

ENACT – LIVE A FAITHFUL MODEL

1. **Model effective skills for handling conflict, both personally and collectively among those in leadership.** For example:
 - a. Invite and work with disagreement. Work at listening and understanding. Move towards tension, not away from it.
 - b. Confront destructive behaviour, firmly but gently.
 - c. Be confrontable: show that it's OK for others to raise concerns with you, or to challenge you.
 - d. Talk directly with others, not about them, when you have concerns.

2. **Empower all sides to feel they've been heard, when issues arise.** Not by saying, 'I think you're right,' but by saying, 'Your perspective also needs to be heard.'

STUDY – READ THE BIBLE FAITHFULLY

- 3. Examine different examples of tensions and conflict in the Bible**, noting not only those that stress harmony, but also those that affirm the presence of diverse gifts and views.

Discuss how disagreement and conflict are an integral part of life in the early church, and throughout church history.

Reflect on the stories of Biblical figures who offer good examples and those offering bad ones.

- 4. Explore passages which can provide some principles for how to handle conflict.** Among others, consider what insights can be gleaned from passages such as Matthew 18, Acts 6, Acts 15, Ephesians 4 and James 1.

TRAIN – EQUIP PEOPLE TO LIVE AND WORSHIP FAITHFULLY

5. **Provide skills training opportunities**, to equip everyone to handle conflict more effectively and constructively.
6. **Use opportunities for ongoing training**, through preaching, small groups and courses.
7. **Develop materials for children and young people**, which educate not just the next generation, but the generation doing the teaching.
8. **Write and sing** songs, create banners and posters, and develop liturgies that reflect an understanding of the church's life that incorporates working at listening and dialogue, addressing differences, practising forgiveness and reconciliation, and restoring relationships.

REMEMBER – CELEBRATE AND GRIEVE, AND DRAW FROM THE PAST

9. **Reflect together on your church or group's history.** Give opportunities to celebrate and grieve for past 'beloved leaders' or 'golden eras', by honouring, recollecting and acknowledging.

Remember difficult conflicts that were worked through, and major losses that were experienced.

Acknowledge the present realities that you're collectively facing, and the need to face the challenges of life as it is now.

10. **Draw on your church's or group's traditions.** What helpful traditions are there for handling conflict, that are constructive and helpful? Explore these resources and traditions, and see how they might be applied or strengthened.

BUILD STRUCTURES – CREATE A FAITHFUL GROUP

- 11. Identify patterns and habits in your group that are unhelpful for dealing with disagreement and conflict. Agree on constructive habits to replace them.** Find ways regularly to remind the church or group of any guidelines that exist, and introduce these to new arrivals.

- 12. Strengthen relationships,** especially by nourishing respect for and involvement of diverse individuals. For example:
 - a. Celebrate diversity by acknowledging individuals for their unique accomplishments, contributions, activities and gifts.
 - b. Nurture and develop small groups, re-creating them periodically.
 - c. Plan work projects, retreats, fellowship meals and other ways to mingle informally.

FUNCTION BETTER – CREATE A FAITHFUL ORGANISATION

13. Learn to hold better meetings. Explore how meetings work, and what can help to make them more effective. Focus on good chairing and process.

14. Strengthen reporting and communication mechanisms.

- a. Make public written reports and minutes of committees and councils.
- b. Offer regular oral reports from leadership and decision-making groups.
- c. Regularly solicit comments on key issues and decisions from people who aren't leaders.
- d. Test whether your structure really supports good decisions and sufficient representation.

15. Foresee and plan for major decisions. For example:

- a. Plan the process at the beginning with all key groups involved.
- b. Provide diverse ways for people to offer input, such as focus groups, questionnaires and having leaders available at special times.
- c. Initiate conversation with those who are shy, and coax responses from them. Avoid having the same few people always have the last word.

LEAD BETTER – STRENGTHEN FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP

- 16. Ensure primary leaders are adequately and broadly supported, and are not overly reliant on just one or two mechanisms.** Ideally support might include all these: a spiritual director; a work consultant or coach; a peer group; regular retreats; and regular study time.
- 17. Establish systems for leaders to receive feedback.** Remember that honest feedback – both positive and negative – is vital for growth and development. Find out what feedback mechanisms others have used effectively.
- 18. Be willing to use outside assistance, when appropriate.** As leaders or as a group, recognise when you're out of your depth and need external support. As a group, prepare carefully for leadership transitions. Be humble. Find out what resources and wisdom external bodies and organisations can offer.