

## Conflict in the Bible

### **A. General Observations**

1. The Bible is full of diversity and conflict.
2. Conflict is often an opportunity to learn something new about God.
3. Authentic peace requires both conversion and justice.
4. Reconciliation is God's:
  - a. Overriding concern for human beings throughout history.
  - b. Primary responsibility, not ours
  - c. Gift to us. The church's role is not to make reconciliation happen (God does that), but to create an environment where God's reconciliation has a better chance of happening.

### **B. On Loving Our Enemies**

*People in conflict often behave like enemies – and scripture calls us to find ways of loving them.*

1. It includes national enemies. (Jonah)
2. It includes oppressors. (Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36)
3. It includes sisters and brothers in the church. (Matthew 18:15-20)

### **C. Reflections on Matthew 18:15-20 (and vv. 21-22)**

1. God intends for us to live in peace. Peacemaking starts with our sisters and brothers.
2. Conflict is inevitable and normal.
3. The question is not *if* we have conflict, but how we *respond* to it.
4. Direct communication is better than triangulation.
5. Draw on the gift of others.
6. Conflict between individuals concerns the whole church.
7. God is present for the purpose of helping people resolve their differences.
8. Verses 21-22 = How much we should forgive? (70x7) Forgiveness doesn't mean we avoid healthy boundary setting, or that we forget.

### **D. Reflections on Acts 6:1-7**

1. Conflict is a normal part of church life.
2. Conflict may signify that:
  - a. People are out of touch with each other or with the group.
  - b. An injustice or a structural problem within the organization needs changing.
3. The best way to respond to conflict is to come together (even though our natural response may be just the opposite).
4. When you come together, look for the people who are wise and in tune with the Spirit.
5. Conflict can improve relationships in the church.

### **E. Reflections on Acts 15:1-35**

1. Resolution begins by acknowledging that a problem exists.
2. Find a forum adequate to address the problem.
3. Seek representation of all viewpoints.
4. Learn to listen, not only speak, prophetically – seek discernment through each other's voices what God is telling the church.
5. Use the varied gifts within the community to assign roles in discussion.
6. There comes a time when a decision and implementation bring relief.
7. Conflict can be a means of God's revelation of new directions for mission and ministry.

## **TIPS\***

### **10 Agreements for a functioning Team**

1. We will assume the best intentions in one another
2. We will not get mad at anyone for failing to fulfil expectations we never clearly set.
3. We will give feedback honestly and directly, not through 3<sup>rd</sup> party gossip
4. We will focus on specific behaviors, not attack personal character
5. We will give everyone chances to learn and to improve
6. We will not get mad at anyone if we've never given them feedback and a chance to improve
7. We will own our part in contributing to conflict.
8. We will not form cliques
9. We will own our part in creating and implementing solutions
10. We will not take each other for granted

### **SAFETY/ COMFORT PLAN**

Conflict is incarnational. It impacts us physically. Counter that impact with something physical. Physical movement is crucial.

Have a plan in place for if things get escalated.

- Bring your favorite drink into a potentially escalated meeting or a doodle pad, or cozy hoodie.
- Go for a walk before and afterwards.
- Carry into meeting a picture of someone who showed you courage.
- Light a candle to represent the presence of the Holy Spirit
- Fidget items.
- Take quick breaks to stretch.
- Prepare to do something fun after the meeting; baking, or reading a good novel (the sun does not rise and set on this conflict and the people involved. Remind yourself there is life, health, laughter, joy, friendship outside of a contentious meeting).

Also, think about and prepare for how a team will celebrate once a tough decision is made.

## Questions/ Statements to Uncover Needs

- If you got what you were asking for, what would it do for you?
- What would \_\_\_\_\_ give you?
- Is there something you would like me/ us to understand?
- Say more about your concern.
- Can you give me an example?
- Tell me what would help you to feel better about \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you tell me your understanding of what would happen if nothing is done?
- What is a solution you could live with?
- How would \_\_\_\_\_ meet your needs?
- I sense this is important to you, can you tell me/ us what is going on with/for you?
- What was the impact of \_\_\_\_\_ to you?
- What is important for you about \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## DEESCALATE

### SCARF

We are more inclined to change behavior and make wiser decisions more effectively if we experience: Safety Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness.

- Safety: *“Don’t worry you don’t have to make a decision tonight and you will not be forced to speak.”* You will be responsible for communicating in a manner that addresses the needs of others.
- Certainty: *“Let’s come to a decision next month at our admin mtg.”* Or *“This is what a circle process looks like (give handout).”*
- Autonomy: *“In a circle process everyone gets an equal chance to speak or not to speak.”*
- Relationship: *“Sharing in a Circle helps us feel connected to each other”*
- Fairness: *“In a circle everyone’s feelings and needs are taken into consideration.”*

## STOP

- Stop – talking/ arguing/ etc.
- Take a step back (physically or mentally disengage). Take a break. Pause – breathe deeply for 1min.
- Observe: What are you feeling? Where do you feel it? What do you need in this moment? Use the 5,4,3,2,1 method: name five things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste
- Proceed mindfully.

## FLIP-IT

Flip an accusation to curiosity. From negative to positive.

*“I think Debra is a liar! → Is flipped to → “Sounds like truth telling is important to you and you want a conversation where everyone is honest and upfront.”*

Follow-up questions could include: *“What does an honest and upfront conversation look like? Can you share with me the last time you had such a conversation? How did you know it was honest? What are the characteristics of a truthful conversation with Debra?”*

## TO VOTE OR NOT TO VOTE

Voting creates winners and losers. To lose a vote leaves a bad taste. Often people talk about it negatively for years afterwards. Consider consensus instead of voting.

- You can consent.
- I do not consent but will not stand in the way of moving forward
- I do not consent and here is my alternative. For example, *“I believe we should have a second bid.”*
- Then spend time on addressing how this alternative addresses needs.

Other questions for the group to ask is, *“What do you need to move from disagreement to consent? What concerns need to be addressed in order for you to agree?”*

Use the Circle to come to Consensus. Hint: Often Smaller Groups are more effective at making tough decisions than larger groups. Consider larger groups for information sharing, invitation, input. Use smaller Circles for decisions.

## RESTORE RELATIONSHIPS

If injury has occurred.

Three questions:

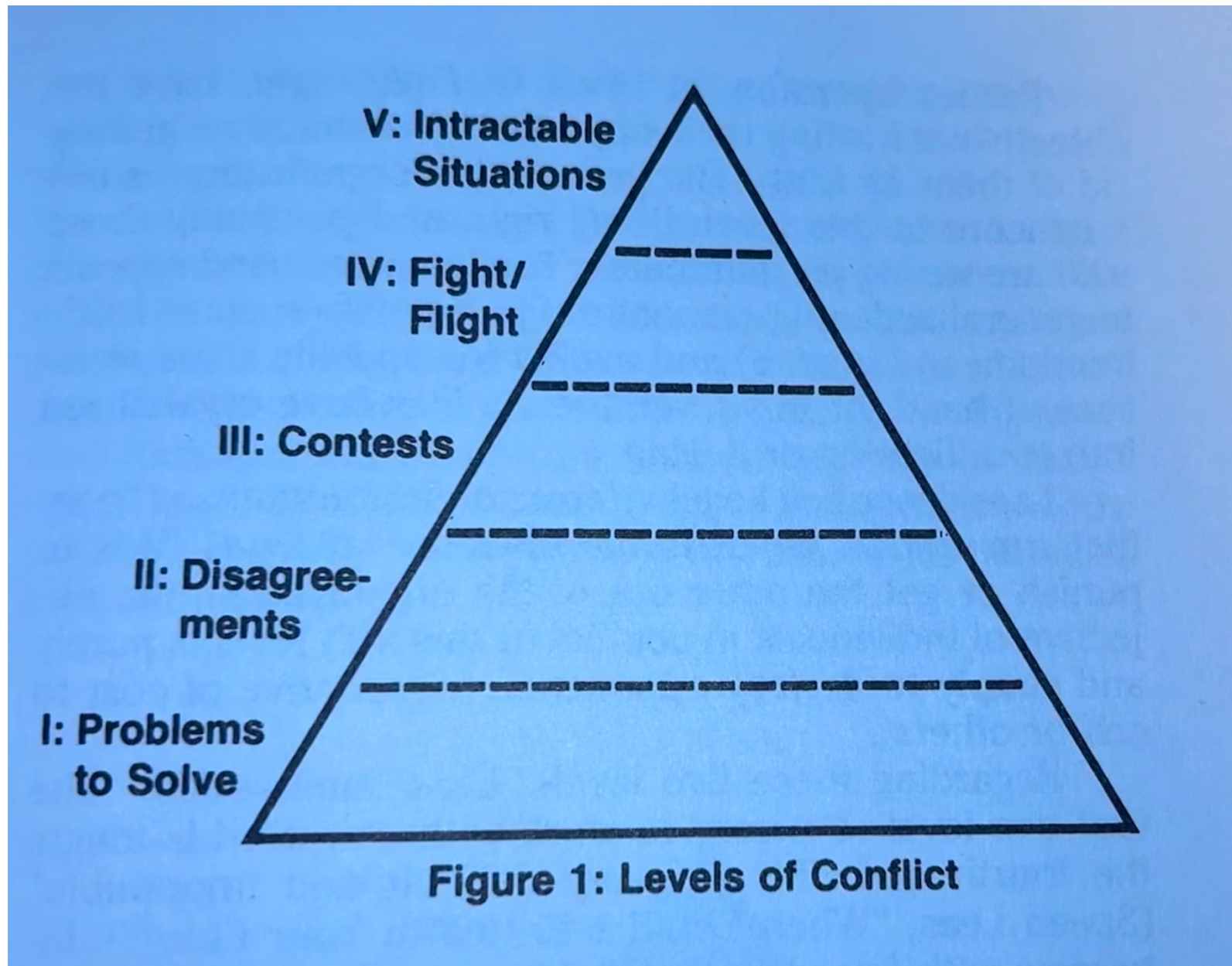
- What Happened?
  - What happened, just the facts?
  - How did you feel?
  - What do you think?
  - Use five senses.
  - Use “I” statements
  - Do not assume the intent by others.
  - Focus on your feelings and thoughts.
- What was the impact?
  - This could include impact beyond direct parties
  - Difference between Intent and Impact
- What needs to happen to make things right (think boldly)?

\*All Tips can be processed and practiced using The Circle (See The Circle Handout)

For a list of human needs and feelings:

<https://www.sociocracyforall.org/nvc-feelings-and-needs-list/>

## Constructive Versus Destructive Conflict



## Conflict Resolution in the Church

### ***“SQUISHING TRIANGLES!”***

#### ***Upon hearing feedback about a third party not present:***

##### Step 1 –

Invite the person to speak with the third party.

##### Step 2 –

Invite the person to go with you to speak to the third party.

##### Step 3 –

Ask permission to tell the third party using their name as a reference.

##### Step 4 –

Say, “I’m sorry you feel that way. Let me know if you change your mind” and end the conversation.

### ***STEPS TO WORKING OUT PROBLEMS...***

Ask PERMISSION to speak with them.

Recount what you SENSED (see, hear, feel, taste, smell).

Tell them what your INTERPRETATIONS are about what you sensed (example, “When I see you do \_\_\_\_\_, it looks to me like \_\_\_\_\_”).

CHECK it out with them (example, “Is that true?”).

Tell them how you FEEL about it.

Tell them about your INTENTION (Why even work on this issue?).

#### ***SUMMARY:***

- Permission
- Senses
- Interpretation
- Check
- Feelings
- Why?

#### ***HELPFUL HINTS:***

- Focus on using “I” language
- Manage your own nervous system
- Prepare ahead of time
- Turn assumptions into agreements

## The Circle

Conflict is based on unmet needs. The needs are valid, and the feelings we have when needs are not met are valid. (For a list of needs and feelings, see link below)

What is not automatically valid is expressing our feelings in divisive ways. What is not valid is attempting to meet our needs in destructive ways.

Example of an effective way to state a need such as the need for, connection/ cooperation/ safety/ closeness/ community/ compassion:

*"I have been leaving our Admin mtgs feeling sad because I feel disconnected from you/us when we talk about '\_\_\_\_\_'. I'm wondering if others feel the same. I'd like to take some time to talk about my need as a group using The Circle."*

The goal is to express and meet the needs underneath the conflict in a way that takes responsibility for feelings. Use "I" statements and focus on your need. Express the facts. Can highlight visible facts but not our assumptions (see handout; *Conflict Resolution in the Church*).

How to deal with conflict? Circle Process.

In a circle, questions are asked which are designed to do many things including building community or uncovering needs.

In a circle you can do one of three things:

- Share
- Pass and come back
- Pass (if you pass i.e. refuse to engage in the process, it does not excuse you from being responsible for the way you express your feelings later on. In other words, you can pass, but you can't shout later.)

Talking piece: something meaningful, fairly small (like a swatch from a prayer quilt, a small cross, rock with the word grace/love on it, etc.)



Center Piece: Everyone bring tokens – create a center piece related to the theme of the work of the church. Examples of center pieces could include representations of one’s Christian discipleship i.e. copy of the upper room, copy of grandmother’s bible, cross from church alter, etc.

Begin with Reading (Romans 12/ Matthew 18:15-22/ Acts 6:1-7) or Activity (could include creating the circle piece by writing a single word on a card about one’s hopes/ feelings/ etc. and then placed in center one at a time).

Co-Circle Keepers (best to have two): Circle Keepers are the people who prepare for the circle and guide the process. Often they are the ones who prepare the questions.

The best kinds of questions are open-ended like, “What, who, how, when questions. Avoid “Why” questions or questions which have “yes” or “no” answers.

Only the person with the talking piece may talk which is passed from person to person. The piece is passed to the left (the way of the heart). Circle keeper starts and models process and level of intimacy.

Example Questions:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Question: Who you are, what did you bring to the centerpiece?
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Question: When did you feel the closest to God in this church?
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Question: What sticks out for you when reading the handout, *The 10 agreements for a happy and well-functioning team* (see handout)?
- 4<sup>th</sup> Question: How do you feel now about the way we do our work and what would you like to do differently?

It is ok to postpone the decision of an issue in order to address legitimate needs such as the need for connection. It is ok to postpone a decision until the body of Christ gets loving about *how* it makes decisions.

*The Little Book of Circle Processes*, by Kay Pranis

For a list of Needs and Feelings see: <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/nvc-feelings-and-needs-list/>

## Circle Prep Sheet\*

**Preparation:**

Co-keepers:

Circle Purpose:

Where & When:

Talking Piece, center piece, readings, and other things to bring:

Who do you have to talk to and what prep do you need to do ahead of time:

## Circle Prep Sheet (Cont'd)

### Conducting the Circle:

Opening reading/ activity:

Explain how the circle will work (example: everyone gets a chance to share):

Opening Round Question (Usually something lighter or a check-in):

Questions:

Closing Round Question (What might you be able to ask?)

What “must” be addressed in circle (brainstorm, be wild, be bold)?

What is follow-up?

Closing (reading/ activity)?

\*This preparation Sheet came from the DRC of Kitsap County