



## ***Reconciliation within our Church Communities*** ***Lovingly confronting conflict***

### **A Prayer for the Unity of the Church (adapted from BCP 204)**

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, even as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you sent and who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection: Matthew 18:15-22**

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

*How does Jesus ask us to deal with conflict?*

*Why is reconciliation important?*

*What is conflict?*

- Conflict is a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns." [Academic Leadership Support Group]
- Conflict is normal and happens in every relationship.
- Often one responds with learned behavior patterns established in one's family of origin without any conscious understanding of whether the response is helpful in this situation.
- It is human nature to react to hurt and threat from our most primal nature, that fight or flight response that is innate to that primal aspect of being human.

- Conflict is the opportunity to grow as human beings and to deepen our relationships with others by building trust, IF we can navigate the conflict and the anxiety it produces in us without blaming and shaming others.

## Loving Confrontations

1. What happens when relationships are not attended to?
  - a. Poor or lacking communication takes us out of relationships. For example, making assumptions may harm the underlying trust needed for relationship.
  - b. Conflict may occur when we do not understand one another or trust one another or when our desires, expectations, fears, or wants seem to collide with the desires, expectations, fears, or wants of others.
    - i. Examples of areas of tension are differences in values (family systems, such as generational leadership, diversity, worship, leadership styles, money), mutual ministry, shared leadership.
    - ii. Unresolved tensions that become conflict can destroy community, including a lack of spiritual growth, a drain of the church's resources, diminished ministry opportunities, decreased church attendance, voluntary or involuntary leadership separations, congregation division, and sometimes church splits.
2. Loving confrontation is often an effective response to conflict.
  - a. Loving confrontation is the opposite of passivity or avoidance; confrontation means simply "meeting face-to-face," or addressing.
  - b. Confrontations can and should be positive.
  - c. When we address a problem or a challenge with another person, we often can reconcile with that person and move forward.
  - d. Confrontations are required in any successful relationship, especially love. Without confrontations, we give up on relationships.
  - e. There are real benefits to working through disagreements over values, goals or methods if they are relevant to the mission of the community or the challenges the community is adapting to.
3. Leaders need to encourage, facilitate and mediate confrontations that may help the community make better positive decisions about questions that do not have clear answers and solutions.
  - a. *Break old patterns*: Churches sometimes have "old issues" or conflicts which were never fully resolved and which tend to resurface in unsettled times.
  - b. *New leadership and styles*: Churches need to consider whether, as a whole, patterns of lay involvement in the church are healthy or unhealthy, empowering or disempowering for most of the congregation, and to empower and to welcome leadership gifts from all parts of the congregation.
  - c. *New commitment*: The congregation can improve itself structurally, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually to enter into stronger relationships with one another.

- d. *New experiences*: Church conflict responses promote peace and unity, glorify God, and provide opportunities for the church to prosper in all areas.
4. We may avoid dealing with a challenge or problem just because we dislike confronting another person – especially if this means making ourselves vulnerable or putting ourselves at risk.
- a. Most of us are uncomfortable with confrontations. Failing to confront often means failing to raise awareness or solve problems.
  - b. Avoiding loving confrontations undermines change by harming relationships, preventing reconciliation and closing off the productive learning that differences in perspective may spur.

### **Questions for Discussion among Congregational Leaders**

*How do we do when we have conflicts (as a Vestry or in the congregation)? Do we follow the steps Jesus outlines in Matthew 18:15-20?*

*Every person and community faces challenges in their interpersonal relationships. What are areas of unresolved tension in this Vestry or congregation? (If we can, let's just list areas of disappointments or differences without trying to reconcile them.)*

a) *Past*

b) *Present*

*Why is it difficult to talk about these kinds of things?*

*What is our role in leading reconciliation of certain issues or concerns? What do we need help with?*

*What are the ground rules for "loving confrontation"? How do we need to treat one another in this conversation?*

### **A Process of Peacemaking-Mediation**

1. *Gather and identify areas of conflict or disappointment that have not received adequate attention and may be adversely affecting your relationships.* Invite anyone to briefly summarize any concerns or opportunities that they believe need to be addressed. What is challenging for you about your current relationships? Share stories about our feelings, interests, wants and concerns; this is the most important step for getting past resentment to healing – and the most avoided.

2. *Clarify information.* Give each person an opportunity to explain and provide the details of their understanding of the concerns or opportunities and perspectives in more detail. Be specific and state how you have been hurt.
3. *Clearly define the concerns to be addressed and desired positions and outcomes of various persons.* In what ways have our relationships diverged from the relationships we envision? Paraphrase and clarify the real needs of the community and each person. Allow anyone to ask questions.
4. *Brainstorm possible solutions.* What actions could we take to strengthen our relationships (brainstorming ways to work together, beginning to reframe in a positive way)? What do we value about our relationships and have in common? Evaluate solutions reasonably and objectively.
5. *Reach agreement about solutions,* focusing on both steps for reconciliation and resolving the material or substantive issues. What specific steps will we take to build our relationships?

#### Stages to Reconciliation

- Settlement – Both parties agree to take the first step and remain in the community. They agree work with a third party.
- Resolution – Resolution occurs when both parties form a mutual partnership to live together, even in disagreement (partially or whole), and accept the fact that turning swords into ploughshares is better for both and for the church.
- Reconciliation - Both parties realize that they can live together, depend on one another without fear or mistrust, and while there will certainly be disagreements along the way, they can work them out in mutual fashion.

#### **Reconciliation Process Objectives**

##### Areas of learning

1. Understanding anxiety levels and triggers
2. Guidelines for discussing differing views
  - a. Recognizing differing perspectives
  - b. Importance of emotions (“feeling words”)
  - c. Respect
3. Importance of our own responses and actions (e.g., Basic Family Systems Approaches)

4. Leadership team response (Focusing on functioning together as a Leadership Team)
5. Process of forgiveness
6. Modeling mediations (as leadership team and among individuals)
7. Cooperation
8. Rebuilding trust

## Prayers

### *For the Unity of the Church (BCP 818)*

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### *In Times of Conflict (BCP 824)*

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### *A Prayer attributed to St. Francis (BCP 833)*

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

### *For the Unity of the Church (adapted from BCP 204)*

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, even as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you sent and who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### *Collect 6 at the Payers of the People (BCP 395)*

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, "Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you." Regard not our sins, but the faith of your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly City, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, now and forever. Amen.

*Prayer for Reconciliation (adapted from reconciliation process with Canadian indigenous peoples)*

Holy One, Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, of story, of souls and voices and all relationships;

You are the God of all truth and the way of all reconciliation.

Hold the anger we carry, and the angry words that may be expressed, in the palm of your hand.

Sustain us with your grace that we may have ears to listen.

Help us to forgive others and even to forgive ourselves.

Help us to learn something good from the sharing of these stories and from this time.

Touch us through the holy gift of story that those who speak and those who listen may behold your own redeeming presence.

Guide us with holy wisdom to enter through the gates of remorse that our feet may walk gently and firmly on the way toward justice and healing.

May we do all this with your help. Amen

**Bible Reflections**

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." —John 13:34-35

Jesus said, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

—Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them,

tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. —Matthew 18:15-22

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

—Matthew 5:21-24

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. —Acts 6:1-7

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided?

—1 Corinthians 1:10-13

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith,



one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. . . So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. . . Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. —Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-16, 25-27 and 29-32

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. —James 3:17-18

## Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion

These eight principles can help create and sustain equity and inclusion:

**Try on** each other's ideas, feelings and ways of doing things for the purpose of greater understanding and exploring all possible approaches. Keep what you like and let go of the rest at the end of the work session.

**It's Ok to disagree.** One of the necessary ingredients for differences to be expressed and valued is that people let go of the need to be, think or act the same.

**It's not Ok to blame, shame or attack** ourselves or others because of our differences.

**Practice self-focus.** Begin by talking about your own experience. It is helpful to make "I" statements when speaking about yourself and your experience, rather than saying "you", "we" or "one". When you intend to refer to others, be specific about who those others are --by name or group. When you really speaking about your own experience or opinion, use "I have found....." or " I think ...".

**Notice both the process and content** during work sessions. Content is what we say, while process is how and why we say or do something and how the group members react. Notice who's active and who's not, who's comfortable and who's not, who's interested and who's not, including yourself, ask about it, and share your own thoughts and feelings as well.

**Practice "both/and" thinking.** Look for ways to fit ideas together and not set up an "either/or" process or a competition between ideas. Look for the existence of many truths from the perspective of the many cultural backgrounds involved.

**Be aware of both the intent and impact of your actions.** The impact of our behavior and decisions on others will determine the success of inclusive work sessions. A major inclusion strategy is to learn and hear when our behaviors and decisions are having a negative impact even when we don't intend them to and to be willing to change that negative impact if it results in persons or groups being treated as "less than" or excluded. This guideline will require us to take risks with new ways of thinking and feeling, to share our reactions to others and to exchange honest feedback about the impact of our words and actions on each other. We can be both well-intentioned AND still say hurtful things and at the same time, be open to how to behaving differently with people who are different from us and who prefer and need different behaviors from us to feel fully valued and included in their relationships with us.

**Confidentiality** with regard to personal sharing is important. You can share the public work of the group, your own stories and perspectives and your own learning and areas for growth. Allow others to tell their own personal stories, opinions and learnings.