



Parramatta Nepean Presbytery
Uniting Church in Australia
2011

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT IN CONGREGATIONS

Conflict is inevitable. How you deal with it is what matters. Congregations are *Christian* communities, and that makes a difference!

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15: 5 – 6.

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1. DIFFERENCE, DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICT IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND THE PLACE OF PRAYER.

Difference, disagreements and conflict are inevitable in any community. How they are dealt with is what matters. Faith communities and congregations are *Christian* communities, and that makes a real difference in how they are dealt with!

In the Church we often speak of faith communities and congregations as being like family. And yet families inevitably experience difference, disagreements and conflict. Because the relationships are so close in a family, it can be hard to work through these things when they arise.

Difference, disagreements and conflict are not new in Christian churches. Read *1 Corinthians 1:10-11 and 26-31* for example. Two of the main concerns of Paul in writing this letter were that the Corinthian Christians were arguing among themselves, they were not treating one another in a true Christian spirit.

Faith Communities and Congregations are called to live as *Christ-like* communities – called to be a sign of the reign of God – to demonstrate a quality that is genuinely Christ-like.

The attitudes and feelings expressed by members of the church towards each other will always convey something to others – positive or negative – about the qualities of Christian community. The challenge is to demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit – ‘love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity and self-control ...’ in how we think about and treat each other.

When differences, disagreements and conflicts arise, it is important to acknowledge that they exist! *Matthew 18:15-17* encourages us to address these situations respectfully. This resource offers some tools to assist faith communities and congregations to do this.

We are all sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. Christ came, lived, died and was raised for all people, and so we are called to value and respect everyone. Because God in Christ first loves us, it is that love in us enables us to love in turn. This way of life has its challenges! But challenging situations of difference, disagreement, even conflict, can become opportunities to experience the grace of God the Reconciler who has given *us* the ministry of reconciliation – *2 Corinthians 5:19*.

By *praying together* for understanding while working respectfully towards solutions, we are able to ask for and to receive God’s Spirit to help us to work through the issues and to bring reconciliation.

Knowing that we are trying to live out our Christian community together, imperfectly but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, underlies all that follows in this resource.

2. DISCERNING THE ISSUES - A SUGGESTED PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS.

Differences, disagreements and conflicts can take place in a number of ways. Among them are:

- *Competing* – there is no understood and agreed process for making decisions about things that affect all parties, so everyone competes for space, leadership, power and so on.
- *Avoiding* – each group or person stays out of the other’s way, so there is no conflict, but there is no understanding or respectful relationship either.
- *Controlling* – one group or person make/s all the major decisions and give limited opportunities to the other group. There is no respect or equality, only the exercise of power
- *Integrating* –everyone is respected, there are intentional efforts to understand differences, respectful and culturally appropriate ways of dealing with disagreements, and with conflict if such an occasion does arise.

The goal or purpose of this process is to build healthy respectful relationships that enrich the individuals, the group and the wider community.

a. What are we trying to decide?

- Are we dealing with the need to understand underlying matters of difference in understanding and practise, or is it something that requires making an informed decision?
- **How** will we decide? What methods or procedures will we use? How can we best use the “Manual for Meetings”? Are there particular ways by which one of the groups makes its decisions? If so, how do we shape an appropriate time-frame for this? When we are together, do we use Consensus, formal Voting, or Discernment?
- Define the problem in a way everyone can accept.
- What interpretation of documents and/or conversations may be necessary in order to help overcome difference and to enable full participation and understanding? How will that be provided?
- Deal with one issue at a time.

b. What alternatives do we have?

- Brainstorm: encourage many possibilities and options, but do not evaluate.
- **Listen** to other viewpoints.
- Ensure there is time for participants to show their understanding of what has been heard, and that expressing understanding is not the same as agreement.
- Share your feelings about the issues as well as your ideas.

c. How might each alternative work?

- Evaluate the many possibilities suggested by the group.
- How would each idea work to solve the problem?
- Would any of the preferred alternatives or combinations of them bring new or potential problems for either group? If so, are there simple solutions for them?

d. Which alternative or combination of alternatives do we choose?

- The group does not have to be limited to one choice.
- Depending on the decision-making processes of the groups, there may need to be time given here for each group to consider the options in their own way.

e. What do we need to do to carry out the decision?

- Consider the resources available of people, leaders, personal gifts, money, in-kind giving, building space and so on that are available or needed
- How do we release the resources we have and obtain those additional ones we need?

f. Who will do what, when?

- Be specific.
- Assign responsibilities of leadership and for each of the tasks.
- Each person must be accountable to the group.

g. How will we evaluate progress and when will we do that?

- Set a realistic timeline allowing for any differences in the decision-making process of each group.
- Have regular progress reports – where helpful, in writing and in the languages of the communities involved (preferably with both languages on the same reporting paper/presentation).¹

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(This Problem Solving Process adapted from the *Center for Congregational Health, Copyright, 2009*)

Case Study.

Discerning the Issues

A Pacific Island (PI) group worshipped at XX church on Sunday afternoons. They were a UCA congregation. Members of the XX congregation had little contact with the PI group. Over recent months they had become increasingly concerned about the fact that the PI group did not put the chairs back into position as used in morning worship, and often did not clean up well enough after using the kitchen. Then a neighbour complained about noise from the PI group's singing.

The matter came on to the agenda of the next Church Council meeting. The chairperson encouraged members to list all the issues concerning the relationship with the PI group. They realized there were several issues – care of the property, loud music, lack of financial contribution by the PI group to property maintenance and repairs. In addition, someone said "we hardly know these people!"

So the Chairperson suggested that each issue be discussed in turn, beginning with 'how can our congregation get to know the PI group better?'

After the second shared lunch with the PI group, a Church Council member suggested contacting the Presbytery for help with some of the other issues. This led to the Presbytery arranging for a workshop on sharing property to be held, involving members of both congregations. Following this workshop, Church Council received assistance from Presbytery in meeting with the PI group to draw up a 'covenant' in which both groups made commitments to strengthen their relationships by meeting and worshipping together at regular intervals, agreed on an adequate financial contribution from the PI group to the congregation's property budget, and agreed on actions in relation to care of the property.

3. POTENTIAL AREAS FOR CONFLICT.

Experience indicates that some areas of church life have both positive and negative potential for times of conflict. You will be aware of others also.

3.1 Communication.

Communication, or the lack of it, can lead to all sorts of conflict in churches. It should be uppermost in all we plan and all we do. Church Councillors, Elders, leaders of groups and ministers need to think through carefully the issue “who needs to know” and “how can we do this best”? A notice in the church bulletin or an email may not suffice in certain situations. You need to ask “has the message been received and understood?”

3.2 Meeting structures.

The way we structure meetings can promote good decision making, or lead to greater conflict. Don't forget to make use of the UCA Manual for Meetings. For example, what would be the best way to reach a decision on worship times? If you put all your congregation in one hall and get them to decide on worship times then.... sit back and watch the bunfight! Instead, develop a process so that all peoples views are heard, pros and cons identified and an informed decision made. Try the dynamic of having groups of people sitting around tables to discuss and identify issues. Issues raised can be passed on to church council.

3.3 Respecting people's privacy.

You may know that someone needs prayer for a certain condition, but check with that person first before putting them on a prayer list. Likewise, there can be a fine line between passing on a loving concern about someone and gossip. Beware of using the phrase 'I'm speaking out of love' to make a comment that is hurtful to another person. First consider if the comment needs to be made at all.

3.4 Implementing change.

Times of change are particularly sensitive in the life of a congregation. Usually there are people who have invested much of themselves in reaching and maintaining things as they are at present. However, the life of congregations should not stay still! When the time comes for necessary change to the way things are done, this needs to be done sensitively, giving plenty of time and opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute to discussions and decisions. Take care to elect leaders who are “team players”. These are leaders who will consult widely and take people with them as they implement change. Some conflict at times of change is inevitable – but remember, how you deal with it is what matters.

3.5 Cross-cultural relationships and communications.

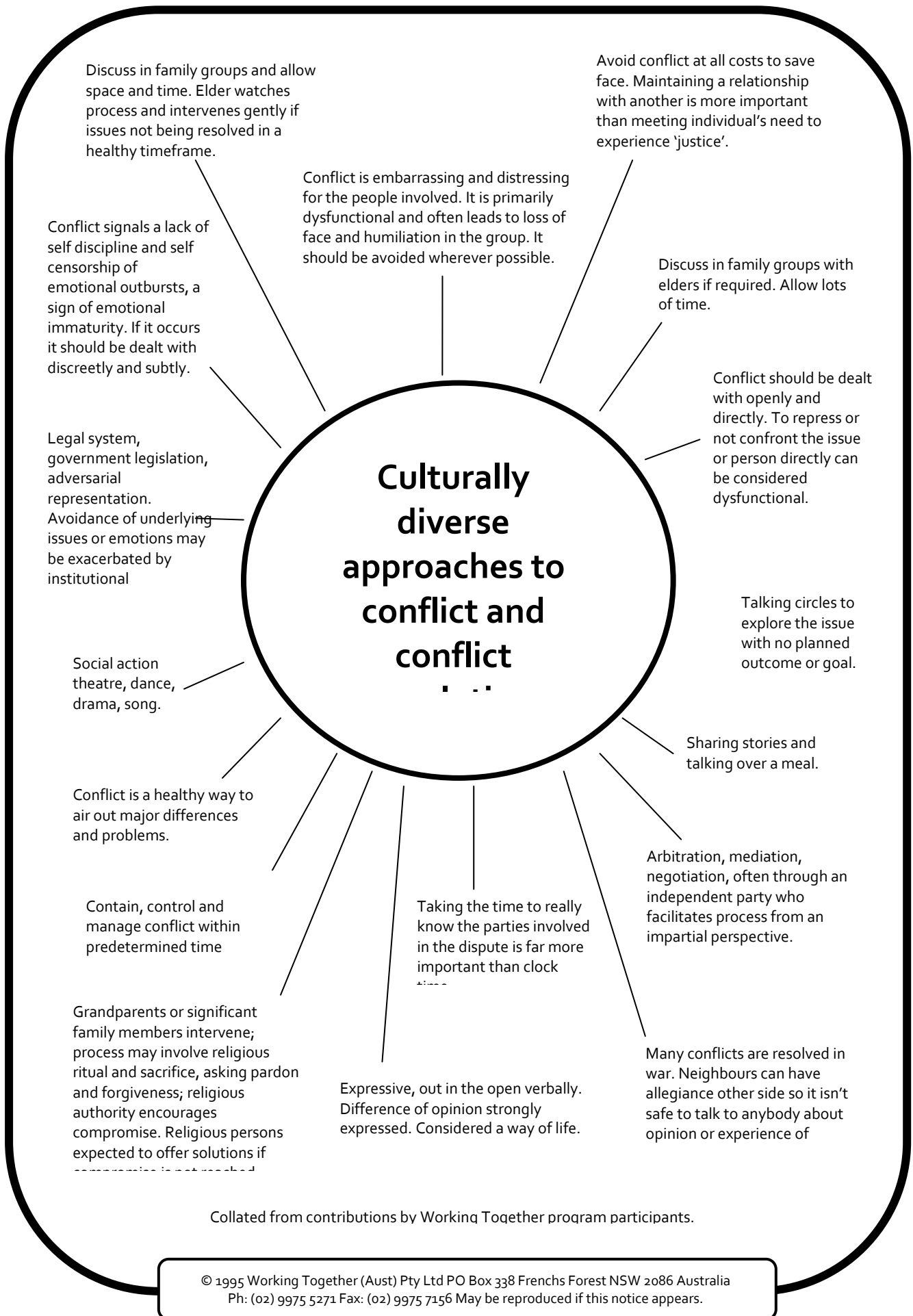
'Conflict' means different things to different people. Different cultures traditionally have different ways of handling conflict. It is helpful to try to gain an understanding of how a particular conflict might have been handled in the

traditional ways of that culture. That does not mean that the traditional ways are necessarily appropriate in the Australian context. However, efforts to try to understand them will help, particularly if the process of dealing with the conflict seems blocked. Most people from all cultures agree that a response to conflict in its very early stages is important to prevent it becoming a major conflict.

Some hints that are useful for cross-cultural communication in churches are:

- Remember that culture has many layers, and someone not of that culture can never fully understand all of it, but must always keep seeking to learn more.
- Do not underestimate the not-so-obvious gulf between people of different language and cultural backgrounds. Like icebergs, what is obvious is only a small part of the whole. There is much more that is hidden, internalised in both individuals and communities.
- Do not underestimate hidden, unrecognised racism, and prejudice in individuals but also in institutions, particularly in the dominant group. Note the 'icebergs' above.
- Use 'cultural advisers' (people who understand the particular culture, who are willing to advise in the situation), but never use only one cultural advisor.
- The history of the group or congregation is very important, including how the group became linked with the UCA.
- Take great care with all aspects of communication – spoken, written, and processes. Miscommunication or misunderstanding of actions or processes can have unintended very negative and long-lasting consequences.
- Accurate interpretation is critical for meetings, critical conversations, and presentations and most often requires someone who is very familiar with both cultures involved **and** the ethos of the churches and communities involved. Trust by all parties is key here.
- The use of technology (e.g. PowerPoint presentations) in very simple language/imagery can be very helpful to all parties.
- It is most helpful if **both/all** languages are on the same 'slides' / document / presentation so that there is ease of comparison and both/all groups know they have exactly the same information. It is vital that written documents are available for people to take away and to use as accurate reference points for their community discussions.
- In-depth and regular conversations between key leaders are absolutely critical in building understanding about central images, values, the use and meaning of key words and leadership roles. Because a 'title' is used in both cultural groups does **not** mean that the role and 'status' is the same in both.
- It is most important that congregations be aware of and read the recently adopted Property Sharing Policy of the UCA. It can be found at <http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/mcm/news/128-property-policy.html> Presbytery has found it is very helpful to develop the 'culturally sensitive memorandum of understanding' now required by the Regulations, as it can prevent issues between congregations using the one property from escalating to become major conflicts. A 'covenantally-based' outline for such a Memorandum can also be found on that site.

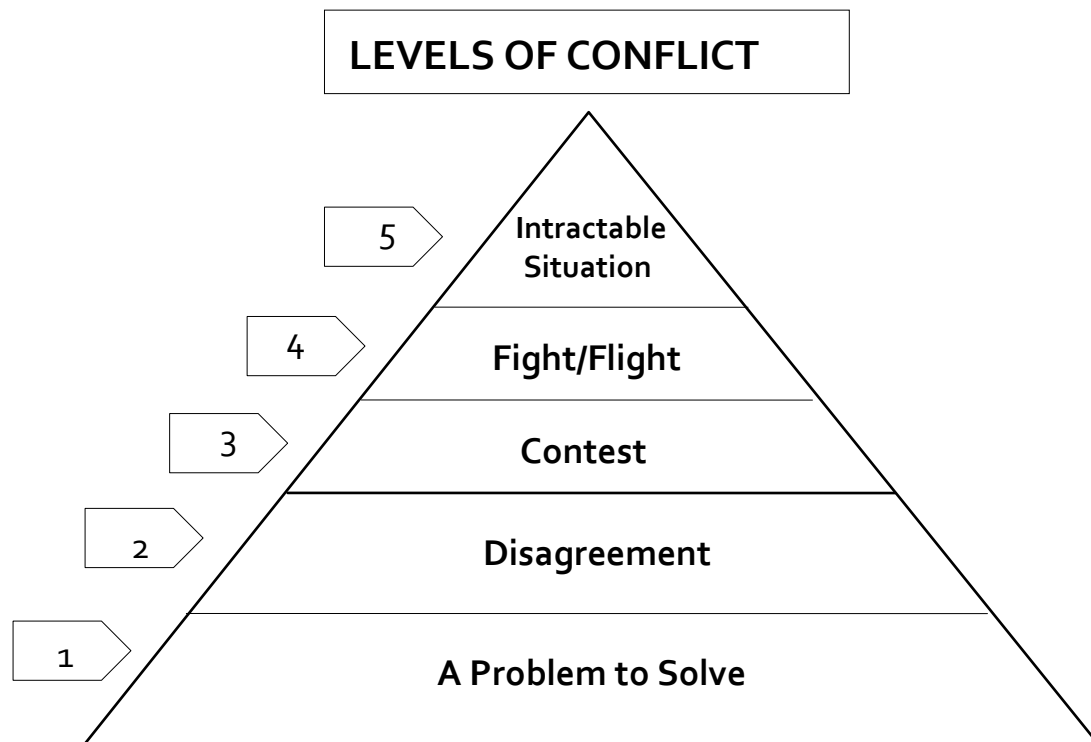
The diagram on the following page indicates the range of diverse traditional approaches to conflict in different cultures.



4. LEVELS OF CONFLICT.

There are different levels of conflict and these should be referred to in determining how to proceed. *If conflict escalates beyond Level 2, get external help, preferably from Presbytery PRC.*

The best time to deal with conflict is when it arises!



Level 1: A problem to solve.

Conflicting goals, values, needs. Problem oriented rather than person oriented.

Level 2: Disagreement.

Mixing of personalities and issues, problem cannot be clearly defined. Beginning of distrust and personalizing problem.

Level 3: Contest.

Begin the dynamics of "win/lose." Personal attacks, formation of factions, sides, camps. Distortion is a major problem.

Level 4: Fight/Flight

Shifts from winning to getting rid of person(s). Factions are solidified. Talk now takes on the language of “principles,” not “issues.”

Level 5: Intractable situations.

No longer clear understanding of issue(s); personalities have become the focus. Conflict is now unmanageable. Energy is centred on the elimination and/or destruction of the person(s).

Conflict resolution can be like marriage stress - it needs to be addressed early before the dynamic becomes too entrenched and the relationship gets beyond the possibility of healing. It is like marriage stress also because it needs outside help more often than people are sometimes willing to acknowledge.

The simplest way to manage conflict is to keep differences of opinion at Level One or to move them down to that level so everyone understands and agrees that “we have a problem to solve.” Write the problems out together as a “Workable Problem Statement” which should:

- be free of blame
- be specific and descriptive
- not focus on the distant past
- not be a “put down” of any involved parties
- be agreed to by all involved as a definition of this problem

(Levels of conflict above as identified by Speed B. Leas)

Case studies.

a) Levels of conflict

Level One: "X" Congregation was left a bequest of \$5,000, to be used for 'Christian education'. Members of the Congregation were excited and began discussing possible ways to use the bequest. One suggestion was to purchase books to add to a small collection already held by the Congregation, so that a library of books would be available for the 'education' of members. Another suggestion was to use the bequest to fund selected people to attend leadership training courses. There was much keen discussion on options, and these two possibilities emerged as the most popular. Members listened carefully and respectfully to one another as they talked about it. There was prayer for guidance on this issue.

Level 2: Two people took a lead in speaking strongly for each of the two popular options. Eddie was very keen to set up a library, and Rebecca wanted the money to be used for leadership training. People kept talking about it, and the Congregation divided into two groups – those for the library and those for leadership training. The options were identified as "Eddie's library" and 'Rebecca's leadership training'. People with different points of view talked to each other, but discussions on this subject started to get heated. Theological reasons for one or other option began to be used in the arguments.

Level 3: The two groups in "X" Congregation grew more opposed and angry with each other. People in one group avoided talking with people from the other group. People from both groups tried to persuade people who were not yet part of either group to join their group, strongly arguing that the other side was wrong, both about their preferred option and about the theology being used to support it. Sometimes both groups used irrelevant arguments, and made personal criticisms of people on 'the other side'.

Level 4: Church Council made it known that the time had come for the Council to make a decision on this matter at its next meeting. People from both groups lobbied members of Church Council, and both groups threatened to leave the Congregation if their preferred option was not chosen. Each group claimed that their theological reasons were the correct ones to use in making this decision.

Level 5: Church Council decided to use the bequest for a library. Following that decision, no-one from Rebecca's group would talk to anyone from Eddie's group. A little later, Rebecca and a number of people who supported her and the option of leadership training left the Congregation, saying that their theology was rejected by the Church Council.

Case study (b)

Anne had recently moved to the area and had been attending the local church for about 6 months. She had been a member of Church Council in the church where she had previously lived. She wanted to get more involved in her new church. The Annual Meeting of the Congregation was coming up so she thought she would nominate for the Church Council. However, when she handed in her nomination form, the CC Chairperson told her that they had enough members on the council and didn't need any new members. Anne was disappointed. She offered to be a Welcoming Steward, but received the same response. Anne's husband became quite angry and talked to a few other people about it. They told him that all leadership in that church was controlled by one person – the chairperson of CC. Over the years, people have left the church because of this, and those who remain just accept that is how it is. However, Anne and her husband believed that this was not how leadership should operate in a church. They talked to more people about it, and soon the congregation became split between those who supported Anne and those who supported the CC Chairperson.

This conflict moved from Level 2 to Level 3.

5. WORKING WITH CONFLICT.

1. **Define the conflict objectively in terms of issues and behaviours (what was done and said) rather than people.** Be as specific as you can. What are the **issues** where you disagree?
2. Identify the issues as a common problem that **all parties work together** to resolve.
3. Deal with **one issue at a time**.
4. Work towards solutions where **everyone's needs are respected**.
5. Do **more listening than talking**.
6. Use active listening, checking out with others that you are hearing them correctly.
7. Use statements about yourself e.g. "when happens, I feel"
These are commonly known as "I" statements.
8. Be prepared to **take as long as needed** to reach a solution, and **take time out** when you need to.
9. **Consider if a neutral third person may help** to work with both of you towards understanding and solutions.
10. Rather than seeking who to blame, ask: how did we each contribute to the disagreement/argument/conflict and what can each of us contribute to better understand it and resolve it?
11. Try to understand what feelings the other person has about the disagreement between you, and see if those feelings can be addressed. Working with feelings like this usually requires an outside helper who is not involved in the conflict.
12. Sometimes hearing each other out in order for everyone to feel they have been heard is just as important as finding a solution.
13. Treat others as equals.
14. Be willing to fix the problem.
15. Be willing to negotiate.

16. Try to see the whole picture, not just your own point of view.

17. Consider the needs & anxieties of everyone involved.

18. Offer positive affirmations.

19. Allow for the possibility of forgiveness.

(Adapted from various sources, including the *Pastoral Partners Program* and the *Conflict Resolution Network*)

6. CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES FOR CONGREGATIONS.

Conflict in churches is normal and is to be expected. It occurred in the early church as between Paul and Barnabas. But conflict can lead to growth in understanding of each other and of God's will for us as individuals as well as for the church.

Within congregations, Church Council (C.C.) is the body responsible for dealing with conflict, at least initially. It may deal with the issues directly, or refer them on, depending on the circumstances.

PRAYER should precede all meetings dealing with conflict as God's presence is sought as well as God's blessing on outcomes.

A specific concern about a conflict in a congregation may be made verbally and/or in writing to the Church Council Secretary. If the matter concerns the Church Council Secretary, then notify the Church Council Chairperson or the Minister.

When the concern is brought to Church Council by the C.C. Secretary, the matter should be heard by Church Council **in closed session** in order to determine how to proceed. The confidentiality of proceedings and people involved is to be respected at all times.

Possible outcomes from resolved conflict.

Conflict may lead to positive outcomes, as it challenges the status quo. This is not an exhaustive list – there can be many good outcomes.

- * Improved policies and procedures
- * Better interpersonal relationships
- * Differences resolved
- * Future course of action agreed on

If a matter of disagreement or conflict has been taken to Church Council, here are options for ACTION BY CHURCH COUNCIL.

First decide on the "Level of the Conflict" (see above, pp 11, 12) and refer the matter on (e.g. to Presbytery PRC) if necessary. Otherwise, the following options are available to Church Council to resolve conflict.

- a. **Resolve the Problem Together.** If the matter is an interpersonal conflict, the people involved may be encouraged by Church Council to work together to resolve the problem.

(Note Section 5, "Working with conflict", p. 15.)

If successful at any stage, the resolution is to be communicated to the Church Council Secretary.

- b. **Pastoral Counselling** may be sought for the people concerned. This may mean asking the minister, and/or some trusted Elders or members of the congregation, to visit those concerned, either separately or together, in order to bring about resolution.
- c. **Mediation.** If mutual discussion or pastoral counselling is not appropriate or the problem is not resolved, then the possibility of mediation may be sought with the aim of seeking resolution.

Mediation is a confidential and voluntary process where a neutral party, the mediator, assists the parties involved in the dispute to reach some common ground and arrive at an agreed settlement.

An independent *mediator* may be appointed by Church Council. Each party may also bring a support person of their own choosing, who is acceptable also to the mediator. The support person may not speak at the mediation session, unless permission is given by the mediator.

- d. **Seek Presbytery Help.** Church Council may seek the advice or intervention of Presbytery. This would depend on the seriousness of the matter, the level of the conflict and the potential for the matter to escalate.
- e. **Arbitration.** Church Council may decide to arbitrate on the matter, i.e. make decisions to conclude the matter. This should only occur after consultation with Presbytery and after all other avenues have been attempted with resolution not being achieved. Church Council would listen to all parties concerned, gather all relevant information, canvas all options for resolution and then make its decisions consistent with UCA Regulations.

Examples of dealing with conflict.

- 1. Bob was a keen church member who helped out with the running of the KUCA children's group of a Friday afternoon. For some weeks, a group of year 6 boys had been becoming more and more disruptive, boisterous and out of control. They ignored Bob and other leaders' requests to behave and to do as they were requested. The frustration Bob felt, built up to the point where one afternoon, following blatant disobedience, Bob picked up a boy by the arms, placed him firmly on a chair and instructed him not to move. The boy of course, went home and told his parents. The following week, his mother came up to confront the minister about her son having been manhandled. She said that her son and his friends would no longer be attending KUCA or the church until Bob had apologized.

How should the church handle this matter?

- *Refer the matter to Church Council.*
 - *Church leaders pray for God's blessing and guidance in healing relationships.*
 - *Seek help from the Presbytery Children, Youth & Family Officer.*
 - *Church Council may suggest Bob and the parents resolve the problem together.*
 - *Church Council may arrange counselling for Bob and training in the area of child management for KUCA leaders.*
2. Betty had been the church organist for over 30 years, faithfully playing the hymns in worship Sunday by Sunday. As times and the congregation changed, there came to be growing opinion that contemporary music should replace the old hymns and that a guitar band should replace the organ. The church was divided over this issue and people became entrenched in their positions. Soon, any dialogue at all between some members of the two groups became strained, and the matter of church music could not be discussed at all without matters becoming tense. This conflict was affecting friendships and newcomers to the church were put-off by the unfriendly atmosphere.

How should the church handle this matter?

- *Church Council identifies the nature of the problem as one affecting all church members and recognizes it must take the initiative to bring about a resolution. They recognize that things will only get worse if the issues are not addressed.*
 - *Church Council contacts Presbytery for help and advice.*
 - *Elders are encouraged to get people praying for God's healing and guidance. Elders set up a special prayer group before church and prepare a prayer bulletin for church members to follow.*
 - *Following advice from Presbytery, Church Council states the nature of the problem to the congregation and announces a congregational meeting to address the matter.*
 - *Church Council invites the Presbytery Mission Resource Office to the congregational meeting, to use problem solving techniques to solve the problem which affects the whole church.*
3. Sera had done a great job organizing the flowers for the event. She got up early and went to the markets to get the very best flowers she could find at a price she could afford. She got them to the church in plenty of time to do the most beautiful floral arrangements, which lifted the old church with their dazzling colours. When William, the event organizer, gave a vote of thanks for the different ones who

had helped make the occasion such a success, Sera's name was not mentioned. Sera was very upset. She felt that no one had even noticed her flowers, let alone appreciated her efforts. She went home very sad and did not return to church again. It was some weeks before someone noticed that Sera had not been to church and so her elder paid Sera a visit. It was then that the story of Sera's lack of recognition began to emerge. Sera would not be going back to church!

How should the church handle this matter?

- *Refer the matter to Church Council.*
- *Pray for Sera.*
- *Church Council could ask William, the event organizer, to pay Sera a visit to apologise for the oversight and to affirm Sera's floral arrangements.*
- *If this was unsuccessful, Church Council could ask the minister or a respected church elder to visit Sera to bring about resolution.*
- *If still unsuccessful, the Church Council might contact Presbytery or organize for mediation.*

7. COMPLAINTS AGAINST A PERSON.

- a. Try to communicate your concern to the person, one-to-one, or with one or two others (See Matt 18: 15- 17). Note 'Working With Conflict', Section 5.
- b. If there is no change, take your concern to the church, following the process in the UCA Regulations.

If the person of concern is:

- i. *A minister* (See Regulations 7.5.1)
A complaint in writing goes to Presbytery. However, if the complaint is about sexual misconduct a written complaint goes to the Chairperson of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee. (See Regulations 7.7.5ff)
- ii. *An employee* of the congregation – CC should seek advice from Synod Human Relations section, part of Uniting Resources.
- iii. *A lay member* of the congregation (See Regulations.7.2.1 – 7.2.7). A complaint (preferably in writing) goes to Church Council. Church Council may refer to the options suggested in Section 6 above for dealing with conflict, particularly 'pastoral counselling ' and 'mediation'. *Refer to Regulations for further steps in the process.*
- iv. If complaint is about *behaviour in relation to a child*, seek advice from Presbytery Child, Youth & Family Officer.

8. APPENDICES.

The following handouts are on the following pages.

- 'Fighting Fair' – A4 poster from the *Conflict Resolution Network*.
- 'Some principles for cross cultural work with congregations', Parramatta Nepean Presbytery PRC.
- 'Respectful Communication Guidelines', Eric Law.
- 'Mutual Invitation' – a tool for inclusion & equality in discussion and decision-making', Eric Law.

Fighting Fair

How you both can win

**Be willing to fix
the problem...**

**Say what the problem
is for you...**

**Listen to what the
problem is for them...**

**Attack the problem,
not the person...**

**Look for answers
so everyone gets what
they need...**

Fouls

**Name Calling
Put Downs
Sneering
Threats – Blaming
Bring up the past
Making Excuses
Not Listening
Getting Even**



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SOME PRINCIPLES FOR CROSS CULTURAL WORK WITH CONGREGATIONS

In response to the gift and call of God, the Uniting Church in 1985 proclaimed itself a multicultural church! In doing so the Assembly was acknowledging the changed and changing multicultural and multi-faith context of life and ministry in Australia and the presence of people from culturally diverse background in its membership.

The Assembly declared the Uniting Church to be a multicultural Church and thus renewed a commitment to developing close and respectful relationships with Indigenous/first peoples.

This biblical vision of inclusion and of valued humanity and culture created by a loving and living God is one that needs to be continually nurtured and, through its various Assembly Agencies and through the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Uniting Church in Australia expresses that commitment and offers that nurture.

Cross cultural ministry is the pattern of normal life all around us in Australia in 2010. The cultural diversity represents exciting, challenging, enriching and fulfilling gifts from the Creator God.

In multicultural and cross culture ministry we are charged to assist the Uniting Church in Australia nationally to acknowledge, embrace, and live out this reality as God's gift and calling. Central and key in all of this are relationships that are built on respect, collaboration and mutual recognition of gifts and calling.²

- Remember that culture has many layers, such that even people from a specific culture cannot speak on behalf of it. Someone not of that culture can never fully understand all of it, but must always keep seeking to learn more.
- Do not underestimate the gulf between people of different language and cultural backgrounds
- Do not underestimate hidden, unrecognised racism, particularly in the dominant group
- Use '**cultural advisers/mediators**', but never one person only.
- The **History** of the group or congregation is very important – including the 'home church' then and now and the journey to the present of individuals and the community.
- Seek to discover *how* the group became linked with the UCA – were there differing opinions/groups about whether or how to join UCA?
- **Be very careful about all aspects of communication**
- Miscommunication can have very negative and long-lasting consequences
- Accurate interpretation is critical, by people who understand the culture and **ethos of both parties and who are trusted by the group for impartiality.**

² UCA Multicultural & Cross Cultural Ministry website.

- The use of technology and an independent translator for significant meetings can be very helpful.
- Written material however presented, in English or another language, (on paper, PowerPoint, etc) must be checked by an appropriate person as to how it will be understood.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES.

In May 2005 Rev Eric Law, Missioner for Congregation Development of the Diocese of Los Angeles, visited the N.S.W. Synod. Mr. Law used the word "RESPECT" as an acronym to represent the following guidelines for respectful communication:

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST the other to speak and listen with integrity

MUTUAL INVITATION

Objectives: To facilitate sharing and discussion in a multicultural group.

Type of Group: Any.

Size of group: 4 – 15 people

Setting: Participants should sit in a circle.

Materials: Newsprint and marker pens.

Time required: Depending on the size of the group. A good way to tell how much time will be required for each round of sharing is to multiply the number of participants by 5 minutes.

How to proceed:

A. *Let participants know how much time is set aside for the process.*

B. *Introduce the topic to be discussed of information to be gathered or question(s) to be answered. Write this on newsprint and put it on a wall so everyone can see it.*

C. *Introduce the process by reading the following:*

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another person to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

If this is the first time you use this with the group, it will be very awkward at first. The tendency is to give up on the process and go back to the whoever-wants-to-talk-can-talk way. If you are persistent in using this process every time you facilitate the gathering, the group will eventually get used to it and will have great fun with it. A good way to ensure the process goes well the first time is to make sure there are a couple of people in the group who have done this before and. As you begin the process, invite them first.

Problems to anticipate:

This process addresses differences in the perception of personal power among the participants. Some people will be eager for their turn, while others will be reluctant to speak when they are invited. If a person speaks very briefly and then does not remember to invite the next person, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. This is especially important if a person "passes". By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of the person's verbal ability.

From Eric Law, "The wolf shall dwell with the Lamb", Chalice Press 1993. Pp 113-114.

9. RESOURCES.

1. *Conflict Resolution Network* P.O. Box 1016, Chatswood NSW 2057
www.crnhq.org Excellent material can be found on this website, including the "12 Skills Trainer's Manual" and many handouts.
2. *Pastoral Partners Program*, MediaCom Education.
3. UCA Regulations, particularly Section 7.
4. UCA Policies for complaints of sexual misconduct against lay people.
5. Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, & Sheila Heen of the Harvard Negotiation Project
"*Difficult Conversations*". Penguin Books, 1999.
6. Roy Oswald & Barry Johnson, *Managing Polarities*, Alban, 2010
7. Eric Law, *Inclusion, Making Room for Grace* (especially Ch.4), Chalice press, St Louis, Missouri, 2000.