HOW TO MOVE FROM DIVIDED BY CONFLICT TO BOUND TOGETHER BY CONFLICT

PLEASE NOTE: Lasting change from one set of patterns to another will require a shift in culture within your church. Cultural change is a long-term project that requires sustained vision, commitment and stamina. Develop a plan and weigh up the costs before you begin.

ENACT – LIVE A FAITHFUL MODEL

1. **Model effective skills for handling conflict, both personally and as a leadership team.** This will include:
   - Inviting disagreement. Move towards disagreement, not away from it, and work at listening.
   - Confronting destructive behaviour in a spirit of gentleness.
   - Being confrontable: allow others to challenge you and to raise situations where they have felt hurt or offended by you.
   - Talking directly with others, not about them, when you have concerns.
2. **Empower and encourage all sides when issues arise, so that all sides feel they have been heard.** Not by saying, "I think you're right," but by saying, "You have perspectives that need to be heard," and "I think it is important that the church hears your views."

STUDY – READ THE BIBLE FAITHFULLY

3. **Examine different examples of conflict in the Bible**, noting not only those that stress harmony, but also those that assure the presence of diverse gifts and views in church life. Discuss how disagreement and conflict is an integral part of life in the early church.
4. **Explore passages which can provide some principles for how to handle conflict in the church.** Consider what insights can be gleaned from New Testament passages such as Matthew 18, Acts 6 and 15 and what these mean in your context.

TRAIN – EQUIP THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO LIVE FAITHFULLY

5. **Provide skills training opportunities** – for all holding leadership roles in your church, or as group leaders, and look to equip people to work through differences and to handle conflict more effectively and constructively.
6. **Use opportunities for ongoing training**, through preaching, home groups and Lent courses with conflict or dealing with difference as a theme.
7. **Develop materials for young people** – which will educate not just the next generation, but the generation doing the teaching! Give opportunities for young people to encounter and work through differences in creative ways.

COMMUNICATE – INCORPORATE INTO FAITH-GIVING WORSHIP

8. **Write and sing** songs, create banners and posters, and develop liturgies that reflect an understanding of the church's life that incorporates reconciliation, practising forgiveness, working at listening, dialogue and restoration of relationships.

REMEMBER – CELEBRATE AND GRIEVE, AND DRAW FROM THE PAST

9. **Reflect together on your congregation's history.** Give opportunities to grieve (by honouring, recollecting, acknowledging) for significant people, events and "golden eras" now past. Remember also difficult conflicts that were worked through, and major losses that were experienced.
10. **Draw on your denomination's traditions.** Your denomination may have traditions for dealing with conflict that can be constructive and helpful. Sometimes these are traditions that have fallen into disuse. Explore what the resources and traditions are and see how they might be applied or strengthened.

BUILD STRUCTURES – CREATE A FAITHFUL INSTITUTION

11. **Identify destructive habits for dealing with conflict and disagreement. Agree on constructive habits to replace them.** Find ways to regularly remind the congregation of the guidelines or covenants that exist and include them as part of the welcome and induction of new members. Remember that the process for agreeing the guidelines, and the collective ownership of them, is as important as the covenant adopted.

12. **Strengthen relationships**, especially by nourishing respect for and involvement of diverse individuals.
    - Celebrate diversity by acknowledging individuals for their unique accomplishments, contributions, activities and gifts.
    - Encourage small fellowship groups, and re-formation of these after a certain period.
    - Plan work projects, retreats, fellowship meals and other ways to mingle informally.
13. **Find ways of using meetings effectively and in ways that reflect and develop the culture you want to encourage.** Focus on purpose, timings and planning to enable them to be more effective. Focus on good chairing and good process.
14. **Strengthen reporting and communication mechanisms, including electronic communication and social media.**
    - Make public the reports and minutes of committees.
    - Share regularly reports from leadership and decision-making groups.
    - Agree guidelines for the appropriate use of email and social media, and encourage personal and collective responsibility for upholding these
    - Enable a variety of ways for providing comments and feedback on key issues and decisions to widen the responses.
15. **Foresee and plan for major decisions.** This will include:
    - Planning the process at the beginning with all key groups involved and giving time for the process.
    - Providing several ways for input by members other than just large group discussions, such as small groups, questionnaires and having leaders available at special times.
    - Being prepared to initiate conversation with and coax responses from habitual withdrawers and avoiding having the same few individuals always have the last word or make the final decision for the whole group.
16. **Prepare carefully for leadership evaluation and transitions.** Use outside resources in establishing proper processes, even if your church has a good history in leadership evaluations and transitions.

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