

RESPONDING TO CONFLICT: Living with diversity

A study prepared by Assembly Multicultural Ministry

Minimum time 2 hours or over 2 sessions

Aims:

In the light of the Scriptures, and our experience reflect on tensions that arise from living with diversity and difference

Ice Breaker

Think of a situation of conflict in the last day, week or month. Share this in pairs

Learning: Conflict affects all of us.

Step 1 Looking at conflict

Questions for group:

- When you hear the word 'conflict' what comes to mind - *List on white sheet*
- What is your definition of conflict?
Compare with this possible working definition of conflict: 'a relationship between two or more parties who have, or think they have, incompatible goals'
- The harmful effects of conflict on people and relationships easily come to mind, but is conflict always negative? Can you think of a positive outcome to a situation of conflict?

Learning: Conflict is part of life and we each have the potential to deal negatively or creatively with conflict.

Step 2 Reading the Bible from the perspective of conflict and peace making

Three groups- each look at a set reading and reflect on the questions.

Group 1 John 8: 1-11

Group 2 Acts 6: 1-6

Group 3 Acts 15: 36-41 ; 2 Timothy 4:11

Who were the key players?

What were the issues?

What options for resolution?

What do you learn about conflict from this passage?

Each group feeds back what it has learnt to the large group.

➤ **For Further Discussion**

- When mediating between a stronger and weaker group effort needs to be made to reach out to the weaker group.... Can you give other examples of this from the bible or from your experience?
- Sometimes there comes a “ripe moment” when groups that have been in conflict with one another are ready for change, are open to mediation and are willing to negotiate a reconciliation. How do we ‘read’ those moments when a door of opportunity opens?

Step 3 Personal Conflict Styles

From Responding to Conflict Course, Woodbrooke, Selly Oak

Read the following list of personal conflict styles- which most ‘fits’ you?

- 1) **Controlling** : ‘Do it my way’ Tends to see conflicts and problems as contests to be won; prefers others to accommodate or avoid.
- 2) **Problem Solving** : ‘ Let’s try and resolve this together” Seeks dialogue towards a ‘win-win’ solution.
- 3) **Compromising**: ‘I’ll give a little if you do too’ Tries to ensure that everyone “gives and takes”- gains something. (But this approach may leave everyone feeling they have lost something important.)
- 4) **Accommodating**: ‘Whatever you want is fine by me’. Tries to appease, smooth over differences, give in, seeks peace at any cost. You may not say what you are really thinking.
- 5) **Avoiding**: ‘Conflict? There’s no conflict?’ You prefer to avoid conflict, ignore, delay, deny, withdraw either emotionally or physically from conflict

Role play in pairs an interchange between X and Y

X had offered to organise the church anniversary picnic.

3 weeks before the picnic X asks Y to take this job over as they have been feeling very stressed with work. Equally Y does not really feel able to take on any extra responsibilities at the present time.

Choose one of the personal conflict styles (don’t tell your partner!) and role play for 5 minutes before swapping around characters, Try and choose a ‘style’ that feels most ‘out of character’!

Depending on time, people may want to repeat this exercise taking on a different ‘style’

For Discussion:

What did you learn from this exercise about how you operate in situations of conflict?

Step 4 Mapping a Situation of Conflict (see sheet)

The purpose of 'mapping' is to enable you to see your own and other peoples' points of view more clearly. It may give rise to a new understanding and empathy.

Either individually or in small groups do a 'mapping exercise'

- (a) Define the issue in a general statement
- (b) Name the major parties involved
- (c) What are the needs and fears of each person or group?

➤ Other questions that can be useful to explore:

What are some of the underlying issues or motivations?

What options are available?

What common ground or common vision do you have?

What would it take to bring about an outcome that makes all involved feel satisfied?

◆ After doing this exercise what new insights have you gained?

Sharing a story “RECONCILIATION IS SO HARD” written up by Helen Richmond

I remember a difficult relationship between a South African woman and a British man who was preparing to work overseas as a missionary. She came out of a painful history of oppression. As a so called “coloured” person she had grown up feeling a second class citizen. Her experience of prejudice and racial enmity had affected her deeply. Now, living and studying in a cross-cultural community, something of anger and bitterness that she felt towards white people generally became focused in how she related to this English man. He seemed to represent all the overconfident and dominant white people she had known.

There seemed no way to bridge the gap. Both left the college, knowing something of the pain in the body of Christ where sometimes it seems reconciliation is too hard to achieve.

- **How does this story affects you? Issues may be more complex if the conflict has cross-cultural dynamics. What is some of the “historical baggage” you carry?**

Step 5 Action and Commitment - Sharing Property

One area of conflict in the life of a multicultural church is the issue of how we share property- moving from seeing others/ or ourselves as tenants to being equal partners.

- If your congregation was to share property with another Uniting Church congregation from a different cultural background what areas of conflict do you imagine could emerge?
- How could these areas of conflict be addressed?

We have '*Guidelines for sharing property*'. (Copy of Guidelines for sharing property' available on the Assembly Multicultural Ministry Web page) What attitudes may stop these guidelines from being implemented? (See extract included)

If you are already sharing property think of examples of conflict you have experienced. Sometimes *latent (underground)* conflict goes undetected until there is something that causes the underlying conflict and tension to be expressed.

- 'Map' one issue of conflict over the use of property?
- Be sensitive to dynamics of power and language.
- Is there an equal valuing and respecting of the other, or underlying attitudes that one party knows what is best for the other?
- How well have these areas of conflict been dealt with?
- What bridges need to be built so both sides can hear the other?

Listening to a story – “LEARNING TO SHARE A WORSHIP CENTRE”.

What helped the congregations to share property?

How does this story speak to your congregation?

Step 6 Taking it further

- *What particular things have you learnt about conflict from doing this study?*
- *What are areas for further study, reflection and action?*
- *How can you share these issues be more widely discussed in the congregation?*
Note the resource for worship: 'The church that Jack built' (an illustrated drama)

STORY 2: LEARNING TO SHARE A WORSHIP CENTRE

Background to this material provided by Rev John Jegasothy

Sundays are busy in the Dulwich Hill & Hulstone Park congregations of the Uniting Church. These two centres provide a place for worship for many people from different cultural backgrounds who have found their home in the Uniting Church. There is the English speaking service and Tongan, Tamil, and Cook Islander Uniting Church services. In addition Korean and Samoan congregations also make use of our worship centres. Up until 1995 property sharing tended to reflect *Landlord* and *Tenant* relationships with the new Uniting Church congregations being the tenants. Since 1996 we have started to try and model different relationships. Our starting point is recognising that the buildings belong to God and thus belong to the wider family of God. We have had our struggles! But we are committed to working together to build understanding, good will and sharing of responsibility. This involves groups of members sitting down talking honestly, looking at how we can meaningfully share the property and what is needed to ensure the property is well maintained and cared for. It involves looking at what each congregation that uses the buildings can provide in terms of financial contributions and in terms of time and effort. For example, recently those who attend the Cook Islander service painted the Dulwich Hill church. They ensure the hall is clean and the lawns tidy. Wonderful multicultural services and celebrations that we have from time to time remind us that we are on a common journey and we share a common mission. We are learning a lot. No doubt we have more still to learn as we continue on this journey together.

EXTRACTS FROM THE ASSEMBLY 'PROPERTY POLICY IN A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH' 1992

Shared use of Property

- 3.1 Where two or more congregations/parishes function from one property base, an appropriate form of written agreement will apply to that relationship. It will accord rights of usage, an appropriate sharing of costs and take into account the ministry needs. The working out of this agreement should recognise their equality and equality of their mission as sisters and brothers in the service of Christ, through this Church
- 3.2 Where two Uniting Church congregations or parishes are involved on a continuing basis, it is inappropriate for the sharing of property to be based on a rental or tenancy or tenancy agreement. As all property is resource for mission, it should be shared on the basis of the agreement which will foster that mission and the growth of the Church as a whole.
 - 3.3.1 The needs of each congregation to be given equal attention in decisions relating to the use of property.
 - 3.3.2 Each parish/congregation which uses the property to be prepared to share in the cost of its maintenance in a responsible way. This might be in proportion to the time usage by the respective congregations, or it may have some relation to the size of the respective groups or a nature of usage. A mutually agreed basis of sharing the costs of repairs, maintenance, and service charges is to be determined.

'The church that Jack built' An illustrated dialogue (*source not known*)

A picture is built up on a large board to fit the rhyme as it goes along.

This can be adapted to local conditions. The script is set out for five voices but could be varied.

- ONE This is the church that Jack built.
Puts up notice 'St Jack with St Jill's'.
- TWO These are the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
The walls should be cut away to show part of the interior.
- THREE This is the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Put roof in place.
- FOUR This is the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Put door in place.
- ONE These are the pews inside the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Put pews into cut away area.
- TWO These are the books that are in the pews inside the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Can either add books to picture or place some actual beside it.
- THREE These are the people who use the books that are in the pews inside the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Add figures going into church.
- FOUR This is the pulpit above the people who use the books that are in the pews inside the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Add pulpit in the church.
- ONE This is the Minister who stands in the pulpit above the people who use the books that are in the pews inside the door beneath the roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack built.
Add figure in pulpit.
- TWO *They line up and stand angelically and say.*

THREE We are the choir behind the Minister
Who stands in the pulpit above the
FOUR people who use the books that are in the pews inside the door beneath the
roof that is set on the walls that surround the church that Jack Built.

ONE *Put on board a notice "\$50, 000 to repair the fabric."*
These are the notices place on the board...

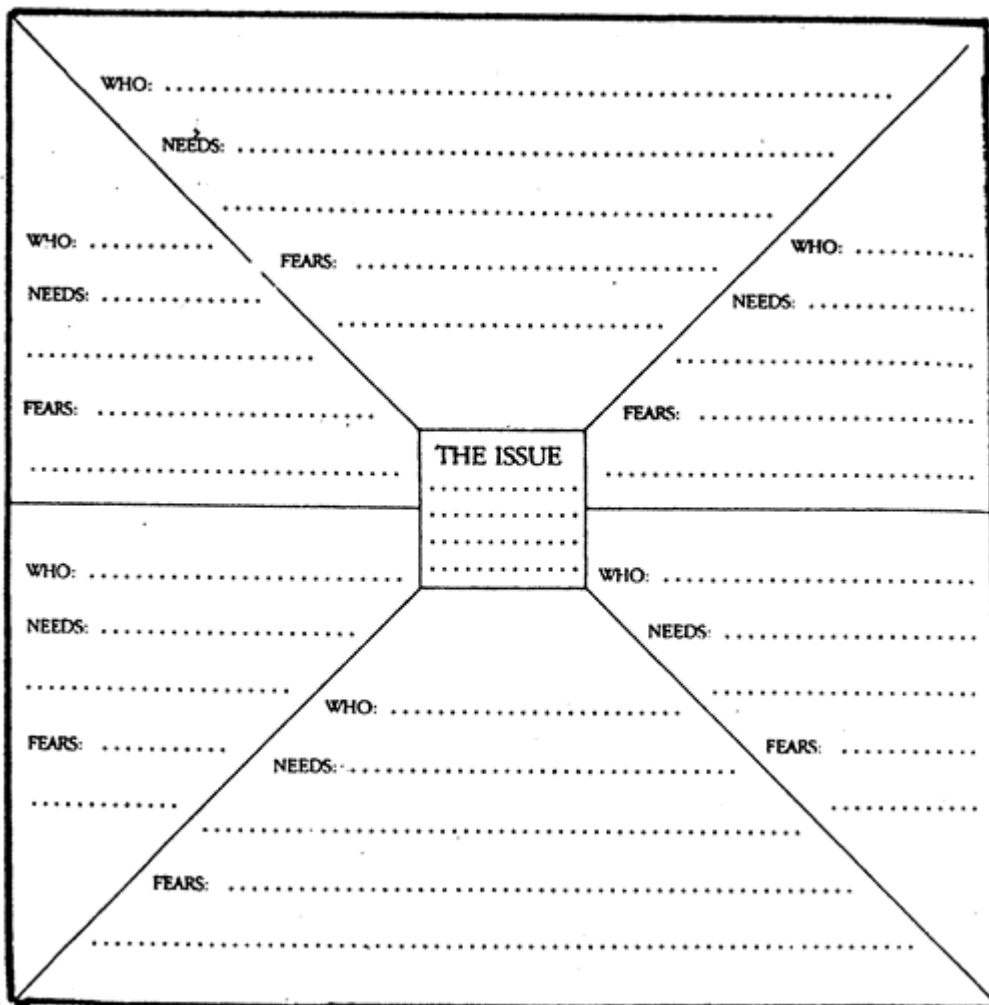
FIVE Wait, wait, just a minute, you've got it all wrong.....
The Lord said to Abraham, Go!
The Lord said to Moses, Go!
Jesus says to his people, Go!
This is the symbol of the world church,
Puts up ecumenical sign
A small ship on a vast ocean.
Whatever resources we have – are for sharing
Why not start again.

They line up together.

FIVE We are the people that Gods needs
ONE Each one sharing gifts
TWO We are God's servants in the world
THREE A travelling people
FOUR A pilgrim people

ALL(1-5) Called to feed the hungry
To comfort the sad
To heal the sick
To tell Good News
This is the Church that God builds!
*They turn and look at each other, offering encouragement, they then move
off in all directions through the congregation singing*
'We are the people that God send', etc.
*The chant needs to be audible to the end with voices coming from different
parts of the church.*
As it finishes one of the characters runs back and puts up a notice.
'The Church in the world -Gone to work'.

This diagram comes from *Everyone Can Win*: Cornelius and Faire, Schuster 1990



This material has been prepared by Multicultural Ministry of the Uniting Church as a resource in preparation for One Great Sunday of Sharing, 2001. Feel free to use and photocopy with acknowledgment.