



April 1, 2008

The Reverend David Templin, Moderator
Presbytery Council, North Puget Sound Presbytery

Dear Dave,

We are pleased to submit the report of your Task Force on Conflict. Much of the information and many of the recommendations in the report address matters of concern to the Committee on Ministry. For that reason we strongly suggest that the Council transmit this report to the Committee on Ministry without delay.

The Conflict Task Force was born of a belief, based on experience and observation within the Presbytery, (and supported by subsequent data) that when a single facet of church leadership, expressed in the various forms of officers, staff or committees, assumes multiple roles or functions within a particular conflict, resolution and reconciliation between the conflicted parties is not only inhibited, but the conflict is likely to become exacerbated.

Conflict is and will continue to be a part of church life. Church leaders have a moral, biblical and constitutional obligation to deal with conflict in healthy ways. This often requires the use of specific functions such as counselor, mediator and judge. These functions often have conflicting interests among themselves. For instance one cannot be an effective counselor to a conflicted party and also serve as a neutral mediator within that same conflict. Presbyterian polity, however, often places an officer, staff member, judicatory or committee into multiple conflicting roles within a single conflict.

The Committee on Ministry, for example, may, within a single instance of conflict, be constitutionally responsible for the role of "pastor and counselor," "facilitator," "mediator of differences" and have the authority to ". . . act to correct the difficulties." Attempting to simultaneously fulfill these conflicting roles within a particular conflict constitutes multiple boundary violations, is unhealthy, ineffective, and may become destructive.

This report is an attempt to identify and clarify the appropriate roles and functions of the Presbytery in addressing conflict between or among congregations or members of Presbytery, and to offer the means fulfilling those roles and functions so that any potentially damaging conflict might be redeemed as a step toward building stronger and healthier relationships.

This report recommends a number of new approaches to conflict within the Presbytery. We have tried to maintain a "minimalist" stance. That is, we believe that our recommendations will not add significant bureaucracy or expense to the Presbytery. However, we do call for some changes and additions.

We believe that recommendations are best understood when presented within their context. Our recommendations are identified in the text by using *bold italics* and are re-stated as a list at the end of the report.

While this completes the task given the Task Force, its members stand ready to assist in the implementation of some of the recommendations, particularly those involving giving and receiving training.

James Christensen, Chair
Corey Schlosser-Hall
Dean Strong
Art Robinson
Rosa Lee Wapstra

REPORT - TASK FORCE ON CONFLICT

Executive Summary

1. The highest goal for life in the Church is complete unity in Christ and diversity in the body, and the minimum standard is the resolution of differences with peace.
2. Conflict is normal and should be expected among followers of Jesus. The New Testament reflects this as it speaks, for example, of rivalries among the disciples, and factions in Corinth.
3. A healthy congregation will use its resources to address and seek to transform conflicts rather than ignore or avoid them.
4. While conflict is often painful and holds the potential for serious damage to churches, it also often provides an opportunity for growth and transformation.
5. There are clear signs of conflict that indicate action is required. Pastors and sessions can be trained to recognize those signs, which can lead to a timely response.
6. In times of conflict there is hope, for there are processes that can mitigate damage and take advantage of the opportunity for growth.
7. There should be multiple channels for those seeking help in conflict to communicate their needs to the Presbytery.
8. It is important for sessions, pastors and individuals involved with the Presbytery to know when and how to ask for help, and to know the nature of the response they will receive from the Presbytery.
9. The first step the Presbytery can take in responding to conflict is to provide a careful assessment by trained individuals - similar to "triage."
10. After assessment, the Presbytery can take a number of "treatment" steps, depending upon the situation.
11. In some cases "treatment" of conflict will require the help of trained mediators, facilitators or others with professional skills and experience.
12. When treatment has been successful, that accomplishment should be identified and marked through appropriate celebration and ceremony.
13. Following the "treatment" phase, another assessment should be made to see if there are residual needs and opportunities for growth and reconciliation.
14. In some cases conflict results in a remedial or disciplinary case. In those circumstances specific processes are required that protect the rights of individuals while resolving specific complaints and simultaneously opening the way toward peace and reconciliation.
15. A special situation may arise if a congregation seeks to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and property issues are involved. In that case a particular policy/procedure needs to be in place to guide the Presbytery and the congregation.

Process and Methods

The Task Force began by seeking out the experience of other presbyteries. The input we received is contained in Appendix 1. The Task Force conducted interviews with people from five NPS Presbytery congregations that have experienced significant conflict between 2003 and 2007. A central theme that emerged during those interviews was that the increase in destructive conflict (conflict that leads to ending relationships as opposed to constructive conflict where parties stay connected and move through the conflict together with relationships intact) is directly correlated with a decrease in trust.

The Interview Guide and the Interview Report form we used are provided in Appendix 2.

The Task Force looked to scripture for guidance about the fundamental value system that must inform the Church in times of conflict. The first section of the report explores that topic. We looked to the Book of Order, the Standing Rules and the Administrative Manual of the Presbytery. We applied our own experiences and insights in coming to our conclusions.

At certain points in the report we recommend that trained people be put in place for certain functions. The training recommendations are summarized near the end of the report. (p. 11)

Biblical and Theological Background.

1. Diversity in the body; unity in Christ. Perhaps the best-known passage about conflict is Matthew 18:15-17. In that passage Jesus sets forth four steps in conflict between two individuals that begins with a personal, private conversation and ends with treating the offender as a Gentile or tax collector. Jesus often treated Gentiles and tax collectors with acceptance and hospitality.

A broader survey of the New Testament shows that not all conflicts among the early followers were one-to-one, nor were they dealt with according to the Matthew formula. Nevertheless, Matthew 18 provides exegetical richness with which to approach conflict between individuals, within a small part of a congregation, among the whole congregation, and between a congregation and other entities.

The highest goal for Christians is a unity that matches the Communion of the Father and the Son--an ideal that appears to be beyond earthly possibilities. From that height, there seems to be a descending ladder of expectation for Christians in conflict. Jesus told his followers to love one another as he had loved them. He told them to forgive one another. Paul urged the Corinthians to settle their differences without going to court. He urged two persons to just get along.

We conclude that in dealing with conflict the Church must settle differences. But the mere settlement of issues is not sufficient. The higher goals of continuing to get along, finding forgiveness and achieving unity must always be in view.

Findings and Recommendations

2. Conflict is normal and should be expected.

The disciples of Jesus were rivals in their desire to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul and Peter were at odds. Paul left off traveling with Barnabas because of a dispute about John Mark. The Corinthian Church struggled mightily with factions, outside interference and questions of doctrine and practice.

3. A healthy congregation will address conflict rather than ignore it.

A healthy congregation will use its resources (people and their energy, intelligence, imagination, love, time, and money) to address and seek to transform conflicts rather than ignore or avoid people in conflict. Often the creative process involves a great deal of give and take, and some conflict. In this case conflict is healthy. Healthy congregations will not attempt to suppress all conflict. The early acknowledgement of conflict so it can be dealt with appropriately is also a sign of congregational health.

Congregations that use their resources in these ways both demonstrate their health and develop greater health. The best outcomes from conflict can be anticipated in situations where the congregation is active and dedicated in seeking reconciliation and sees the Presbytery as a source of help rather than as the sole source of solutions.

4. Conflict is often painful, but frequently contains opportunity for transformation.

Clearly the New Testament Church suffered because of unresolved differences and because of pride. The epistles almost universally reflect the anguish of their writers as they preach and teach the lessons of humility and unity.

In the New Testament, encountering Jesus was a transforming event for those who came to faith.

The Church is called to engage in Christ's mission and to become a unified community that lives in peace. To focus only on internal relationships or to focus only on mission would result in a false dichotomy.

Further discussion of the biblical material, with specific text references, is found in Appendix 3.

In conflict management we may be able to settle some issues and reach some agreements through the methods and techniques of mediation and facilitation. The higher goals of reconciliation, forgiveness and unity require us to go deeper.

The Task Force recommends that a team of capable persons be trained to take conflict resolution to its higher levels in those cases where that is needed.

This is consistent with the existing Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy, which is part of the Administrative Manual of the Presbytery of North Puget Sound. It is found in Appendix 4.

5. There are signs that indicate that a conflict needs attention.

The vast majority of conflicts in churches are successfully handled internally without help from the Presbytery. However, some conflicts do require outside help. The signs listed below are aimed at distinguishing one from the other.

The following are some signs that should signal a pastor or session to contact the Presbytery for help:

- a. There are complaints about the pastor to which he or she feels a need to respond.
- b. There are complaints about the pastor to which the session feels it needs to respond.
- c. Issues have arisen that divert the staff, the pastor or the session and committees from conducting their normal work.
- d. Any combination of the following:
 - 1) Those who are dissatisfied claim to have supporters they will not name.
 - 2) Issues are framed in terms of personal characteristics of leaders and others.
 - 3) Parties re-work decisions following committee or session action through informal processes (a.k.a. "parking lot sabotage").
 - 4) Those who are dissatisfied withdraw from dialogue and disconnect from those with whom they are in conflict.
 - 5) Undue sarcasm or "put downs" are used during discussion.
 - 6) Entrapment or double bind questions are asked.
 - 7) Claims of exclusive righteousness are made. (When a person claims spiritual authority for a statement or position and does not open it to discussion or exploration ("God said to me . . . and therefore . . .").
 - 8) There is misuse of church newsletter, mailing list, etc. to promote a narrow viewpoint or

agenda.

9.) There is undue absenteeism from official meetings or duties.

A more complete listing of warning signs is found in Appendix 5.

The Task Force recommends that sessions and pastors be oriented to warning signs of conflict needing help from the Presbytery through workshops and in an ongoing way by COM liaisons.

6. Hope.

From a practical standpoint, within the Presbytery, conflict is responded to by pastors, sessions, Presbytery staff, the Committee on Ministry, Investigating Committees, and the Permanent Judicial Commission. In rare cases others may become involved. Each of these persons and groups contain a great deal of competence and a strong motivation to achieve peace and reconciliation. Each has a defined role and authority. What is needed is an integrated and cooperative process. That is what we hope we have devised.

7. Communication.

When the warning signs of conflict are recognized there needs to be an open line of communication. The system should allow for communication to come to the Presbytery from a pastor, church member, elder or session. It should also allow the call or other communication to come first to any of several parties including the Presbytery Executive, a chair or member of the Committee on Ministry, or the Stated Clerk. This presumes that the Presbytery will have an internal mechanism to route the information appropriately.

The Committee on Ministry is given, by the Constitution, the responsibility and authority to resolve differences within the Presbytery. In some instances, conflict within the Presbytery may need to be referred elsewhere.

8. When and how to ask for help, and what to expect in response.

a. When: Whenever the early signs appear, or the session or pastor has other insight, information and motivation that, in their judgment, requires help from the Presbytery. Pastors and sessions should ask for help earlier, rather than later, and should err on the side of asking too soon rather than too late.

b. How: Any method of contact would be acceptable. The person receiving the contact will ask some pertinent questions and record the answers on a first contact information form.

The task force recommends that pastors and elders serving on session be given a presbytery produced handbook welcoming them to spiritual leadership. The handbook should include a well-designed communication process map with “whom to call” for a variety of resources including conflict situations.

c. What to expect in response: The first response will be an assessment of the conflict, which will provide guidance to the Committee on Ministry in forming a treatment plan.

d. In addition to assessment, the presbytery will take intentional steps to provide pastoral care to parties involved in conflict. Care will be designed to continue through the duration of the conflict until settlement and/or reconciliation. People who are supported emotionally and spiritually during difficult circumstances are 1) more likely to see the process through to reconciliation and 2) more capable of recognizing their own role in the conflict and taking responsibility that is rightly theirs.

The Task Force recommends that a group of individuals be selected by the Committee on Ministry and trained to provide the care described above.

The Task Force recommends that 8a – 8d be adopted and communicated to the members of the Presbytery (congregations and ministers) as the standard procedure for responding to conflict.

9. Triage.

Conflicts tend to change as they develop. It is important to make a careful assessment of a conflict before taking action to deal with it.

The Committee on Ministry has the primary responsibility and authority to deal with conflicts

within churches. An early assessment of the conflict for the benefit of the Committee on Ministry would be helpful. This is a step that the Task Force believes would be a worthwhile innovation.

Intensity assessment for conflicts, first expounded by Speed Leas of the Alban Institute in his book, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict* (1985) is well known. It continues to be a useful tool in assessing conflict, and should be part of the triage recommended here.

There are several additional factors that should be assessed, including the complexity of the conflict and its scope within the congregation. A Conflict Assessment Worksheet is provided in Appendix 6 as an example.

The assessment requires good judgment, and should be provided by well- trained and experienced persons.

The Task Force recommends that a group of individuals be selected and trained by the Committee on Ministry and authorized by it to conduct initial assessments of conflicts on behalf of the Committee on Ministry.

In the view of the Task Force, these "first responders" would be deployed very quickly. They would be neutral to the conflict. It should be clear to them, to the church involved, and to the Committee on Ministry that the role of these individuals is not to intervene in the conflict or begin to resolve it. Their role is to understand the conflict and report to the Committee on Ministry.

10. Treatment.

The Committee on Ministry is given specific and limited authority in G-11.0502j. Based on the initial assessment, the Committee on Ministry should determine its initial approach as described in sub-paragraphs (1), (2) and (3).

11. Special Skills Needed.

The resolution of conflict, especially when it is serious enough to require the involvement of the Presbytery, will likely be an intense and lengthy process. Such processes can take many twists and turns, and require special skills.

The Task Force recommends that a group of individuals be selected by the Committee on Ministry and trained to work on its behalf in situations requiring a high level of conflict management skills.

The Task Force has identified some training resources that could be helpful, including the Dispute Resolution Center of Snohomish and Island Counties, the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, and Church Healers, Inc.

The Task Force recommends that \$5,000 be provided for training as described in this report for 2008.

12. Celebration and Ceremony.

When issues have been settled and peace restored, the Committee on Ministry and the congregation should give thanks to God and celebrate with appropriate worship and ceremony.

13. Follow-up assessment.

The Task Force interviews revealed that some churches continue to suffer residual effects of conflicts that long ago were "settled." Issues have been resolved, but reconciliation, healing, forgiveness and unity have not been achieved.

For this reason, the Task Force believes that the "first responders" should again be deployed following conflict resolution to make another assessment. If there is need for further work on the part of the Committee on Ministry, that advice can be given.

The Task Force recommends that, in the event deeper healing is needed, the trained individuals mentioned in #11 above be utilized, or outside agents with the necessary facilitation skills be engaged.

14. Situations involving remedial and/or disciplinary cases.

The Book of Order provides for Alternative Dispute Resolution, as does the Manual of Operations of the Presbytery. In the cases where mediation is to be part of the process, trained, neutral mediators should be engaged.

Mediation should be safeguarded by provisions of confidentiality and privileged communication for participants.

The Task force recommends: a) That the Presbytery confer with the General Assembly Office on the Constitution to ensure that Presbytery policy and practice provide appropriately for confidentiality and privilege when cases involve mediation; and b) That training be offered to the Permanent Judicial Commission and Investigating Committees about when and how ADR should be used.

15. Cases involving church property.

There is considerable experience within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) about congregations wishing to leave the church and retain the property. A variety of presbytery policies are forming throughout the national church. Currently NPS Presbytery does not have a process for handling such a case.

The Task Force recommends that the Council develop a guiding policy and procedure for cases involving congregations wishing to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Training Summary

Entity	Training Needed	Responsibility
Congregants	Skills for behaving in conflict.	COM/First Response Team members
Pastors And Sessions	How to recognize early warning signs. When to ask for help. How to ask for help. What to expect (triage).	COM COM liaisons
First Response Team	Scope and source of authority. How to conduct assessment. Reporting procedure & documentation. How to conduct re-assessment.	COM
Care Response Team	How to provide care to parties involved in conflict.	COM
COM	How to recognize conflict situations. Interpreting first response report. Develop initial plan of action. Scope and source of authority. How to confer per G-11.502j (1). When to use trained mediators & facilitators.	Professional trainer
Council and Presbytery Committees	How to recognize levels of conflict. When to seek assistance. How to seek assistance.	COM

Presbytery Staff	First Responder skills. How to record initial call for help. When and how to dispatch first responders.	COM O.J.T.
Mediators and Facilitators	Professional level mediation and facilitation skills. Scope and source of authority. How to report results.	Outside training organizations.
PJC and Investigating Committees	How and when to use ADR	Stated Clerk

Task Force Recommendations

That a team of capable persons be trained to take conflict resolution to its higher levels in those cases where that is needed.

That sessions and pastors be oriented to the early signs of conflict needing help from the Presbytery through workshops and in an ongoing way by COM liaisons.

That pastors and elders serving on session be given a Ppresbytery-produced handbook welcoming them to spiritual leadership. The handbook should include a well-designed communication process map with “whom to call” for a variety of resources including conflict situations.

That a group of individuals be selected by the Committee on Ministry and trained to provide pastoral care to parties involved in conflict.

That the following 8a – 8d be adopted and communicated to the members of the Presbytery (congregations and ministers) as the standard procedure for responding to conflict.

a. When: Whenever the early signs appear, or the session or pastor has other insight, information and motivation that, in their judgment, requires help from the Presbytery. Pastors and sessions should ask for help earlier, rather than later, and should err on the side of asking too soon rather than too late.

b. How: Any method of contact would be acceptable. The person receiving the contact will ask some pertinent questions and record the answers on a first contact information form.

c. What to expect in response: The first response will be an assessment of the conflict, which will provide guidance to the Committee on Ministry in forming a treatment plan.

d. In addition to assessment, the presbytery will take intentional steps to provide pastoral care to parties involved in conflict. Care will be designed to continue through the duration of the conflict until settlement and/or reconciliation. People who are supported emotionally and spiritually during difficult circumstances are 1) more likely to see the process through to reconciliation and 2) more capable of recognizing their own role in the conflict and taking responsibility that is rightly theirs.

That a group of individuals be selected and trained by the Committee on Ministry and authorized by it to conduct initial assessments of conflicts on behalf of the Committee on Ministry.

That a group of individuals be selected by the Committee on Ministry and trained to work on its behalf in situations requiring a high level of conflict management skills.

That \$5,000 be provided for training as described in this report for 2008.

That, in the event deeper healing is needed, the trained individuals mentioned in #11, above, be utilized, or outside agents with the necessary facilitation skills be engaged.

That: a) the Presbytery confer with the General Assembly Office on the Constitution to insure that Presbytery policy and practice provide appropriately for confidentiality and privilege when cases involve mediation; and b) training be offered to the Permanent Judicial Commission and Investigating Committees about when and how ADR should be used.

That the Council develop a guiding policy and procedure for cases involving congregations wishing to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Appendix 1 - Responses from Other Judicatories

New Brunswick Presbytery

From: Joyce Emery
Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2007 1:55 AM
To: Corey C. Schlosser-Hall
Subject: Re: Conflict and Creative Financing

Dear Corey,

I have not gotten back to your requests but will take a few moments now in the wee hours of the morning.

Conflict. I read your plan of action beginning with analysis of past situations. How we got at this in our new structure was to put together a "Crisis Team" on the Committee of Ministry. This team is made up of wise COM members and co-opted folk who have been trained to deal with crisis. God has provided each year for us to have a mental health professional on this team. I can't tell you how helpful that has been. Any COM liaison and staff can call in this team to help evaluate a situation and put together a plan

of action to address the crisis (or conflict). The plan usually takes a year at least to implement and the assignments are clear. It is essential that the COM members have good relationships with the sessions and pastors with whom they are working. The moderator of session is always included in a portion of the plan implementation. Communication is essential.

By God's grace this process has worked well – but each situation has been totally different and the plan unique. But our process is similar:

COM liaisons, moderator of session or presbytery staff call the team together.

Team hears the story from key leaders.

Team goes on site and begins to "read" the situation.

Team comes out and prepares an action plan.

Team communicates plan to every party and makes assignments for follow-up.

Action plan is implemented. Prayer is always essential.

Grace and Peace,
Joyce Emery, New Brunswick Presbytery

Synod of Southern California & Hawaii

. . . To answer your first question, our Synod has contracted with Eric Law of the Kaleidoscope Institute to help us through our transition. A lot of his materials are really helpful at handling conflict in a multi-cultural context which all of us on the West Coast live in. I'm impressed with him, his work, and have signed on as a facilitator/trainer. You can read up on his approach at www.diocesela/ki

Gracefilled Peace,
Edie Gause
Transitional Synod Executive
Synod of S California and Hawaii
Office: 213-483-3840
Mobile: 213-369-9808

Olympia Presbytery

Corey,

On to conflict resolution –

We too have a task force looking at ways we can more effectively serve our churches experiencing conflict. We are looking at models coming out of Lombard Mennonite training, Steinke, etc. Folks on the task force have backgrounds in system dynamics, counseling, conflict resolution, communication, church development, and pastoral care.

In years past we “assembled lessons” as you phrased it. That led us to restructure our entire COM so that we now have 10 sitting members of COM and 30 other folks we call our “Pastoral and Congregational Care Team” (PCCT) who work under the direction of a COM member as team leader. The PCCT folks each have one or two churches they are assigned to. Each person’s mission is to get to know their church(s), build a relationship with the pastor, attend worship and events, so that they are known as friend and trust is built. That way a Presbytery rep is involved with every church both in their joys and their concerns. We see it as a preventative strategy. If trouble is brewing we then can come alongside the church early on, before it escalates. In addition to this contact COM has focused COM on prevention in other ways ---- offering Presbytery wide workshops on systems (Steinke), personnel committee training, Session training, etc. We are now working on a course that may end up being required of all pastors (optional for elders) that has to do with how to handle issues of power, control, confidentiality, truth telling, listening, ethics, spiritual abuse. I’ll keep you posted on how that develops. We have found that these issues often lie at the heart of conflict.

We are just beginning to wrestle with the issues of helping pastors get into homes at a reasonable cost. First Pres. Tacoma is looking at arranging a down payment no interest loan to their incoming pastor. I have a lot to learn about all this and would appreciate partnership in figuring out how best to proceed.

A full day awaits me so this is perhaps shorter than you would like. Maybe we can touch base again next week. Hope you find something in the above ramblings that proves helpful.

Take good care. You are a joy to work with!

Peace,
Lynn Longfield, General Presbyter
Olympia Presbytery

Synod of the Pacific

The Synod of the Pacific is planning a consultation for this coming May (2007). Each presbytery can send four individuals at the Synod's expense. Others are welcome but must pay for their own travel and lodging expense. The general idea of the consultation is to give our presbyteries the opportunity to come together and share information of how they are dealing with the concerns of congregations relative to the PUP Report. We are hoping to also have a presentation by Dr. Jill Tabart on consensus building. Dr. Tabart is from Australia and works with the Uniting Church in Australia. She is the author of the book, "Coming to Consensus: A Case Study for the Churches."

Rob Brink, Synod Executive
Synod of the Pacific

Appendix 2 - INTERVIEW GUIDE - North Puget Sound Presbytery Task Force on Conflict

Preliminaries:

The purpose of the interview is to learn from the experience of the person interviewed so that the Presbytery might become a more effective agent of healing and reconciliation within local churches.

The most fruitful approach is through open-ended questions. With the permission of the person interviewed take detailed notes. Then use those notes to provide the Task Force with the interview results within the format of this guide.

The information you receive is likely to be given without regard to the order you will give to the responses later. Take it as it comes and arrange it later.

The following categories are suggestive of the information the Task Force needs. Not every question will be addressed in every interview. Before closing the interview, go over this guide and ask any questions you feel are important and have not been covered.

As a guide for the interview itself, several questions are included below to help the interviewer to obtain the information we are seeking.

What happened in the conflict process?

Here we want as objective a description of key conflict events and processes as we might be able to obtain. Here are some suggestions for the sort of questions to ask at the interview.

Briefly describe what the conflict was about.

In retrospect, what were the early signs of conflict that you now recognize?

What steps were taken at the onset of the conflict to work toward resolution?

How would you characterize the progress of the conflict in terms of:

- a. Its scope? (Did it start large and get reduced to a few people later, or visa versa, etc.)
- b. Its complexity (Was it at first a single issue and later multiple issues, for example?)
- c. Its intensity.

Describe the quality and effectiveness of communication related to the conflict.

What precipitated contact with the presbytery?

With whom in the presbytery was contact first made?

What were the first responses of the presbytery?

How did the presbytery involvement change over time?

Describe the process by which the conflict came to an end.

Evaluation

What were the most helpful actions taken within the congregation and its leadership in relation to the conflict?

What were the most helpful actions taken by presbytery representatives in relation to the conflict?

What other factors contributed positively to conflict reduction?

What actions taken within the congregation and its leadership, if any, were detrimental in dealing with the conflict?

What actions taken by the presbytery and its representatives, if any, were detrimental in dealing with the conflict?

What other factors contributed negatively to conflict reduction?

What other comments or information was given by the interviewee that helps evaluate the handling of the conflict?

What kinds of unresolved feelings or wounds might still linger within the congregation at this point in time?

Suggestions for the future

In your opinion, is there anything that needs to be done regarding this conflict that has not yet been done?

What suggestions do you have for the congregation or the presbytery about handling conflicts that may arise in the future?

INTERVIEW REPORT

Date of interview _____ Person interviewed _____

Church _____

Interviewer _____

1. What is your assessment of the conflict?

2. What do you feel was done well?

a. By the congregation

b. By the presbyery.

c. By the pastor at that time

3. What do you feel was done poorly?

a. By the congregation

b. By the presbytery?

C. By the pastor at that time.

4. What are the most important things for the Task Force to learn from this interview?

5. What potential Task Force recommendations might arise from this interview?

Appendix 3 - Biblical and Theological Background on Conflict

Jesus prayed that all who would believe in him would be one. "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:20-23 NIV).

This prayer expresses the highest hope for believers. The unity for which Jesus prayed is realized only in Christ and God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. This unity is not a human achievement, but can be found only in devotion to Jesus Christ. Our disunity within the Church of Jesus Christ is a sign of our spiritual weakness or failure. Ultimately the cure for disunity must be sought devotionally and spiritually.

Although unity is called for, sameness is not. The Church of Jesus Christ welcomes all people, just as Jesus did. The Church is not fully the body of Christ without the rich diversity exemplified in the New Testament.

Jesus told his disciples to love one another as he had loved them. (John 13:34) This is the new commandment that pertains to the covenant community of which we are a part as followers of Jesus. The commandment to love one another does not rise to the level of complete unity, but contributes to it.

Certainly loving one another as Christ loved us is not the whole work of the Church. The Church has a mission of evangelism and service. The challenge to the Church is to live out its mission in all its gritty reality without losing sight of the quality of its community. If we cannot achieve complete unity, we can perhaps learn to love one another. But to love one another as Christ has loved us is still beyond our reach, it would appear, for he gave his life for the Church.

Jesus told his disciples to forgive one another with extravagance. (Mt.18:22; Lk 17:4) The command to forgive is accompanied by the instruction to be reconciled. Jesus said that before making an offering at the altar, one should seek reconciliation. (Mt. 5:23; Lk 5:24) He urged haste in such matters (Mt. 5:25) Forgiveness and reconciliation do not rise to the level of love, yet they are within the grasp of all who would pursue them.

Nevertheless, the New Testament is rife with examples of church conflicts that were responded to in other ways. When Paul was in conflict with Peter, he resorted to denouncing him publicly (Gal 2:11-14) Yet, Paul was later reconciled with Peter. When the council met in Jerusalem (Acts 15) there was heated debate. Paul separated from Barnabas in ministry over the issue of John Mark. The disciples of Jesus argued about who would be greatest among them. The sons of Zebedee asked for a special place in Christ's kingdom and the other ten apostles were upset about it. The Corinthian church was divided and quarreling over issues of leadership and questions of practice. Paul resorted to cajoling and threats in dealing with their conflicts.

It is clear in the New Testament that a gap exists between what is taught about conflict and what was practiced in the face of actual conflicts. There was no single strategy or method. When there was a case of incest Paul urged excommunication. He urged suffering wrong rather than bringing a civil suit against a fellow Christian. Cases varied, and with those variations the intervention methods varied.

The biblical background upholds the highest standard as unity in Christ and the highest ethic in the love commandment. It does portray church conflicts as the real experience of the Church from the beginning. There is a clear call to seek reconciliation through forgiveness. The practice of the Church seems to include a variety of approaches to conflict based upon the case at hand.

The biblical and theological background leads directly to the conclusion that mere conflict management is not sufficient. The Gospel calls for complete reconciliation through forgiveness and a life of mutual love in Christ.

Appendix 4
Presbytery of North Puget Sound
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Policy

Whereas the Form of Government and the Book of Discipline provide for Alternative Dispute Resolution, and

Whereas negotiated resolutions of conflict are generally more successful than imposed solutions, and

Whereas negotiation is to be preferred over either litigation or continued conflict,

It is the policy of the Presbytery to encourage and support Alternative Dispute Resolution for conflicts arising within the Presbytery and its congregations.

Those who engage in facilitating ADR ("neutrals") within the Presbytery are to be properly qualified by training and experience.

Statements, offers and conduct occurring in the ADR process are confidential, and to the extent allowed by Church law, not admissible in any formal proceeding. The results of ADR, however, are admissible.

Notwithstanding the provision for confidentiality, neutrals facilitating ADR within the Presbytery are obligated to report to the Stated Clerk any previously unreported incidents of abuse that become known during the ADR process and any threats of harm to persons or property.

Neutrals are to be chosen who do not have a relationship with any of the parties to conflict.

Participants in ADR retain their rights to use the remedies provided by the Constitution.

Except as provided for in the Constitution, participation in ADR is voluntary.

Costs of ADR are generally to be borne equally by the parties to conflict, although if deemed necessary the Presbytery or a congregation may assist in paying the costs.

Appendix 5 - Signs of conflict

Given the premise that conflict within the church is normal and to be expected and even welcomed as a potential catalyst for growth and transformation, we have identified the following signs of conflict that can become antagonistic, divisive and injurious to individuals and churches, if not recognized and dealt with in a healthy and constructive manner.

a. Early warning signs *

1. A chill in the relationship (avoidance, sarcastic comments in group settings)

2. Expression of a criticism disguised as a “concern”
 3. Entrapment (double-bind questions, “Judas-kissing” under the pretense of “caring”)
 4. Mobilizing forces (whispering during meetings, calling unofficial meetings, spreading rumors/gossip against key people)
 5. Meddling (email campaigns, misuse of church newsletter to promote a narrow viewpoint or agenda)
 6. Resistance (active: openly challenging or ridiculing the pastor or leaders; passive: failing to show up for activities and then telling others why they chose to be absent)
- b. Later warning signs***
1. Sloganeering (ex: “John is a good man, but not good for this congregation.”)
 2. Accusing (projecting onto others the feelings a person has about him or her self)
 3. Spying (recording phone calls, voice mail messages, stalking)
 4. Distorting (creating false picture of actual encounters)
 5. Misquoting scripture (taking passages out of context to fit the situation)
 6. Smirking (inappropriate smile or cocky grin)
 7. Pestering (constant phone calls or requests for “a brief word with you”)
 8. Letter writing (campaigning one’s cause against the advice of the leadership)
 9. Pretense (portraying oneself as a victim or underdog or as a champion of the underdog)
 10. Lobbying (giving special attention to groups, especially new members, to create doubt about leaders)
- c. Red flags of antagonism***
1. Previous track record (those with antagonistic behaviors in the past tend to repeat them in the present)
 2. Parallel track record (similar behaviors in other areas)
 3. Nameless others (won’t disclose names of “supporters”)
 4. Predecessor-downer (flattering the pastor while degrading others)
 5. Instant buddy (but later becomes contemptuous)
 6. Gushing praise (secretly harboring unrealistic expectations)
 7. The “I gotcha” flag (trying to catch the pastor or leader in an error)
 8. Extraordinary likeability (too smooth, too perfect)
 9. Church hopper
 10. Liar
 11. Aggressive (extreme, unethical or combative measures)
 12. Flashing dollars (public display of generosity)
 13. Note-taker (at inappropriate times)
 14. Portfolio (appearing to carry evidence)
 15. Sarcasm disguised as a joke (use of sharp, cutting words)
 16. Different drummer (“rules are good for others – not me”)
 17. Pest (persistent caller, challenger, questioner)
 18. The cause flag (going too far to support a cause)
 19. School of hard knocks flag (portraying a victim stance; apt to flaunt struggles)
 20. Situational loser (difficulty accepting loss of an issue)

Individuals who wave a number of these red flags are likely to stir up unhealthy conflict by the use of many of the warning signs listed above.

*Adapted from Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict*, 1988

Other signs of conflict

1. Unhealthy communication
 - a. Lack of communication between committees and the congregation
 - b. Triangulation
 - c. Rigidity, back-talking, inflexibility and deep-seated anger
 - d. Fear of confrontation
2. Habitual blaming
 - a. Growing distrust of pastor and church leaders
 - b. Tendency to deify and then crucify pastors
 - c. Misunderstanding of leadership roles
 - d. Unrealistic expectations
3. Decreasing membership and income
 - a. Assumption that the pastor is to blame for decreased membership
 - b. Staff members deciding to leave
 - c. Burnout of leaders or pastors
 - d. Families choosing to leave
4. Controlling behaviors by individuals or group
 - a. Groups organize and try to come up with “answers” to the conflict(s)
 - b. Threats about leaving the church and taking their financial support with them
 - c. Resistance to new ideas, needs or programs, especially when proposed by younger adults or families
5. Leaders see a problem and don’t know where to take it.
6. Spirit of depression, discouragement and despair
 - a. Lack of identity and purpose – unclear regarding “what defines us as the body of Christ in this place?”
 - b. Absence of focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit – unclear regarding “what does the Holy Spirit want to do among us?”
 - c. Lack of vision – unclear regarding “what is our mission?”
7. Anxiety: Common triggers of anxiety in churches:**
 - a. Money
 - b. Type of worship
 - c. Issues involving sex/sexuality
 - d. Pastors’ leadership style
 - e. Old versus new
 - f. Growth/survival
 - g. Staff conflicts/resignation of staff member
 - h. Internal or external focus
 - i. Major trauma, tension, or transition
 - j. Harm done to a child/death of a child
 - k. Property, building, space, territory
 - l. Distance between the ideal and the real

** Taken from Steinke, Peter, *“Healthy Congregations Respond to Anxiety and Change”* (1999), Workshop Two.

Appendix 6

CONFLICT ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET
Locate from 1 to 10

URGENCY

1 _____ 10

SPREAD (How widespread within the congregation is the controversy)

1 _____ 10

INTENSITY

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

COMPLEXITY

1 _____ 10

DIVERGENCE (How much difference in how different parties tell the story)

1 _____ 10

FUNCTIONAL BREAKDOWN - PASTOR

1 _____ 10

FUNCTIONAL BREAKDOWN - SESSION

1 _____ 10

RECOMMENDED INITIAL LEVEL OF INTERVENTION (Per Book of Order)

