

Conflict is inevitable Let's use it constructively to help our church continue to flourish.

Conflict avoidance and/or attacking (flight or fight) are common reactions to strife, yet this is not what our faith calls us to do. Christ calls us to "turn the other cheek" - to stay engaged in the conflict in a loving way to work out a resolution. In *Conflict Management in Congregations*, UCC minister Speed Lees writes, "When the battle has begun, I do not leave, nor do I attack. I stay there. I stay in range of getting hit again. I take the risk of not destroying the other person or leaving the scene" in order to resolve the problem. Let us draw on the examples of Christ, Rev. King and Gandhi to use loving conflict in making Just Peace in our community.

What to do when you have a conflict, complaint or concern:*

Remember that your constructive feedback is vital to keeping our congregational process healthy.

- 1) Remind yourself that facing conflict directly is usually stressful for the giver and receiver of feedback and that any nervousness you have is normal.
- 2) Go directly to the person concerned and constructively raise the issue with him/her.
- 3) Work together with that person to determine a good time to have an earnest conversation.
- 4) Be kind and honest in conveying your feedback. Give examples of the problem behavior and suggest behaviors that would work better. Speak only for yourself and your experiences with this person.
- 5) Remember that the courage you are having now will help to reduce future stress for you, the other, and our church community.

Avoid gossiping, co-miserating, looking for allies and/or underground griping.

If you do not feel safe in approaching this person in the first place, or you feel unheard afterwards, approach a member of the PPRC (Pastoral Parish Relations Committee) and ask for support in bringing up your concern/ complaint to the person.

Since anonymous feedback generally creates more conflict, anonymous complaints and requests for confidentiality with the PPRC are not options. (For rationale, see *Conflict Management in Congregations*, David B. Lott, Editor and *Congregational Fitness* by Denise Goodman).

A PPRC member will coach you and, if needed, meet with you and the person concerned to facilitate a constructive dialogue and help you in expressing your important feedback.

While the PPRC can't make it easy or completely comfortable to give hard feedback, you will be given a safe and supportive environment within which to share your concern/complaint.

What to do when a fellow church participant, raises a complaint/concern with you about someone else:

- 1) Remind the person how important his/her feedback is to the health of our church community.
- 2) Remind him/her of the process described above and encourage him/her to contact directly the person at issue and/or the PPRC.
- 3) Remember that your support in stopping gossip, co-miserating, side-taking and underground griping is vital to the health of our community.
- 4) Follow-up with the person to see if s/he has taken the feedback forward to the person at issue. Set boundaries on repetitive complaining with you.

We all need to work together to make sure that our feedback loop is healthy and functioning. If feedback does not get aired and addressed constructively, it goes underground, festers and becomes toxic. So, let's all support each other in taking our inevitable conflicts, concerns and complaints directly to each other so that we can keep our community healthy and vibrant.

* Complaints of sexual misconduct by a clergyperson will be handled in accordance with the Rocky Mountain Conference policy Clergy Sexual Misconduct Guidelines, 303-284-0287, www.rmccucc.org.