



CHANGING HOW WE DO CONFLICT



SESSION 7
HANDOUTS

SESSION 7

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Introduction

This session recognises that we are all embedded in particular local contexts, and that each group – including every church – has its own patterns of handling tension and conflict, some of which are likely to be unhelpful, while others may be constructive. The session explores how we can go about changing – or at least beginning to change – the culture within our church, group or organisation. This will include agreeing healthier ways of handling conflict, and developing new habits as a group, where these are needed. (It doesn't cover how conflict is handled differently in diverse cultural ethnic groups.)

Session Objectives

- To clarify what is meant by 'culture' and recognise the culture of niceness which can pervade the Church.
- To illustrate two contrasting group cultures, identifying a range of negative and positive patterns for handling conflict within groups.
- To explore a range of strategies for changing a group's culture in a more positive direction.
- To develop a personal plan of action for beginning to change the culture in one's own context.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session participants will have:

- Defined the term 'culture'.
- Heard 10 Unspoken Commandments illustrating a culture of niceness which can pervade the Church.
- Engaged with an illustration of two contrasting church or group cultures.
- Identified some negative patterns of handling conflict that connect with their own experience.
- Affirmed a positive pattern that they have seen in their church or group.
- Reflected on and discussed a range of strategies for changing a church or group's culture in a more positive direction.
- Developed a personal plan of action for beginning to change the culture in their own context, and received some feedback on this.

Overview of Session Segments

Welcome:	Arrival and introduction
Way in:	Introducing the idea of 'culture' and a group's way of doing conflict
Pointer 1:	Presenting two different conflict dynamics
Explore 1:	Identifying negative patterns that people have encountered
Explore 2:	Affirming positive patterns that people have encountered
Pointer 2:	Moving from divided to bound together
Explore 3:	Developing a plan to change the culture
Review:	Looking back over the session
Feedback:	Completing written feedback

Handouts

- Handout 1: Introduction and overview of Session 7
- Handout 2: Unwritten rules for handling conflict in church
- Handout 3: Patterns of handling conflict
- [Handout 4: Moving from divided by conflict (display sheets only – not handed out)]
- Handout 5: Moving from divided by conflict to bound together
- Handout 6: Moving from divided to bound together: my ideas and plan
- Handout 7: Feedback form for participants (for return to course leader)

UNWRITTEN RULES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT IN CHURCH?



- Be nice. Avoid confrontation.
- Don't listen to your opponents. Prepare your defence.
- Avoid people who disagree with you. Mix only with nice people like yourself.
- Find someone to blame, especially a leader.
- Save up your irritation for a big public moment, then dump it on others.
- Avoid conflict in the church. Pray that others will see it your way.

With one or two others, discuss: What is one unwritten rule about how tension or conflict is handled in your church or group? Make a note below:

PATTERNS OF HANDLING CONFLICT



DIVIDED BY CONFLICT	BOUND TOGETHER BY CONFLICT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conflict and disagreement are viewed as wrong, sinful, dangerous, a sign of not caring, and something to avoid at all costs. 2. People spiritualise conflict. They equate their own view with God's will, call others to get right with God, and say that prayer is all that is needed to sort things out. Anyone with a different view is liable to be demonised. 3. People blur issues and people. Relationships suffer when people disagree on issues. Those who disagree are treated coldly and disrespectfully. People won't disagree with those they like or respect. 4. Leaders discourage expression of differences and ignore problems. Instead they plead for peace and harmony. 5. Indirect communication flourishes. People talk about others, but not with them. 6. People hoard up hurts and offences, and don't seek reconciliation early on. 7. In the stress of conflict, a few vocal people are heard, intimidating the majority. 8. People react defensively or explosively to the views of others. Others' views are attacked without proper reflection. 9. Discussion focuses on positions and people get stuck on their own solution. 10. Timing is uneven. People delay a decision as long as possible and then rush to take a vote. 11. There is a low tolerance of uncertainty, and people want issues over and done with. 12. People repress inner conflicts caused by past experiences and continually project them into the current conflict, often unconsciously. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conflict and disagreement are viewed as inevitable, an opportunity to learn more, and as evidence of involvement and concern. 2. People draw from spiritual resources. They exercise disciplines of listening, confession and prayer. They test views against the Scriptures and their tradition. They expect God to speak through each person. 3. People separate issues and people. Relationships are maintained even when people disagree on issues. Others with whom they disagree are treated with respect, and friends can disagree. 4. Leaders invite disagreement and welcome different views. They want all perspectives to be heard. They too can disagree with others. 5. Direct communication is maintained, and clarification is sought when differences arise. 6. People keep short accounts with one another, and address hurts and offences when they arise, not allowing them to fester. 7. In the stress of conflict many voices are heard, and people are energised by debate. 8. Individuals interact thoughtfully with the views of others, and make a response only after making an effort to understand others. 9. Discussion focuses on the process and the problem and only later on possible solutions. 10. Timing is steady. People foresee issues, plan process (adjusting for the unforeseen), examine options without rushing, then prepare proposals for a final decision. 11. People are willing to move calmly through inevitable periods of uncertainty as all options are considered. 12. People are consciously aware of their own past hurts or unresolved conflicts and take responsibility not to project these into the current situation.

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.

MOVING FROM DIVIDED TO BOUND TOGETHER BY CONFLICT



REMEMBER

Lasting change from one set of patterns to another requires a shift in culture within your church or group. Cultural change is a long-term project that requires sustained vision, a plan, commitment and stamina. Weigh up the costs before embarking on this.

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 needs to be heard as well.'

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 handling conflict.** Among others, consider what insights can be gleaned from texts 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 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 are 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 traditions are there for handling conflict, that are constructive and helpful? Explore these, 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 to remind the church or group regularly 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, 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 letting 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 for support.** 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.

MOVING FROM DIVIDED TO BOUND TOGETHER: MY IDEAS AND PLAN



Which two or three strategies do you most want to focus on for changing the culture of how your church or group handles conflict?

(See Handout 4 'Moving from divided to bound together'.)

**Who else needs to be involved if the above strategies are to be implemented?
How might you go about securing their involvement?**

When signalled by your facilitator, share your provisional ideas in a small group, and offer one another some appropriate encouragement or challenge.

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Participant Feedback Form

Please complete this form at the end of the session. Thank you.

1. Please circle your evaluation of the following aspects of the session where 1=Unhelpful and 6=Very Helpful:

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. The content provided in the session | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| B. The way the session enabled you to learn | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| C. How your leaders led and facilitated the session | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| D. How participants worked and interacted together | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| E. THE SESSION OVERALL | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |

2. What you most appreciated or found helpful about the session was:

3. One thing you see yourself applying or using from the session is:

4. What you would change or like to be different about the session (either the content, or the way learning was facilitated, or both) was:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this feedback form.

GROUP:

COURSE LEADERS:

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Course Leader's Feedback Form

Please complete a form at the end of each session. Please respond to question 5 after reading your participants' feedback forms. Thank you.

1. Please circle your evaluation of the following aspects of the session where 1=Unhelpful and 6=Very Helpful:

A. Guidance provided in the Leader's Guide	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. PowerPoint slides, handouts, scripts and other materials	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. Quality and appropriateness of the content	1	2	3	4	5	6
D. Process offered for presenting content and enabling learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
E. How you led and facilitated this session	1	2	3	4	5	6
F. How participants worked and interacted together in this session	1	2	3	4	5	6
G. THE SESSION OVERALL	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. What you most appreciated or found helpful about the materials provided for you was:

Thank you for taking time to complete this feedback form. Please then scan it as a PDF file, and email it to Bridge Builders: **bb@bbministries.org.uk**

Only send the course leaders' feedback form.

Bridge Builders will seek to improve Growing Bridgebuilders in the light of feedback from all the course leaders.

COURSE LEADERS:

LOCATION:

GROUP SIZE:

TYPE OF PARTICIPANTS:

3. What you most struggled with in leading the session was:

4. What you would change or like to be different about the materials provided for you is:
(Note: this could relate either to the content, or to the process for facilitating learning, or both)

5. Having read all the participants' feedback comments what you would most draw attention to is:

6. Any other comments: