



CAMPBELL UNIVERSITY

Divinity School

Christ-Centered | Bible-Based | Ministry-Focused



Conflict and Communication

- What we *not* going to do:
 - Resolve any specific conflict
 - Learn how to win arguments
- What we *are* going to do:
 - Think together about what drives conflict
 - Learn how to speak the truth in love
- Preliminary practice (TTAN)
 - Turn to a neighbor: Name (do not discuss, just name) one topic that you feel would be the most divisive if it were discussed in your church
 - In one sentence, what would you expect would happen if this were discussed?
 - Feedback loop



Understanding Conflict

- Differences are *necessary* to the proper functioning of the church
 - Key scriptural image: the Body of Christ (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4)
 - The result of differences: friction
- Ways of dealing with friction
 - Eliminate the friction
 - ◆ Separate
 - ◆ Move in lock-step
 - ◆ Don't move at all
 - Accept the friction, but reduce it
 - ◆ Degrees of separation – silos, joint projects, etc.
 - ◆ Oil: communication!
 - TTAN: Which of the above most characterizes your church?



Conflict and Emotion

- Do differences and friction inevitably result in conflict?
- The role of emotion
 - We have to *care about* the topic
 - ◆ Good news: conflict usually signals that we *share* a deep concern!
 - We get *angry*
 - ◆ Anger is nearly always the result of fear – an instinctive response to a sense of threat
 - ◆ TTAN: What do you most fear about the topic you named?
What makes you feel most threatened if/when others hold a different view on this topic?



Conflict, Emotion, and Division

- The full recipe for conflict:
 - Differences
 - Emotion (anger, anxiety, feeling threatened)
 - Division: the decision to protect ourselves, that we are not going to find a way through this together
- Resolving conflict requires us to undo the recipe *in reverse*:
 - *Start* with a decision for *unity* (Ephesians 2:14-16; 4:1, 17)
 - *Deal with the emotion*: We *cannot* discuss well when angry!
 - *Acknowledge* the differences
 - *Decide* how to respond: compromise? trade? creative alternative?
- TTAN: Share a time when your church/family/friends unsuccessfully tried to undo a conflict by starting with the differences.



The Recipe for Communication

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. (Ephesians 4:15-16 NRSV)



Speaking the Truth in Love

- Speaking the truth in **love**: What is our goal?
 - To win the argument?
 - To persuade the other to our point of view?
 - *To build up the Body of Christ!*
- Speaking the **truth** in love: What truth do we possess?
 - The clearest, most complete truth I can speak is about myself:
 - ◆ I can speak about my perceptions and feelings ...
 - ◇ *I cannot* tell you what you think or feel or intend
 - ◆ I can share my understanding of what God is saying ...
 - ◇ Do I dare to claim to know, absolutely, the mind of God?
 - Bottom line: OYOS!



Speaking the Truth in Love

- **Speaking** the truth in love: What are some ways we avoid communicating?
 - Silence
 - Non-verbal messages (the bowling ball underneath the ping-pong table)
 - Refusing to listen—*really* listen
 - Attacking / defending—letting emotion dominate
 - ... and ... ?
- TTAN: Which of the above do you have the most trouble with (love, truth, speaking)?



Tools for Healthy Communication

- “I” messages (OYOS! Watch out for “you” messages in disguise!)
 - I feel ...
 - I’m struggling with ...
 - I’m in a different place with ...
- Feedback loop
 - The talking stick
 - Genuine questions (Watch out for bowling balls!)
 - ◆ Help me understand ...
 - ◆ How do you deal with ...
 - “Check in” agreements



Tools for Leaders

- Identify emotion
 - Be particularly aware of whether your own emotions are becoming engaged
 - Help people claim their emotion in positive ways: “I can tell that you really care about the success of this church”
- Celebrate the different members of the body
 - *Ask* for different views: “What have we not thought of?”
 - Turn nay-sayers into helpful participants
- Model good communication
- Emphasize the ultimate goal: building up the body of Christ



Covenant for Dialogue

- I covenant to speak the truth in love:
 - I will seek to build up the body, letting love determine whether and how I speak
 - I will seek the truth I really have:
 - ◆ I will not tell others what they must think or feel, but only what I myself think or feel
 - ◆ I will seek to identify my own fears and anxieties
 - I will seek genuine communication:
 - ◆ I will really *speak* (rather than “send messages”)
 - ◆ I will really *listen*



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