

**Guidelines  
for Peacemaking  
Through More  
Effective Governance**

**Provided by the  
Presbytery of Des Moines  
Congregational Reconciliation Task Force  
and  
Congregational Health Task Force  
August, 2017**



# **Guidelines for Peacemaking Through More Effective Governance**

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## **Introductory Letter**

**To: Pastors and Session Members of the Presbytery of Des Moines**

**From: Congregational Reconciliation Task Force and Congregational Health Task Force**

**Date: August, 2017**

The Congregational Reconciliation Task Force was formed by the Presbytery with the purpose of helping congregations that were experiencing conflict. We have worked with a number of churches and now, in addition, we are working on “prevention” and want to help sessions be proactive with peacemaking. There are a number of things that churches can do that will help them be more resilient when conflict occurs.

This document addresses **four actions** that sessions can take.

1. Prepare a clear Vision and Mission statement.
2. Educate to ensure a well- functioning and knowledgeable Human Resources/Personnel Committee.
3. Prepare a written plan to deal with conflict.
4. Prepare an operations manual that addresses all facets of church activity.

Each of these four sections includes:

- **WHAT** to do,
- **WHY** this will be helpful,
- **HOW** to implement these recommendations, and
- **RESOURCES** to help you. Members of the CRTF are also available to help you.

Disagreements are not necessarily conflicts until people’s emotions and behaviors create a problem. Congregations that have taken these four actions and have these documents in place and session approved are able to prevent many conflicts, and manage others before the conflict becomes divisive.

Implementing these recommendations will be a process that will move your congregation toward healthier functioning and more effective governance. This process should involve all those who are engaged in leadership positions, program positions, or have a function that supports the life of the congregation.

Whenever there are changes, there will be resistance to change. Expect it and be prepared for it. When it happens, **stay calm, stay the course, and stay connected** and in communication with those who are resistant to change.

*“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” I Cor. 15:58 (NRSV)*

We ask God's guidance and blessing for you as you consider these things.

**Sub-Committee Members:**

Elder Lola Peters, CRTF Moderator (Ankeny)

Rev. Marcy Campbell, CHTF Moderator (Perry, First)

Rev. Sarai Rice (DMARC)

Elder John Sprole (West Des Moines, Covenant)

Rev. Jan Scott (HR)

## **Vision and Mission**

### **WHAT: Prepare a Vision Statement and a Mission Statement(s)**

Every church in the Presbytery of Des Moines is encouraged to write a Vision Statement and then a Mission Statement(s).

### **WHY: To clarify a particular church's work.**

Vision and Mission Statements, approved by Session, are the standards by which all programs and activities of the church are measured. When there is conflict, if someone is operating contrary to those Vision and Mission Statements, those people can be re-directed to be in compliance with these guidelines.

A Vision Statement is an aspirational, inspirational description of what a particular church believes she is about. The vision statement points to a future aspiration inspired by Christian scripture or values.

For example:

- A Vision Statement example might be aspirational:

*Members of First Presbyterian Church work to bring the Kingdom of God to fruition in \_\_\_\_\_, Iowa."*

- Or scripturally inspired:

*Members of First Presbyterian Church, \_\_\_\_\_, Iowa, strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.' -- Matthew 6:33*

A Vision Statement is partially about who a particular church sees itself to be, and partially who they want to be. For example a particular church who does not see themselves working for the Kingdom of God on earth, or that personal righteousness as part of their church identity, will write a different vision statement with a different theological bent.

For example:

- An aspirational statement might be:

*Members of First Presbyterian Church work to bring Christ's Gospel to the world.*

- Or scripturally inspired:

*Members of First Presbyterian Church, \_\_\_\_\_, Iowa work to fulfill Christ's Great Commission as expressed in Matthew 25.*

### **HOW: A Mission Statement**

After each church body has an agreed upon a Vision Statement (by the particular church, the Session), the next step is to create a Mission Statement(s).

A Mission Statement is the how of the Vision Statement. While the Vision Statement has more of a future aspiration, the Mission Statement has a more present-day focus. *How are we going to work to get to our vision for our church?*

If we take our first example, "...bring the Kingdom of God to fruition...", what are the ways we can recognize the Kingdom of God on earth? These might be:

- Peace
- Justice
- Everyone proclaiming Jesus as Lord

The desire for righteousness might be seen as personal righteousness. Then we might include:

- Bible study
- Sunday School
- Vacation Bible School
- Preaching

The Mission Statement might read:

*We work to bring the Kingdom of God to fruition by*

- *learning peacemaking skills and using them for the reconciliation of ourselves, our church, our community and our world.*
- *recognizing injustice in our personal beliefs, in our church's actions, in our community's response to conflict.*
- *creating opportunities such as Vacation Bible School to witness our faith to others outside our church family*

The second example might read:

*We work to live out Christ's Great Commission by*

- *feeding the hungry through the food bank*
- *quenching thirst by supporting clean water projects*
- *welcoming the stranger by creating multi-cultural education programs*
- *creating community clothes closets & supporting the Salvation Army*
- *visiting shut-ins and nursing homes.*
- *supporting prison ministry*

Each Mission Statement will be unique to that church. Not all churches have youth so there may not be a statement about youth in the church, but it might speak to supporting youth activities in

the community. Not all churches are activist-minded. They may be more inward and work on personal spirituality. There is no one right way.

Each church should be honest about who they are now (mission) and how they can aspire to be more (vision). Some churches are more inward-looking, others more outward-looking. Some churches are a little of both. Each church needs to recognize in most circumstances it is difficult to be "all things to all people." Some visions require working with more than one church, or more than one denomination in a community. Remember however, we can make it work. We are all working for Christ

**RESOURCES:**

- Workshop: *"How to Write a Vision Statement & a Mission Statement for Your Church"*, Rev. Marcy Campbell, 515-422-8938, [revmac@mchsi.com](mailto:revmac@mchsi.com)



## **Personnel/Human Resources**

**WHAT:     Ensure a well-functioning and knowledgeable Personnel/Human Resources Committee**

To prevent conflict, one of the most important steps a congregation can take is to create and adhere to policies regarding a variety of issues about which members are likely to disagree. For example, every congregation, regardless of size, should have written job descriptions and clear personnel policies that have been adopted by the session and agreed to in writing by each person who joins the staff at the time that he or she joins.

**WHY:**

Having policies and job descriptions in place establishes agreed-upon expectations for both the congregation as the employer and for any paid staff as employees. Should questions or disagreements arise; the policies and job description can be used to determine appropriate behavior.

**HOW:**

Congregations should follow a clear and consistent pattern when writing *job descriptions*. For example, every job description should clearly state each staff member's responsibilities (at a high level, not as a task list), the core competencies that are necessary for appropriate job performance, the employee's exempt/non-exempt status, the number of hours they are expected to work, who they report to, and how often they will be evaluated.

Any congregation with even one employee, no matter how small the congregation or part-time the employee, should have *personnel policies* pertaining to the following kinds of items, usually captured in an employee handbook

:

**Employment Policies:**

- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Anti-Harassment
- Hiring policies
- Performance management, discipline, and termination
- Theft
- Substance Abuse
- Expectations and standards
- Attendance and punctuality
- Employee appearance
- Confidentiality
- Conflicts of interest

**Pay-related Information:**

- Compensation
- Employment Classification
- Pay Procedures
- Retirement plans and contributions
- Benefits and eligibility for benefits
- Holidays
- Personal Time Off
- Overtime
- Jury duty
- Court duty
- Personal leave
- Maternity/paternity leave
- Military leave
- Professional development

**Work Environment:**

- Work rules and standards
- Whistleblower protection
- Work hours and breaks
- Smoking
- Travel
- Expense reimbursement
- Security
- Use of social media by staff and volunteers
- Personal use of office equipment, including computers and Wi-fi connections

**Personnel Committee Conduct and Responsibilities**

- Session will establish job description, rules and guidelines

**RESOURCES:**

Best practice regarding personnel policies changes frequently, as does employment-related legislation and case law. In order to maintain appropriate personnel policies, it is best to work with an HR consultant and/or a lawyer to establish appropriate policies and review them annually. Failure to do so may result in increased risk of liability for the church.

Members of the Presbytery with background and training in staffing and supervision include Sarai Rice ([srice@dmarcunited.org](mailto:srice@dmarcunited.org)) and Jennifer Hines ([jhines@plymouthchurch.com](mailto:jhines@plymouthchurch.com)). They are available to answer general questions and conduct workshops.

## **Conflict Policies**

### **A PLAN TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT:**

Disagreement is a normal part of every organization. We value diverse ideas and opinions. When people react emotionally to disagreement it is more likely to escalate to a conflict. When people respond to disagreement in a calm, thoughtful, and respectful way a disagreement is less likely to escalate.

Conflict is often seen as a taboo subject that should not be talked about at church. There is often a misconception that Christians should not have conflict, and talking about it is seen as a failure to be a good Christian. This is not true.

Having a plan to deal with conflict can lower anxiety when conflict happens. It will give leaders confidence that they can respond appropriately and manage conflict in the best way possible.

If you are currently experiencing conflict in your congregation these guidelines can help you develop a plan on what steps to take. If you are not currently experiencing any problems with conflict, now is the best time to study these guidelines and adopt these recommendations for your congregation.

### **WHAT:**

**Establish written policies and procedures for dealing with conflict.** These policies and procedures should be included in your operations manual (or in whatever documents your church has) to provide a process for handling conflicts within your community of faith. Policies are the agreed upon decisions or plans formalized by your Session or governing board; procedures are the action steps taken to follow church policy.

### **WHY:**

Having a written plan can often prevent conflict because you have agreed-upon action steps. Your policies and procedures should be freely shared with the congregation so all members have a common understanding of how conflict situations will be processed. This can prevent those with disagreements or complaints from becoming toxic and divisive. It will give those people confidence that they will be heard. It will give church leaders a consistent guide to follow that is backed by the session. Share the written plan with the congregation. Involve everyone in maintaining the health of the church.

### **HOW:**

Researching how other churches have established written policies and procedures for managing conflict may help you in drafting your church's own process. Once established, your policies and procedures should be reviewed regularly by the Session in order to make sure they are applicable

and current. The following guidelines published by PCUSA are an excellent resource and give specific recommendations on how to implement conflict management.

**RESOURCES:**

- *Seeking To Be Faithful Together, Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement.*

This document, first approved by the 204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1992, is a well-tested guide for sessions and congregations as a means for reconciliation and restoration of trust and community wellness. It includes ten guidelines for congregations. You may access it by using this link: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together/> It can be downloaded as a PDF file. We have incorporated it in this document as follows:

## ***Seeking to be Faithful Together:*** **Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement**

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

<p><b>G</b>ive them a hearing... listen before we answer</p> <p><i>John 7:51 and Proverbs 18:13</i></p>	<p><b>1 Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange,</li> <li>– we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others.</li> </ul> <p><b>2 Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.</b></p> <p><b>3 State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.</b></p>
<p><b>S</b>peak the truth in love</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:15</i></p>	<p><b>4 Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.</b></p> <p><b>5 Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.</li> </ul> <p><b>6 Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.</b></p>
<p><b>M</b>aintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:3</i></p>	<p><b>7 Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.</b></p> <p><b>8 Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.</li> </ul> <p><b>9 Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;</li> <li>– seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;</li> <li>– be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;</li> <li>– abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these Guidelines.</li> </ul> <p><b>10 Include our disagreement in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.</b></p>

Adopted by the 204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for use by sessions and congregations

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for the “peace, unity and purity of the Church” (Book of Order) as we seek to be faithful to God’s work in the world. However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful. They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies and in the national life of the denomination.

Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul’s letters address the conflicts which were common in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God’s work in the world and as we interpret scripture.

Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

At the same time, conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights, learning, and individual and corporate growth. Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and can present solutions to problems which previously had not been seen. The successful resolution of conflict can also bind people together in a powerful way.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and much advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the ***Guidelines*** in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE *GUIDELINES* FOR USE BY SESSIONS AND CONGREGATIONS:**

### **What are the Guidelines and how did they come about?**

*Seeking To Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement* is a response to requests from many Presbyterian congregations which have experienced pain and brokenness resulting from disagreements that were not dealt with in a healthy and productive way

Some of these disagreements were about issues important in our national life (e.g. abortion and human sexuality), while some of them were about matters dealing with the life of the congregation (e.g. should we start a building campaign?).

Every congregation has conflicts. They will either be occasions for divisiveness and harm or they will provide opportunities for growing and learning. The *Guidelines* may help congregations of the Presbyterian Church(U.S.A.) use conflict in a creative and productive way.

The 204th General Assembly (1992) adopted the *Guidelines* for its own life and provided this tool to congregations and the other bodies of the Presbyterian Church to help them deal with the inevitable conflicts and disagreements which occur.

### **What is the biblical basis for the *Guidelines*?**

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and offers a great deal of guidance for dealing with disagreements. It is also rich in its description of God's peace giving and reconciling work.

- God, through Jesus Christ is reconciling the world and gives us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-20)
- We are one body. (I Corinthians 10:7)
- We are called to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)
- Make peace with your brother and sister when you have a conflict. (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Bless those who persecute you; live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:14-16)
- Be kind to one another and forgive one another. (Ephesians 4:13-16)
- Listen carefully before you speak. (Proverbs 18:13)
- Speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16)
- Work for consensus. (Acts 15:1-31)

### **Why should your session and congregation agree to use the *Guidelines*?**

Conflicts and disagreements occur in congregations. Where there are people who care deeply, there is bound to be conflict.

The **Guidelines** offer clear, simple suggestions for dealing with differences, so they become occasions for growing in grace and understanding, not times of divisiveness and separation.

Though use of the **Guidelines** cannot prevent conflict from happening, they might help develop an open, helpful climate where differences are dealt with productively.

**What are some suggested steps for considering the use of the *Guidelines* in your congregation?**

- **Leadership** – Ask a committee of session or several elders to lead the session in a study of the *Guidelines*.
- **Bible Study** – Suggest that an adult church school class or Bible study group study the Biblical insights on conflict and what to do about it. It would also be useful if the session would have its own similar study. One resource you might use is, *Behold the New Has Come: Peacemaking in Corinthians (DMS 225-90-202; 75 cents, phone 800-524-2612)*.
- **Skill Building Session** – If the session has not recently used a portion of their meetings for learning skills for dealing with conflict, consider using and adapting this resource. Also consider using this resource in your adult education program.
- **Study the *Guidelines*** – Ask the session to study the **Guidelines** by examining each one of them. The session might ask these questions about each *Guideline*:
  - a. How might the use of this guideline help create a healthy atmosphere for dealing with conflict?
  - b. How might the use of this guideline help deal with an existing conflict?
  - c. Would you like to change this guideline or remove it from the list?
- **Vote on the *Guidelines*** – The session might vote to use the **Guidelines** in its own life and to encourage and help members of the congregation make use of them. The session might also wish to overture the presbytery to agree to use the **Guidelines** for its life together. Ask a committee of the session to help the session and the congregation make use of the **Guidelines**.
- **Report to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program**...Please tell the Peacemaking Program if your session agrees to use the **Guidelines**, about your experience with them, and other efforts to deal with conflict and disagreement.

**How can our session actually use the *Guidelines*?**

Once your session has agreed to use the **Guidelines**, there are several ways they might be used:

- Encourage all members of the session to take responsibility for using the **Guidelines** during the meeting.
- Urge session members to use the **Guidelines** and remind others to use them during informal conversations in the congregation.



- Read a simple prayer together prior to the start of the session meeting which asks God's help in dealing with conflict effectively.

**One possible prayer:**

*Gracious and Loving God, You have called us together to do the work of Your church. Be present with us during this meeting; guide us that we may make decisions that will reflect Your loving presence in this world. Create within us open minds and hearts, that we will not fear conflict or run from it, but embrace it, knowing that it is an opportunity for growing in faith and a fuller understanding of Your will for us. Help us to listen to each other, share our thoughts in loving, honest ways and do all we can to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

- Pray before voting on a matter which has created significant disagreement, reminding all present that some will be happy about the decision and some will be disappointed.
- Use the **Guidelines** in ways which encourage open candid discussion. Discourage using the Guidelines in ways which would stifle the sharing the disagreements and impede session members from sharing their opinions.
- Display the **Guidelines** poster in the rooms where the session and other committees meet ( The **Guidelines** Poster may be ordered from PCUSA).
- Review and evaluate the session's use of the **Guidelines** each year. Help each new class of the session understand the **Guidelines** and their use.

**How can the *Guidelines* be used in our congregation?**

- Reproduce the first page of this form and include it in a Sunday bulletin or in your congregation's newsletter in an effort to give copies to as many members as possible.
- Display the **Guidelines** poster on several of your church's bulletin boards.
- Present the **Guidelines** to the committees of session, other committees, the choir, Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Men and the youth fellowships.
- Invite members of these groups and other leaders in your congregation to a training session on the **Guidelines**. Use some of the resources listed on the back page of this brochure in the training session.
- Include training on the **Guidelines** in new member classes and officer training classes.
- Ask the worship committee of session to work with the pastor to find ways that the **Guidelines** might be emphasized in worship.
- At a congregational meeting, ask the congregation to decide if they will use the **Guidelines**.

- If a congregation votes to use the **Guidelines**, consider having an evaluation annually at a congregational meeting on how effectively the congregation has used them. This evaluation might produce suggestions for using them better.

**Why inform the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program of any actions taken by your session on the *Guidelines*, as well as your experience and your concerns?**

The information received by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program will help it and perhaps the General Assembly evaluate the **Guidelines** and their use. This information may lead to the strengthening of this tool and the development of resources which will help congregations use the **Guidelines**. The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program will send information about new resources and other assistance to congregations which are using the **Guidelines** as well as good ideas and suggestions received from other congregations.

*The above material was adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

**Additional ways the *Guidelines* may be used:**

- Session members can each read this document, including the accompanying scriptures, for discussions. This document in parts or in entirety can be distributed to all members. It could be included in a church newsletter, used in small groups, Sunday School, Bible study or education classes. The Pastor can use this document as a basis for sermons.
- **Establish a Conflict Committee or Task Force** to compile the policies and procedures, recommend how the *Seeking to be Faithful Together* document will be implemented, and provide direct services to facilitate one-on-one communication when needed. Use the Biblical standard. The ones who are in conflict talk directly with each other first. If either party wants a third/neutral person(s) there for that conversation, the Conflict Committee will provide for that. Have a few people ready to take that role when it is needed. It is good to have two people working together when dealing with conflict so they are able to verify what is said and done.
- **When there is conflict, leaders should manage themselves first.** Monitor your own anxiety. Respond in a calm and thoughtful way, and avoid reacting out of anxiety or other emotions.

**WHAT:**

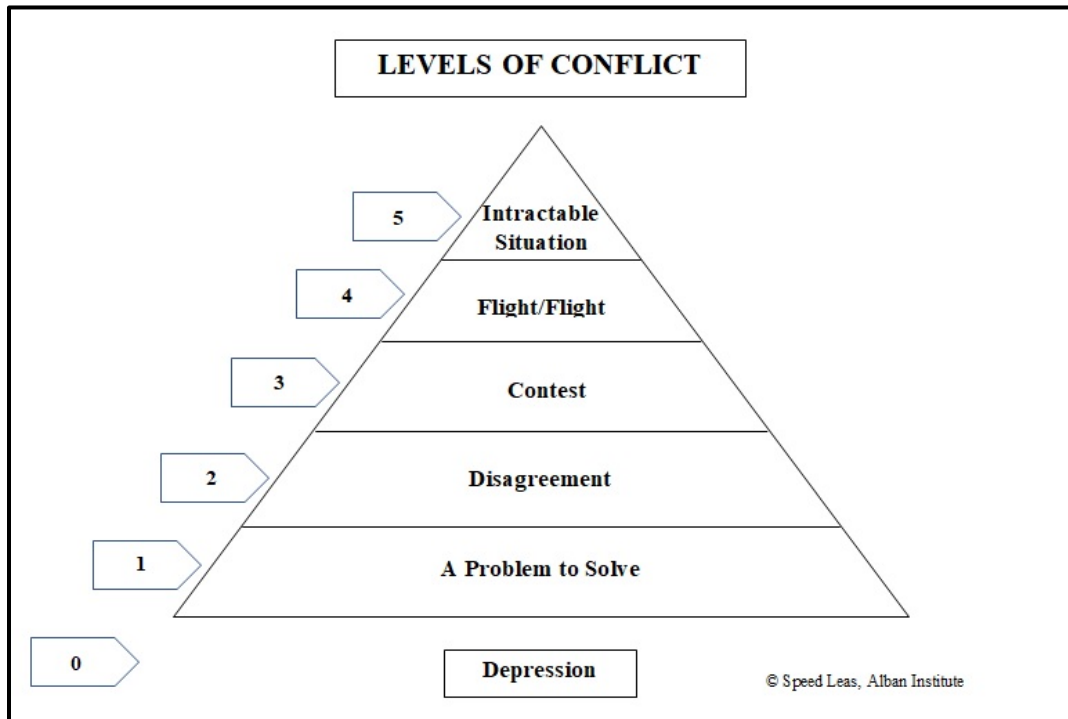
**Learn and practice good communication skills.**

**WHY:**

Conflicts are often either started or exacerbated by misunderstandings.

**HOW:**

- **Encourage honest and open communication.** Emphasize that each elder and deacon is expected to speak his/her mind during the meetings.
- Learn to be a good listener. Listen to really understand what the other person wants you to know, not for the purpose of rebuttal, defending yourself, or trying to change his/her mind. Acknowledge their feelings even if you don't agree with their feelings. When a person feels really heard and that someone understands and cares about their feelings they are more likely to de-escalate emotionally, and that may allow them to be able to consider solutions.
- If you hear someone talking negatively about another person encourage them to arrange to speak to that person directly. Talk to people not about them.
- Hold people accountable. If session receives anonymous complaints, make it known that will only be dealt with if the source of that complaint will make themselves known and be accountable for what they say. If someone reports that: "people are saying..." or "a lot of people think that..." ask exactly who are the ones who are saying or thinking these things? Invite those people to visit with you directly. Then listen in a non-judgmental way. Credence should not be given to one who insists on remaining anonymous.
- As much as possible keep the congregation informed. It is often better that the congregation be told the truth about conflict situations in an appropriate way, than to hear rumors that may or may not be true.
- **If you need help** in dealing with a specific conflict situation or in working with these guidelines please call the Presbytery Office and ask for the name and contact information for the moderator of the **Congregational Reconciliation Task Force**, or check the **Presbytery website** for this information. CRTF members will work with your session, pastor or congregation on resolving conflict, implementing these guidelines, or on recommending resources.



#### **Level One: A Problem to Solve**

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

#### **Level Two: Disagreement**

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

#### **Level Three: Contest**

- Begin the dynamics of “win/lose.” Personal attacks. Formation of factions, sides, camps. Distortion a major problem.

#### **Level Four: 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 Five: Intractable Situations**

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

#### **Level Zero: Depression**

Depression is defined as “anger turned inward.” Sometimes congregations give up and move into a state of depression. The task is to raise their awareness that what they can share together is a vibrant faith and a love for others and what they face is a problem to be solved.

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

### **CONFLICT AS BLESSING: PLEASE DON'T WASTE THIS CRISIS**

*By Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Congregational Health ([www.healthychurch.org](http://www.healthychurch.org)).*

*This article is reprinted as published in **Baptists Today**.*

Ask any minister, “What is the worst part of your job?” and nearly all will tell you, “Conflict!”. Ask any congregation member what they like least about their church experience, and most will answer the same. Conflict is everywhere people are, and it seems to be escalating. The incivility of our culture is having a toxic effect on ministry and congregations.

The FACT 2000 survey of 14,000 congregations found that, in the past five years, 75 percent of churches have experienced some level of conflict. At any given time, one-fifth of congregations are in active conflict. It comes as no surprise that churches are experiencing more conflict than ever. Regarding conflict as blessing seems foolish and naïve. Is it possible, however, to learn to manage our conflict constructively?

#### **Speaking up early**

Church leaders are wise to address conflict early and proactively before it escalates to become divisive. The issue is not whether you will have conflict, but what you will do with it. Following biblical commands means handling conflict with openness, compassion and as much transparency as possible. Speaking up early, rather than sweeping disagreement under the carpet, avoids a host of problems that over time can leave a congregation divided and deeply wounded.

Conflict within a congregation can begin as a simple difference of opinion over worship styles, carpet color or youth activities or it can be as shame-filled as division over clergy sexual misconduct or staff financial mismanagement. It always causes discomfort, and it can be downright painful. And yet, conflict within a congregation can be a catalyst for healthy growth.

#### **Growing through the pain**

In my experience, it is the rare adult who makes any significant life change without discomfort and pain. Throughout the Bible, God uses conflict to grow his people. Paul, Peter, Martha, Mary, David and Jeremiah are examples of heroes who learned through the ache of failure and conflict.

The letters to the early church are filled with instructions for managing conflict. We are not the first to walk this way.

Conflicts and crises make excellent teachers. They often lead to new and better ways of doing things. If a youth leader's misbehavior results in a safer policy for interaction with teens, the youth ministry is strengthened. If employee theft inspires a smart policy that minimizes risk, congregational trust is enhanced. When bitter argument gives way to thoughtful conversation, community is built.

### **Keys to navigating conflict**

At the Center for Congregational Health, we believe there are several keys to navigating conflict. One is to avoid triangulation. During conflict it is tempting for people to talk about each other to anyone who will listen. Instead, we are called to take Matthew 18 seriously and learn to talk to each other about the issue. Such conversations must come in from the parking lot to the fellowship hall. Leaders can facilitate opportunities for guided conversations in a manner that allows everyone to voice an opinion. Mature leaders can help others learn to discuss deep issues of differences, disagreements and disappointments. When people feel belittled, ignored or disrespected, the outcome is very different from when they feel valued, included and heard.

A second practice is to anticipate conflict. Healthy congregations have regular times to talk about life together. Opportunities specifically devoted to open discussion create a safe place for the congregation to ask hard questions and relieve anxiety. Deacon or business meetings that include unstructured time for asking questions build trust. Congregational leaders who are willing to hear suggestions and critiques without undue defensiveness model maturity and deepen the fellowship.

A third practice is to get help. As with Paul and Timothy, in some cases, despite the best efforts of leadership and the congregation to remain open-minded and transparent, a polarity cannot be resolved. When conflict gets especially heated, a third-party intervention may be required to enable us to overcome our emotional anxiety and harmful habits.

Finally, we need to learn the art of graceful exits. If a conflict escalates beyond reconciliation, our goal as Christians ought to be to bless one another and then separate. Often in a worst-case intractable conflict, the two sides take their focus away from the issue and set out to destroy each other. This tears at the fabric of the church and decimates our witness for Christ. We can certainly do better.

While the church of Christ may be filled with sinners and conflict, when we manage in a way that leads to a healthier congregation, we become a message of hope to the larger world. There may be no better way for the church to witness to a conflict weary culture than to handle its own, internal differences with wisdom and grace.

Crisis and conflict awaken our passions and can motivate us to a better way. When conflict arrives, as it must, please do not waste the opportunity to seek to turn it into a blessing.

## RESOURCES:

- **Conflict Transformation Skills Training:** This workshop is designed by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. This workshop is about six hours long and is designed to provide perspectives, skills, and strategies aimed at improving our ability to transform conflict constructively. There is cost associated with this training as participant manuals need to be ordered through the Lombard Center. For more information contact Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com).
- **Interpersonal Skills:** This workshop focuses on much of the above but without the cost of the manual and a bit less focused on conflict and more focused on communicating with one another. For more information contact Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com).
- **Healthy Congregations Workshop:** This workshop is based on the work of Peter Steinke and materials are produced by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. It focuses on *Systems Thinking* and emphasizes the influence of those in church leadership positions. This workshop also examines the role of *anxiety* in church functioning. This workshop includes videos of *The Anxious Congregation* and the *Responsible Congregation*. For more information contact Lola Peters, 515-249-9182, [rlp405@msn.com](mailto:rlp405@msn.com).
- **Active Listening:** Skill building workshop to learn and practice effective listening skills. Sometimes when working with people in difficult situations it is hard to know what to say or how to respond. This workshop would be particularly good for all elders and deacons, as well as anyone working with conflict. (90 minutes) Lola Peters, 515-249-9182 [rlp405@msn.com](mailto:rlp405@msn.com)
- **Various Peacemaking Workshops:** Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, 630-627-0507 or see website: <https://www.lmpeacecenter.org/>
- **Books:**
  1. *Never Call Them Jerks* by Arthur Paul Boers
  2. *Resolving Everyday Conflicts* by Ken Sande

## **Manual of Operations**

**WHAT: Prepare an Manual of Operations that addresses all facets of church activity.**

It is important to have an operations manual that includes written job descriptions of all positions, committees, task forces and volunteer positions. It also should include all policies, procedures and guidelines. This should also include a written policy on conflict resolution. The content of the Manual of Operations should be approved by the Session.

### **WHY:**

Anyone who is acting contrary to written job descriptions, policies or procedures can be re-directed to comply with established norms that have been approved by session. This can often handle situations that have the potential to become conflictual and problematic.

### **HOW:**

An effective way to begin this process is to first gather the written documents you already have and review, update, and have session approve them. Each committee or person with a responsibility will write a job description encompassing what they have been doing and are expected to do in their position. Any policies or procedures pertaining to that area of responsibility should be included. All job descriptions, policies and procedures will be approved by Session.

### **Information that should be included in the Manual of Operations:**

- Originating Documents and Foundation Information
- Nominating, Electing and Installing
- Membership Procedures and Expectations
- Session and Its Committees
- Church Personnel
- Church Finances
- Ministries
- Worship and Sacraments
- Other Policies and Procedures (example: Child Protection, Facilities Use, Conflict Resolution Policy) (See enclosed Table of Contents as one example of what should be included.)



**RESOURCES:**

Ankeny Presbyterian Church Manual of Operations, as an example, is available through the Presbytery Office by request. The Table of Contents is shown below.

**Ankeny Presbyterian Church  
Manual of Administrative Operations  
Updated May 2016**

**SECTION ONE: Originating Documents and Foundational Information**

- A. The Organizing Covenant including Charter Members of Ankeny Presbyterian Church
- B. Articles of Incorporation
- C. The Bylaws of Ankeny Presbyterian Church
- D. The Vision and Mission Statements

**SECTION TWO: Nominating, Electing, and Installing**

- A. The Congregational Nominating Committee
- B. Training and Examining those Elected
- C. Basic Roles and Responsibilities of those Elected to the Ordered Ministries of the Church
  - C-1. Ruling Elders: The Ministry of Discernment and Governance
  - C-2. Deacons: The Ministry of Compassion and Service
  - C-3. Teaching Elders: The Ministry of Word and Sacrament

**SECTION THREE: Membership in Ankeny Presbyterian Church**

- A. Procedures for Contact and Invitation to Church Membership
- B. Expectations and Responsibilities of Church Membership
- C. Membership Rolls
- D. Procedures for Removing Names from the Rolls

**SECTION FOUR: The Session and Its Committees**

- A. The Session Defined
- B. The Organization of the Session
- C. Membership, Expectations, Guidelines for Session Committees
- D. Session Meetings
- E. Congregational Life Committee
- F. Discipleship (Christian Education) Committee
- G. Facilities Management (Property) Committee
- H. Financial Resources Committee
- I. Personnel Resources Committee
- J. Mission Committee

- K. Stewardship Committee
- L. Worship Ministry Committee

**SECTION FIVE: Church Personnel**

- A. Personnel Manual
- B. Pastor Job Description
- C. Director of Christian Education Job Description
- D. Office Coordinator Job Description
- E. Choir Director/Lead Singer Job Description
- F. Musical Accompanist Job Description
- G. Worship Ensemble Job Description
- H. Custodian Job Description
- I. Bookkeeper Job Description
- J. Nursery Attendant Job Description

**SECTION SIX: Church Finances**

- A.-T. Financial Policies and Procedures
- U. Memorials and Endowments

**SECTION SEVEN: The Ministries of Ankeny Presbyterian Church**

- A. Christian Education Ministries:
  - A-1 Sunday Church School
  - A-2 Vacation Church School
  - A-3 APC Wednesdays
  - A-4 Confirmation
  - A-5 Youth Fellowship(s)
  - A-6 Adult Education
- B. Congregational Life:
  - B-1 Nine to Dine
  - B-2 Mill Pond Ministry
  - B-3 Perkins Wednesday Lunch
  - B-4 Congregational Potlucks
  - B-5 Receptions
  - B-6 Donut Hole Sundays
  - B-7 Church Picnics
  - B-8 OWLS
- C. Mission Ministries
  - C-1 DMARC
  - C-2 Central Iowa Shelter Services
  - C-3 Des Moines Hunger Hike
  - C-4 Connection Café
  - C-5 New Horizons Adult Day Care

- C-6 Red Rock Community Action Program
- C-7 CROSS Ministries
- C-8 El Salvador Partnership
- C-9 Special Offerings
- D. Communications:
  - D-1 The Encounter
  - D-2 Social Media
- E. The Board of Deacons
  - E-1 The Structure of the Board
  - E-2 The Ministries and Responsibilities of the Board

**SECTION EIGHT: Worship and Sacraments**

- A. Communion Instructions – Elder Communion Coordinator
- B. Worship Greeters
- C. Worship Lay Leaders
- D. Worship Ushers
- E. Funeral Guidelines and Procedures
- F. Wedding Policies and Procedures

**SECTION NINE: Other Policies and Procedures**

- A. Standard Operating Procedures
- B. Child Protection Policies
- C. Emergency Procedures
- D. Facilities Use Policies and Procedures
- E. Weather Policies and Procedures
- F. Distribution of Information

## **Additional Resources**

- **For Committee Chairpersons:** This workshop is about 90 minutes long for people who are serving as the **chair of a committee**. I focus a bit on the role of the chairperson and focused on things that might not be available in Des Moines Presbytery such as the Presbytery Mission Statement, goals, by-laws, etc. Other pieces that might be helpful would be discussion of such things as how to delegate; empowering others; and running successful meetings. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **So You're An Elder Now** - Looks primarily at the Book of Order responsibilities and Ordination Questions. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **Elders As Spiritual Leaders** - Designed for experienced elders and relies a great deal on Joan Gray's book about spiritual leadership. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **Deacon Training** - is a bit shorter and looks at scriptural qualifications and the Book of Order. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **Stewardship Training** - focuses on the spiritual aspects and fruits of the spirit. It points away from raising money for the church and points to the value of giving for the giver. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **Activating Inactive Members** - identifies the hard work of restoring people to activity and points to strategies for keeping people from becoming inactive in the first place. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **The Book of Confessions** - takes a brief historical and content look at each of the Confessions. It does not include the most recent addition of the Belhar Confession. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **The Directory for Worship** - looks closely at the Book of Order, identifies the roles and responsibilities different people have in worship as well as the sacraments and languages of worship. Bob Houser, 308-455-0565, [houserrobert1@gmail.com](mailto:houserrobert1@gmail.com)
- **“Must Know” Financial and Personnel Information Essential For Every Session:** Churches are employers, and pastors are both employees and self-employed. If this sounds confusing you may want to schedule this training. Sarai Rice, 515-231-3958, [srice@dmarcunited.org](mailto:srice@dmarcunited.org)
- **How To Be A Good Listener – Empathic Listening** for deacons, elders and others. Do you want to be able to be supportive of those in your congregation, especially during their difficult times, but aren't sure what to say? Learning how to really listen can give you confidence in reaching out to others. Lola Peters, 515-249-9182, [rlp405@msn.com](mailto:rlp405@msn.com)