know you are doing something good, don't give up. There may always be someone who will look down on you because of your age, your ethnicity, because you are female, or because of your background. You'll be surprised how many people want to see you fail. It's all a normal part of life.

Everyone has a battle to fight and sometimes they take out their frustrations on people they don't mean to. In the end, when you hold a grudge against someone, it affects you more than it does them, so keep killing them with kindness and show them what unconditional love looks like.

Looking back, I wish that at the time a church leader would have stepped up and tried to help the youth fight for the right to keep teaching. I always hear that "the youth is the future of the church" but how can we expect them to become leaders if you don't give them opportunity to grow and to showcase their abilities. I understand that at the time the church was struggling and it was difficult for that to happen, but it would have made me feel more encour-

aged.

In this situation it worked out for me to be quiet and keep at it, but sometimes you have to speak up and try to talk to the person who has a problem with you. Especially for younger people it may seem like it's impossible to achieve something. Remember 1 Timothy 4:12 "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for other believers in your speech, behavior, love, faithfulness, and purity."

Liz Luna, 23, attends St. Peter's/ San Pedro Episcopal Church in Pasadena, Texas. She leads the Children's Chapel Ministries and is a Youth Minister. She volunteers every first and third Saturday of the month at the church's food pantry. Outside of church, she works full time and spends her free time with family and friends.

Try This

In the story Liz shares, it appears not every parent was happy with older teenagers leading a Sunday school class. Complicating the situation was a void in leadership due to the priest's need to give up his position in order to take care of family matters in his home country.

- How are you preparing young - or new - leaders in your congre-

gation?

- How do you handle disagreements in your congregation related to who is qualified to lead?
- Are their different qualifications for different positions? (Ex. Sunday School, committee member or chair, vestry member, warden, etc.?)
- What are these qualifications based on? Are they broad enough to encourage the involvement of newer or younger members? If not, why not?

Resources

- Citas Biblicas para resolución de conflictos http://www.ecfvp.org/files/uploads/Citas_Biblicas_para_la_resolucion_de_conflictos.pdf
- Peacemaker Ministries <http://peacemaker.net/espanol/>
- El método usado en el libro de los Hechos para resolver conflictos en la iglesia http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal_sp/200502/200502_062_acts.cfm
- Tratando con el conflicto en la Iglesia pequeña http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal_sp/200502/200502_086_squabble.cfm

Conflict Resolution from a Referee

BY SCOTT PETERSEN

Working only with a whistle: What a high school soccer referee can teach the Church about dealing with conflict.

Friday night was a doozy. Not because of a church fight, but because of that evening's high school soccer match.

From the sidelines, I had the opportunity to watch a senior referee react, respond, and manage a conflict. A fight broke out. In less skilled hands it could have ended the game. Conflict may be inevitable, but how one reacts, responds, and manages it can be the essential difference in either fostering restoration or having to abandon the field. There is much the local church might learn from his example.

Last Friday night the varsity team from Houston County, Georgia took on their rival from Columbus, Georgia. Out of the gate the boys played hard. There were hard challenges, shoulder charges, and tackles. Each had a clear agenda: to win.

The main concern for the referee is safety of the players. There is

also the need for the referee to be aware of the "artistic craft" of fouls. People want things to go their way. This is also true in a church, absent the physical contact. Both, after all, involve people at play in the fields of the Lord. The higher the skill, the more nuanced watching for fouls becomes. Two players go up for a header and the one behind gives a subtle shove to take the other off the ball. Away from the referee, a player grabs his opponent's wrist or shorts or shirt (or worse) to slow the other down. It is a tricky environment to maintain - each side wanting justice even when unwilling to see their own part in the unfolding drama. While the referee is given the ultimate authority on the field, meaning that he or she has the power to card a player, eject a fan or all the fans, and even cancel the game outright, the goal is to not have to utilize such powers in the attempt to manage the flow of the game.

As time progressed Friday night, so did the emotional climate. In the 61st minute the game boiled over. A Houston County player and a Columbus player each went in on a tough challenge for the

ball. It began with words. It quickly escalated to pushing and within seconds players from each bench and amazingly, two from the stands were ready to throw down. A melee was about to ensue. The referee was smaller than most of the players yet he had to act. Not an easy place to be if you only have a whistle.

What happened next was a testament to both the referee knowing his role and being a "non-anxious presence" Having a non-anxious presence means knowing your own boundaries. It means keeping your cool when other people are losing theirs. It means paying attention to the cues offered and noticing who is speaking to whom as the temperature rises.

To begin to restore order the referee first gave a hard and long blast from the whistle to let the players know clearly that their current choices were in direct opposition to the goal of the game. He emphasized his intent by running at the players in conflict as he blew the whistle. A quick response ended the fight, but the center referee was still a long way from restoring the game.

It takes skill and experience to manage the scene in order to commence the game again. For the next ten minutes, I watched the center referee consult his sideline refs, consult with the coaches, and record the facts. During that time he intentionally moved between teams, coaches, and sideline refs creating alignment and clearly articulating next steps. Only then did he first speak to the offending players. Only after that did he show them the red cards, signaling their removal from the game. No one was happy but they all bought in. Shuttle diplomacy had created an environment where suddenly, amazingly, to players, coaches, and fans alike, it was now okay to card three players and begin the game again. He did not shy away from making a decision and issuing a consequence. He restored order first by building bridges through his own investment. Once there, he had earned permission to live out his role. And, when the two teams began again, in order to maintain the flow of the game, he stayed close to the action and called things tight so that all players understood that they would not again be fighting.

One striking difference between this scenario and life in our churches is role definition. On the field, the referee is distinct from all others. He or she has a defined

role, understood by coaches and players. In a church we may struggle with role definition, as The Episcopal Church calls for shared leadership between clergy and laity. In some congregations, the roles may not be clear. In others, perhaps the balance in and between those roles is skewed. And, there's always the very human tendency to attribute conflict to personalities (i.e. blame) rather than to view conflict as a failure to reach alignment. When a congregation's leaders embrace a team approach to leadership, careful definition of roles and responsibilities as well as finding a workable balance between roles is essential.

When conflict arises in a congregation, any member of a church has the ability to react, respond, and help manage it. The referee's steps offer a guide. First, call out the trouble when you see it. It is difficult to move beyond a conflict until order is restored. That means identifying all the parties involved. Second, rather than withdraw, move closer (even to the people you don't like). Resist sending that email. Call and set a time for a face-to-face conversation. As you do so, keep your cool (your "non-anxious presence-ness") and invite others to keep theirs. Third, ask questions about the facts. Fourth, speak only for yourself ("Getting through

this conflict is important to me because..."). Express continually that the goal is to get back to playing together again in the fields of the Lord. Lastly, and this is primarily for leadership - lay, clergy, and bishop - let the "advice" from the stands go by. It is easy to comment about one's feelings from the church parking lot, as fans do so often from the stands, but unless you're close to the play and get the facts as they are understood from the people making the decisions, such commentary is best left by the wayside.

For the scope of this essay, it does not matter who won the game that Friday night. For the referee and for the church, our goal in conflict is not winning or losing. It is supporting the flow of the game and when conflict emerges, as it will, it is about identifying the challenge, managing it, and getting beyond it so that once again the body gathered might be restored to play again in the fields of the Lord.

Scott Petersen is a priest, a soccer player, and a high school soccer referee. He is still learning. Scott is glad to be at play in the fields of the Lord at All Saints Episcopal Church in Warner Robins, Georgia. A member on the National Board of the Network of Episcopal Clergy Association (NECA), he has

written before about conflict in the church. To explore his and others essays on conflict and to also see a collection of resources relating to finding ones way through conflict please see: <http://episcopalclergy.org/community/topic/the-essays/>

Try this

When conflict erupts our immediate actions can shape what happens next. In this article, Scott identifies five steps leaders can take in response to conflict that are designed to direct participants towards a healthier approach to resolution.

1. Call out trouble when you see it. Speak out. Restore order.
2. Move closer to the person(s) initiating the conflict. Avoid emails or 'parking lot' conversations and counsel others to do the same. Schedule a face-to-face conversation to talk honestly and openly about what's going on.
3. Ask questions about the facts.
4. Speak only for yourself ("Getting through this conflict is important to me because..."). Remind everyone involved of the bigger goal: responding faithfully to what God is calling

you to do.

5. Base decision and actions on your facts and observations. Avoid the temptation of getting caught up in speculation.

Resources

- "Fostering Respect in Church Settings" Dignity at Work Task Force, Episcopal Diocese of Newark http://www.dioceseof-newark.org/sites/default/files/resources/2015_CONV_141_DAW_Report.pdf
- "Guidelines for Respect and Mutual Invitation" an ECF Vital Practices resource <http://www.ecfvp.org/yourturn/resources-from-the-rev-eric-law/>
- "No More Parking Lot Conversations" by Nancy Davidge, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/caring-for-each-other/no-more-parking-lot-conversations/>
- "Tone Matters" by Scott Gunn, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/caring-for-each-other/tone-matters/>
- "When Conflict and Hope Abound" by Katharine Jefferts

Schori, ECF Vital Practices' Vestry Papers <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestrypapers/conflict-and-controversy/when-conflict-and-hope-abound/>

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