



# Introduction



Fit4  
*Life*

Promoting Health for Growth

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# Introduction

# Training Course/Manual for *Fit4Life*: Promoting Health for Growth



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# Why Fit4Life? – Leaders' Guidelines



Over the past 12 months the Regional Ministers have become increasingly conscious that while there are more and more books being written about healthy congregations, and while there is a great deal of talk in our churches about being healthy, the reality is that there are underlying relational, structural and process issues in many church cultures that stop those churches from being healthy and therefore stop our churches meaningfully relating the Good News to people in their communities.

The significant underlying issues we have observed are:

- Poor Self-awareness
- Lack Of Communication
- Inability To Handle Difference & Conflict
- Poor Understanding Of How To Make Decisions Together
- Unrealistic And Unclear Roles And Expectations

The material in this resource manual and CD is designed to face these underlying issues and to provide creative ways so that churches and individuals can work towards a far greater degree of health in their everyday life and ministry.

The material concludes with a section on Developing a Church Covenant – an agreed way of behaving towards one another – that helps to sustain a healthy community. Our hope is that when churches have begun to face some of the issues raised in the pack and begun to learn new skills, they will begin to enshrine this thinking and working in a covenant, which will hold people accountable to a different way of relating and enable new people to come into the community on a different basis – they will join a healthier church, and commit themselves to sustaining that well-being.

Our aim is to encourage those who attend the workshops to go back to your church and over the next 12 months share this material in whatever way is most helpful so that your church culture might be transformed and your church might have both healthy community and mission.

## Why Fit4Life? – Leaders' Guidelines



The material provides a variety of role-plays, biblical teaching segments, scenarios, small group exercises and facilitation guides so that it can be communicated in a relevant way.

It is of great importance that you read through all the material so you can get a broad sense of what it is about and then can talk together with others from your church who have attended the workshop to plan how you might best use the resources in the year ahead.

If you need help in understanding the material or to use it effectively then please contact your Regional Minister.

Our prayer is that God might work in fresh and vibrant ways amongst us as His church in 2004 and beyond so we will not only experience healthy community but relevant mission.

**The Regional Ministers  
January 2004**

# How to use Fit4Life



If we want to have a healthier body we must take responsibility for our diet and exercise and develop regular sustainable good habits. Becoming a healthier representation of the Body of Christ is no different.

*“We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.” Eph 4:16 (The Message)*

Some of the material can be concentrated into some intensive time together but other parts must become part of our regular repetitive fitness regime. Remember the goal is to become healthier not just know about what could make us healthier. The healthier we become the more effective our mission and ministry together will be.

## 1. The Health Resort Approach

An occasional intensive visit to a health resort where a process of intensely focusing on detox-ing the body, lots of healthy food, an intensive exercise program and some indulgent pampering, can leave you feeling refreshed and ready to get back into the rigours of daily life with renewed health and vitality.

### **Suggestion:**

- A church camp or retreat could be a great way to do the same thing for your ‘church body’. Going away together to work on some of the ‘Fit4Life’ process with your church, either to kick it off or work on a significant section of it.

## 2. The Health Kick

When we want to make a significant improvement in fitness for a specific task or new activity we give that aspect a special focus for a short period of time. Lose a few kilos before summer, get ready for the new season of our sport, develop muscles needed for a new sport, learn the rules and tactics for a new sport, etc.

### **Suggestions:**

- Spending a whole day on one of the topics to really get into it and make significant improvement in our mastery of it.



## How to use *Fit4Life*

- Spend a 4-6 weeks focusing on a particular aspect: some sermon input, home groups focus on it, special workshop nights for specific groups - leaders, youth, ministry leaders, etc.

### 3. The Health Regime

A lot of health and fitness is gained not just in an intensive burst, but by long, gradual, and often sequential development. You don't start with the heaviest weights - you work up to them gradually. Many activities require a range of different skills that must be learnt separately before they can be coordinated together successfully.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Have regular nights (e.g. monthly) to look at which one activity is considered each night.
- Systematic teaching input: in sermons, bible studies, home groups.
- Workshop nights practicing the skills and discussing how to do it better together.

### 4. The Healthy Lifestyle

Much of the effort of getting fit and healthy is soon lost if we don't maintain a regular pattern of good diet and exercise.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Regularly return to some of the exercises and practice them over and over again.
- Don't use all of the input material at once; spread it out over time so topics and issues regularly come up for review and further reflection on how to put them into practice.
- Ensure that some practices become enshrined in a covenant – to enable the church culture to change for good.

#### **Accountability**

Most of us require some level of accountability to stay on a good fitness program, to a gym instructor, diet consultant, coach or personal trainer.

## How to use *Fit4Life*



### **Suggestions:**

- Develop a plan for some regular accountability to keep you on track. Have the facilitator/leaders of your process regularly review progress and update the next stage accordingly, perhaps with reference to a small group of people who help oversee the whole process.
- If you think you require an external facilitator for any of the sections, consult with your Regional Minister.
- Spend time in church meetings reflecting on progress made, getting feedback, and promoting what comes the next.

### **Plan to succeed:**

Give responsibility to a specific group to develop the plan and oversee it: the leadership, a facilitator team, a Fit4Life steering committee, etc., so that someone passionately owns responsibility for promoting it and keeping you on track.

- Develop your own unique plan for growing healthier and maintaining the gains you make.
- Decide what you want each part of the body to be working on: leaders, congregation, youth, etc.
- Map out a yearly Church program that includes some of the elements above and will fit your unique church style and approach to church life, mission and ministry together. Then write it into your church calendar for the year.
- Keep reviewing the knowledge and skills that will keep you functioning as a healthy church. Remember new people coming in will not have been part of what you have already done.

*“You’ve all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs to win; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You’re after one that’s gold eternally. I don’t know about you, but I’m running hard for the finish line. I’m giving it everything I’ve got. No sloppy living for me! I’m staying alert and in top condition. I’m not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself.” 1 Cor 9: 24-27. (The Message)*

# What's the good News About Being Healthy?

**Aim:** To make a link between personal health and church health. To do a first assessment of the health of your church. To explore why becoming healthier might be important to the church and to God.

**Time:** There are two parts to this exercise. Each should take about 40 minutes. You can do either exercise separately or flow easily from Part 1 into Part 2 keeping the same small groups.

**You will need:**

**For the first part:**

A piece of paper and pen for each participant.  
A piece of butchers paper and felt pen for each small group of six.

**For the second part:**

Lots of magazines with colourful pictures.  
Some glue sticks for each group  
A few pairs of scissors if you want to cut out and display pictures.  
A piece of butchers paper and felt tip pen for each group of 6.  
A Bible or New Testament for each group of 6.

**Part 1**

1. Move into small groups of about 6 people and talk about the following questions, recording your responses on the butchers' paper.

- Most of us know what it is like to be in very good health. What does it feel like? What are the benefits that come to us? (If people need a hand in getting started, you might mention words like Energy, Strength, Confidence...)
- Most of us know what it is like to be battling on with a body that is unhealthy. What does it feel like? What happens to us? (Words like Lethargy, Frustration, and Exhaustion may be helpful...)
- When you have completed your lists, read over them again, discussing how a church can also experience these feelings when it is healthy or when it is unhealthy.

2. Now, remaining in your groups, quietly reflect on your own for a few minutes, look over the lists again, and quietly think about your own church. What feelings of being healthy or unhealthy is your church exhibiting at the moment?

## What's the good News About Being Healthy?



3. On a scale of 1 (terminally ill) to 10 (robust with vitality), how would you assess the health of your church?
4. Once everybody in your group has completed this, you may like to discuss each member's rating within your group. Can you come up with a group assessment of your church's health?

### Part 2

1. Gather people into small groups of about six people. (If you have already done part 1, it would be easiest to continue with the same groups.) Distribute to each group several colourful magazines. Ask them to find a picture/pictures strongly representing good health.
2. Once they have selected their pictures, they should cut or rip them out and stick them onto one sheet of butchers paper.
3. Ask the group to record on the butchers paper what the picture they have created says about good health. What does it look like? What does it feel like? What does it cost? How do you get it? What do you use it for?
4. Read one or two of the following Bible stories:

a) Mark 1:29-31	The healing of Peter's mother-in-law
b) Mark 5:1-20	The healing of a man with many demons
c) Mark 10:46-52	The healing of blind Bartimaeus
d) Luke 13:10-13	The healing of a crippled woman
e) Luke 17:11-19	The healing of 10 lepers
f) Luke 19:1-10	The healing of Zacchaeus
g) John 9:1-3, 6-7, 35-38	The healing of a man born blind

Once you have read the story, picture the scene of the person's healing in your minds. What does this picture say about good health? What does it feel like? What does it cost? How did the person get it? What did the person do with it?

5. Health is a wonderful gift in itself, but it also leads to new possibilities. What things might your church be able to do more effectively if it were in better health?
6. How might the people in the community around your church be affected if your church were in better health?





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# Section 1



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Promoting Health for Growth

# Section 1

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# Church Health and Self-awareness



Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God...

Romans 12:3

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- 1.2 Role Play      Self-awareness in Groups
- 1.3 Bible Study    Toward a God-centered Self-awareness

## Section 1 Contents



# Church Health, Self-awareness and the Bible

## Exercise

This exercise would be ideal in groups of about 6 people.

**Aim:** To help people to discover how self-awareness is a Biblical ideal and necessary for our growth toward healthier church life.

To invite people to explore how congregational awareness and openness to the truth may be developed.

**Time:** There are 2 parts to this exercise:

Reading the 4 stories and answering questions - 20 minutes

Reading Bible passages and reflecting on four questions - 30 minutes.

**You will need:** A copy of the handout below (p15),  
and some Bibles in each group.

Self-awareness is an important foundation for good health.

- A person is unlikely to go to the doctor for medical care unless they become aware that they are unwell.
- A person is unlikely to take up a fitness program, unless they become aware that their lack of fitness is impeding what they want for their life.
- A person is unlikely to go on a more healthy diet, unless they become aware that their present diet is likely to be causing them harm.

It is the same in the church. The first step to becoming healthier is to face the truth that there may be some aspects of our way of being and ministering together that are in fact weighing us down, and damaging our witness to the Gospel of Jesus.

In fact, when we think about it, we have all probably seen many examples of poor self-awareness in the church, and the troubled results.

## Exercise

You may like to ponder the following stories. Each person may read them quietly or you may take turns reading the stories out loud.

# Handout for Church Health and Self-awareness



Jeremy was a young Christian, and as eager as they come. At a Young Adults Bible Study, he had filled out a questionnaire on spiritual gifts and concluded that he had the gift of prophecy. So, he would often interrupt Bible Study groups or worship services or use personal conversation in order to “deliver a word from the Lord”. It was all done with a great sense of zeal, but it became increasingly obvious that Jeremy’s prophecies were actually an opportunity for him to tell long and detailed stories about his own life. He was actually crying out for people to notice him and take an interest in him, but nobody quite knew how to raise the issue with him. So, bit-by-bit, people started to feel so uncomfortable that they stopped inviting him to functions and started to ignore him. Jeremy’s lack of self-awareness and the inability of his church to help him started to become a cause of ill health for the whole church.

Jane was quiet. She was regular at worship and at church meetings, but never spoke up, never said anything. Yet she developed some wonderful relationships with some of the children in the church. This led to her becoming a helper at Sunday School and a regular presence in the church’s playgroup ministry. Jane was a revelation. Not only did the children love her, but she also had a great way of responding to their questions about God. She began to get to know their parents, and when families were going through a rough time, she was the first to turn up with a casserole and an offer to pray for them. Families began to come to church because of Jane! However, when the children and families’ pastor approached Jane to join his ministry planning group each week, Jane took flight. She felt she had nothing to offer, and couldn’t bear the prospect of being embarrassed and humiliated in this way. She began to withdraw from Sunday School and playgroup. Jane’s lack of awareness of her gift eventually deprived the church of a capacity it sorely needed.

The Open Hearted Baptist Church savoured its reputation as a welcoming church. Indeed, there was always someone at the front door whose ministry it was to greet them, and get them to sign the visitors’ book. A well-presented letter would arrive in their letterbox on the following Tuesday, asking that they come again. At the August pastoral care group meeting, a letter from James and Jessica was read out to responses of deep concern. They said they had attended the church for 2 months, but felt unwanted. They said that they had never got past the superficial “lovely to see you again” conversations. They had stood alone with their coffee after the service most Sundays. Nobody had invited them to their homes or to any of the church’s home groups. They actually had wanted to help with the church’s recent fete, but they hadn’t been able to find out whom to speak to. They concluded that the church did not actually want new people and was happy to remain as it was. The Pastoral Care group prayed for James and Jessica, asking God to minister to whatever

## Section 1.1 Handout



## Handout for Church Health and Self-awareness

had made them so angry, and the church continued to lack a healthy self-awareness of what it was actually doing.

Paula was a gifted woman: witty, intelligent, hospitable, articulate and with brilliant organisational skills. She had “leader” written all over her, and quickly became the church’s most significant organiser. However, it was not all smooth sailing. She was often quite quick to criticise the contributions of other people, especially the pastor, whose pastoral style she didn’t seem to care for. She would often call on him to be more decisive, and then oppose him when he was. She became the chairperson of church meetings, and was brilliant, except that she controlled agendas so tightly that nobody much spoke up about anything. She would cancel meetings if she couldn’t be there personally. Inevitably, a move arose to have her thrown out of her role. She was devastated. All she had ever wanted, she said, was to love her Lord and serve the church. She fought the move and it wasn’t long before the whole church was dividing into bitter factions. Paula’s lack of self-awareness began to destroy the church she loved.

### Part 1

1. What are your reflections on these stories?
2. Do you think that these are common themes or experiences in churches?
3. Can you think of instances in your own experience where a lack of self-awareness prevents a church from greater health and effectiveness in ministry?
4. Which story impacts you the most? What does this say about your own self-awareness?

### Part 2

The Bible does not explicitly command us to be self-aware, but the need for us to face the truth about ourselves in relation to God, our relationships with one another and the implications of our behaviour is a constant theme.

- In Genesis 32:22-31, Jacob’s wrestling with a shadowy adversary is all about his need to face the truth about who he is so that God may transform him.
- 1 Corinthians 13:12 looks forward to the time when our knowledge of ourselves in relation to God is as clear as God’s knowledge of us.

## Handout for Church Health and Self-awareness



- Romans 12:3 calls us to think realistically of ourselves from the perspective of what God thinks is important.
- Many of Jesus' stories are about inviting people to face the truth about themselves:
  - Mark 10:17-23     The rich young man
  - John 4: 1-42        The Samaritan woman at the well
  - Luke 7: 36-50       Jesus' dinner with Simon the Pharisee
- The letters to the churches in Revelation hold a mirror to the churches so that they can see their truth in relationship with God.
- James 1:22-25 tells us that obeying the word of God is like looking in the mirror, taking note of the picture it shows us and then living in the light of what we have seen.

This suggests some important questions for our churches:

1. How can we grow in our commitment to know and love the truth - even the truth that is difficult for us to face?
2. How can we graciously invite and receive feedback from others about ourselves?
3. How can we help others to receive the truth in a caring environment?
4. How can we become a church of openness, trust and honesty?

# Role Play – Self-awareness in Groups

**Aim:** To help us begin to recognise our own agendas and ways of working when we come together.

**Time:** 60 minutes.

**You will need:** Enough copies of the roles for each person to have one each. Copy the sheets and cut up into strips. The roles are on pages 22-23. Each person needs an envelope containing a role and a name badge/sticky label, with Christian names only (i.e. just Peter not Peter Prophet). A way of communicating the debrief/discussion questions – put onto an overhead projector slide/PowerPoint/slips of paper.

## Instructions for Leader to read out:

1. Divide into groups of 6.
2. Each group is being given 6 envelopes, each containing one role and name tag. These are not to be opened yet.
3. The following is the scenario you are in:

There has been discontent with the current morning service. The 10 am service is fairly full, but there has been a feeling that trying to cater well for the children and young people is hard to do at the same time as providing meaningful reflective worship for older people. It seems as if trying to do something for everyone is ending up pleasing no one. The leadership team has proposed a move from one 10am service to two different styles:

- 9.30 Reflective meditative service
- 11.00 Family worship

You are a working group, made up of people representing different interest groups in the church. Your aim is to discuss the proposal and reach a common mind.

4. You may now distribute and open your envelope.
5. Read your role through and put on your badge.
6. Engage in a debate with other members of your group in the style suggested by your role. You each have a desired outcome, but try to engage creatively with the other members.
7. You have 20 minutes to discuss the issues.  
Allow discussion to commence, and keep track of the time. At the end of the discussion put the following questions on the overhead projector, or hand around slips with the questions.

## Role Play – Self-awareness in Groups



### **Debrief:** (remove badges)

- Reveal character profiles to each other and talk about how the discussion went. Was it constructive? Why/Why not?
- People often come to meetings with their own agendas – how do we work creatively and sensitively with this?
- If the aim is to discern the mind of Christ when we come together, how do we help one another to put aside our own agendas?
- Split into pairs and talk with each other about our own tendencies in discussions. Which character do we most identify with?

# Roles for Self-awareness in Groups Role Play

## **Peter Prophet**

You are the youth leader. You had a dream recently in which you felt sure that God was speaking directly to you. In the dream you were underwater and saw a shoal of beautiful coloured fish. You admired their harmony – the way they moved as a group, and stayed together even when negotiating obstacles and searching for food. But suddenly a big ugly shark came and divided the shoal into two groups. The fish seemed to panic and scatter in different directions. All harmony was lost. You are convinced that God is saying that we need to stay together as one congregation in the mornings. Even though your personal preference is for a more youth-oriented service – God has spoken!

## **Dolores Deacon**

You will chair the meeting. You have served many years on the leadership team – in your opinion it is a good group that has grown in spiritual maturity over the years. You feel that only the leaders really understand ‘the pulse’ of the church, and the direction that God wants. The body of the church is full of barely committed people, new Christians and people who are, frankly, just passengers. God has called the leaders to their role, and their views are really the only ones to be truly “in tune”. To question the leaders is to question God’s judgment in calling them. You believe that God has led the leadership to this model of two services as a way of enabling a very diverse congregation to grow in their faith and service.

## **Worried Win**

You have been at the church all your life and have a strong interest in trying to keep things as they were in the ‘glory days’ of the church. You are very fearful of change since it seems to dishonour the life and service of your dear friends in the past that gave everything for this church. You feel it important to point out all the problems and difficulties that others might overlook. People today are too quick to overturn the long-established, tested and God-honouring traditions of the past. If you can’t defeat change, you still feel a sense of triumph if you can delay or defer decisions. Obviously the two service model is an affront, and unworkable.

## Roles for Self-awareness in Groups Role Play



### **Wounded Walter**

Life has not been kind to you. You cannot cope with any more failure, so it is very important that your view prevail. You need to be seen as a valued and essential person. You tend to do this by a self-effacing kind of manipulation. You try to make people feel sorry for you and play the victim role. You actually want a quieter service, because you can't stand the noise and distraction the children make, but you would never admit this openly or say what you really want. Rather you find ways to make people want to protect you from hurt. You take everything very personally, and if you sense that things are not going your way, you may resort to throwing a tantrum.

### **Hen-pecked Harry**

Your wife has told you to vote against the proposed division of the congregation. She says she has canvassed the opinions of all key people, and at least a third of the congregation will leave (including some significant givers) if the proposed split goes ahead. She wouldn't dream of speaking out, but you would be in big trouble at home if you let this one get through! You are not sure what you think really – you would have liked to have listened to all the different views, but you dare not cross 'she who must be obeyed'.

### **Loaded Lucille**

You have been involved in the church some 10 years now. You found great comfort in the fellowship at the time of the death of your dear Freddie, and you have been very generous with the considerable fortune he left you. You were able to fast-forward the sanctuary renovation program, and you have always ensured that the pastors and their families got a decent holiday each year. You also give a good deal of your time to the church – supporting other widows, and running endless coffee mornings. You have come to expect that people take you seriously. After all, the more significant stakeholders should surely have a greater say in what happens in church. You think that a more focussed approach to worship will be good for people and are supportive of the proposal.



# Bible Study – Toward a God-centered Self-awareness

## Romans 12:1-5

This Bible study is designed with a small discussion group of 6 to 10 people in mind.

**Aim:** To invite some in-depth exploration of a Bible passage that suggests healthy self-awareness as part of our dedication to God.

**Time:** An hour would be about right - depending on the group.

**You will need:** A Bible (or the passage printed out) for each person in the group.

Start by reading the passage through a couple of times, then discuss together the following questions.

1. Being a healthy church means, in the first place, being a church that is so grateful to God that it centres its life on being dedicated and pleasing to God.

- How do we ensure that all our life together – our gathering together, our relationships with one another and our service – is marked by this gratitude and is pleasing to God?

2. The “standards of this world” surround us from our earliest memory. They are part of the culture that shapes us. But not all of these standards are helpful in nurturing the health of the church. For example:

Consumerism: Our culture would have us believe that it is OK for me to shop around for a church that suits my requirements, and that I am free to leave it as soon as it stops being what I need. This ignores the fact that God’s call is for us to grow together as the Body of Christ. I need to learn a new standard that calls me to value not only what I desire, but that which enhances the forming of Christian community and our Christian witness.

- Can you think of some other “standards of this world” that may be damaging in our growth toward being a healthy church?

3. Paul encourages us to let God transform us by a complete change of our mind. Then we will be able to know the will of God.

- What can we do as a church to be constantly opening ourselves to God in order that God may completely change our mind?

4. Paul encourages us not to carry into the church worldly standards

## Bible Study – Toward a God-centered Self-awareness



(e.g. of success and status), but to embrace a real, God-centred self-assessment. This is a call to self-awareness. It rules out behaviour where I:

- Consider myself to be better or more important or more gifted or more influential in making decisions than anyone else;
- Consider myself to be less worthy or less important or less gifted or less influential in making decisions than anyone else.
- How would your church change if people had a positive, God-centred assessment of their own value?

5. Paul likens the church to a body with different parts and unique functions, but all working together in the overall welfare of the body. To be part of the church gives us a twin focus – an individual focus as we exercise our own role, and a corporate focus as we only function for the benefit and well-being of the body.

- How can we reconcile being true to ourselves, with always seeking what will promote the health and well being of the body?
- When we are involved in making decisions together as a church, how can I offer my beliefs while allowing my brothers and sisters the opportunity to come to a different decision?

### **For further reflection:**

6. Scripture encourages us to “deny ourselves”. We have often taken this to mean that we are “never to consider ourselves”, or to “deny that we have any needs”. However, experience tells us that this does not make our needs, e.g. for significance or power or recognition, go away. In fact, if we drive our personal needs and desires underground, they are more likely to reveal themselves in ways that are quite manipulative and destructive to healthy church life. It is possible that the Gospel command to deny ourselves actually requires us to know ourselves so well that we are free to allow the call of Christ and the health our life together to shape all our choices.

- How do you think we can balance self-awareness and self-denial?

7. There are other passages you may like to reflect on here, such as:

- Psalm 139 speaks of God's deep knowledge of us.
- Matthew 18 speaks of the importance of gratitude transforming us, so that we might offer generosity to others.
- 1 John 4 links our love for God with love for one another.





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# Section 2



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# Section 2





# Dynamics of Good Communication

**Aim:** To introduce people to basic ideas about what helps and hinders communication and an introduction to this section of the material.

**Time:** 15-20 minutes.

**You will need:** A whiteboard/ flip chart. Textas.

**Step One:** What is good communication?

Using the Gottman diagram (page 32) the dynamics of good communication. The leader can recreate this simple diagram on a board or piece of paper. Alternatively use it as an Overhead Projector slide

“Good communication happens when the intent and impact are almost the same.”

**Step Two:** What prevents good communication?

Introduce the filters that deflect, slow down, distort communication, and prevent intent and impact being the same (Gottman Diagram 2 – page 33)

- Encourage the group to think about what some of these filters might be, and put suggestions on the board/Overhead projector.

**Some Suggestions:**

Assumptions	Expectations	Language	Social status
Body language	Fear	Power/status	Socio-economics
Concentration	Gender	Prejudice	Time limitations
Culture	Health	Self-esteem	Tiredness
Distractions	Ignorance		

If these filters are not addressed, the problem can increase – show Diagram 3 – (page 34)

**Step Three:** What skills are needed to achieve good communication?

If we are to communicate through the filters there are some communication skills we must learn and develop.

- Ask the group to suggest what these skills might be.

## Dynamics of Good Communication

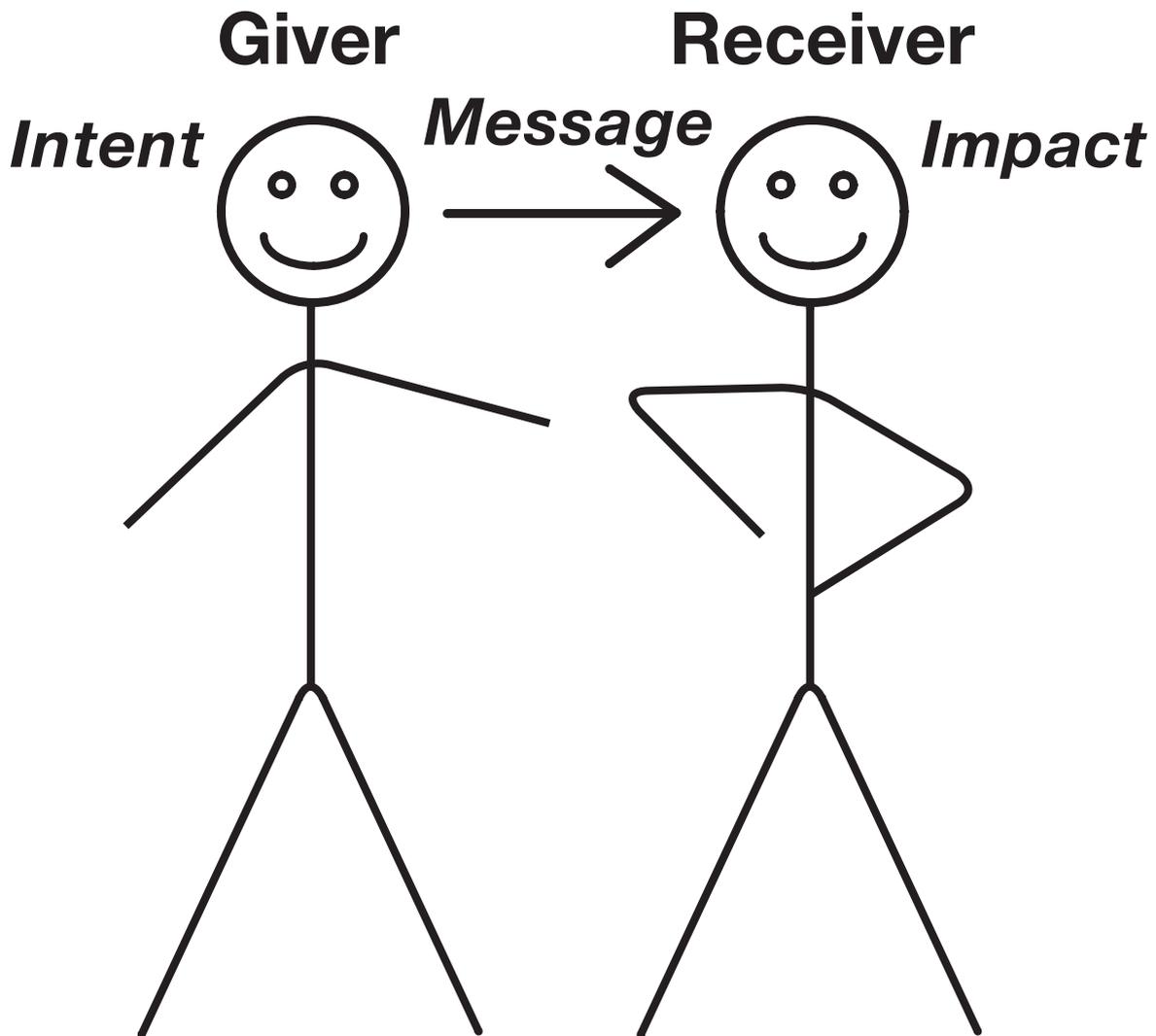


Some important communication skills include:

- Active listening
- Assertiveness
- Bracketing one's own concerns
- Cooperation
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Good will
- Handling one's own emotions
- Self-awareness

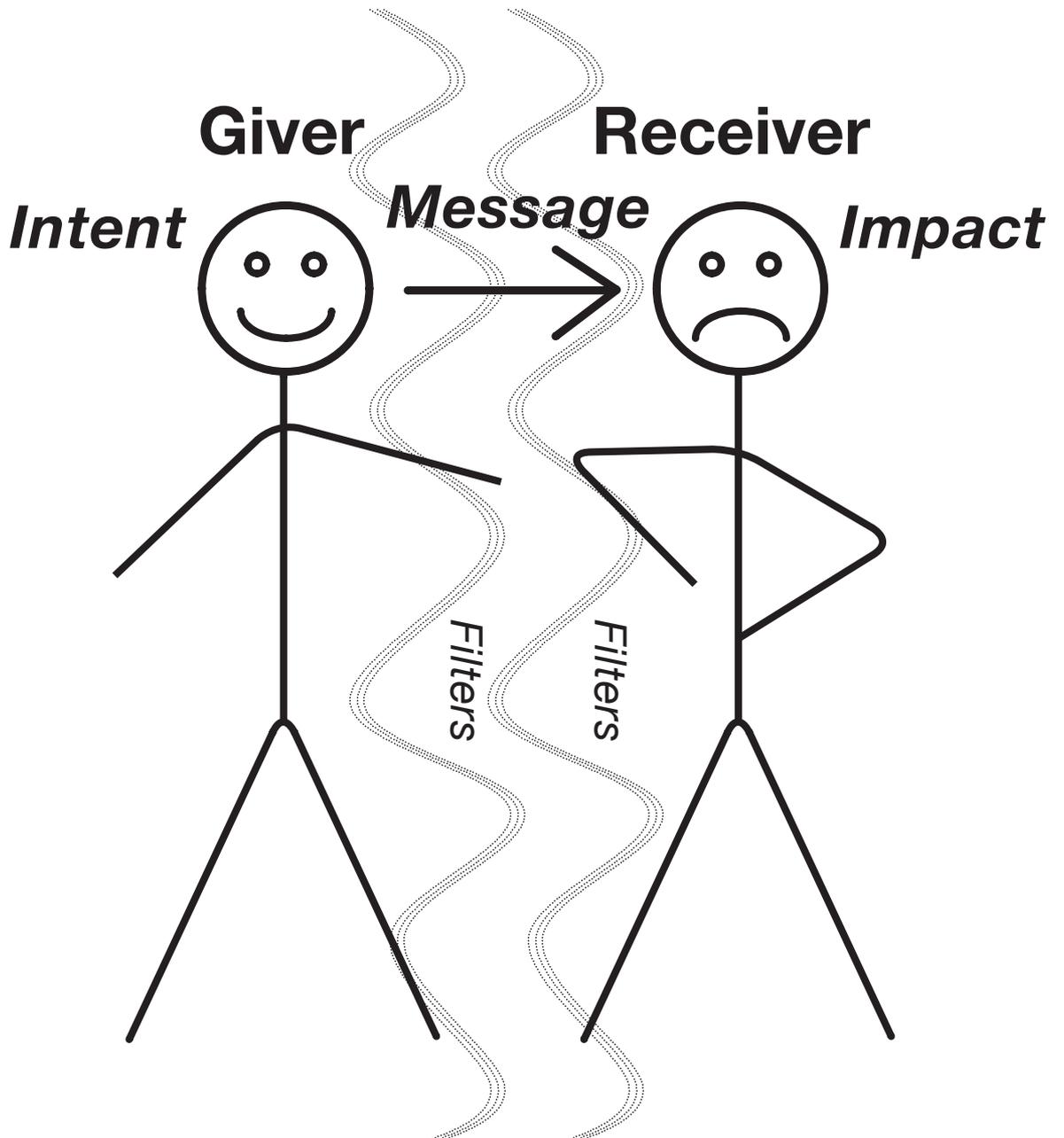
We will be looking at some of these in the following activities.

# Gottman Diagram 1



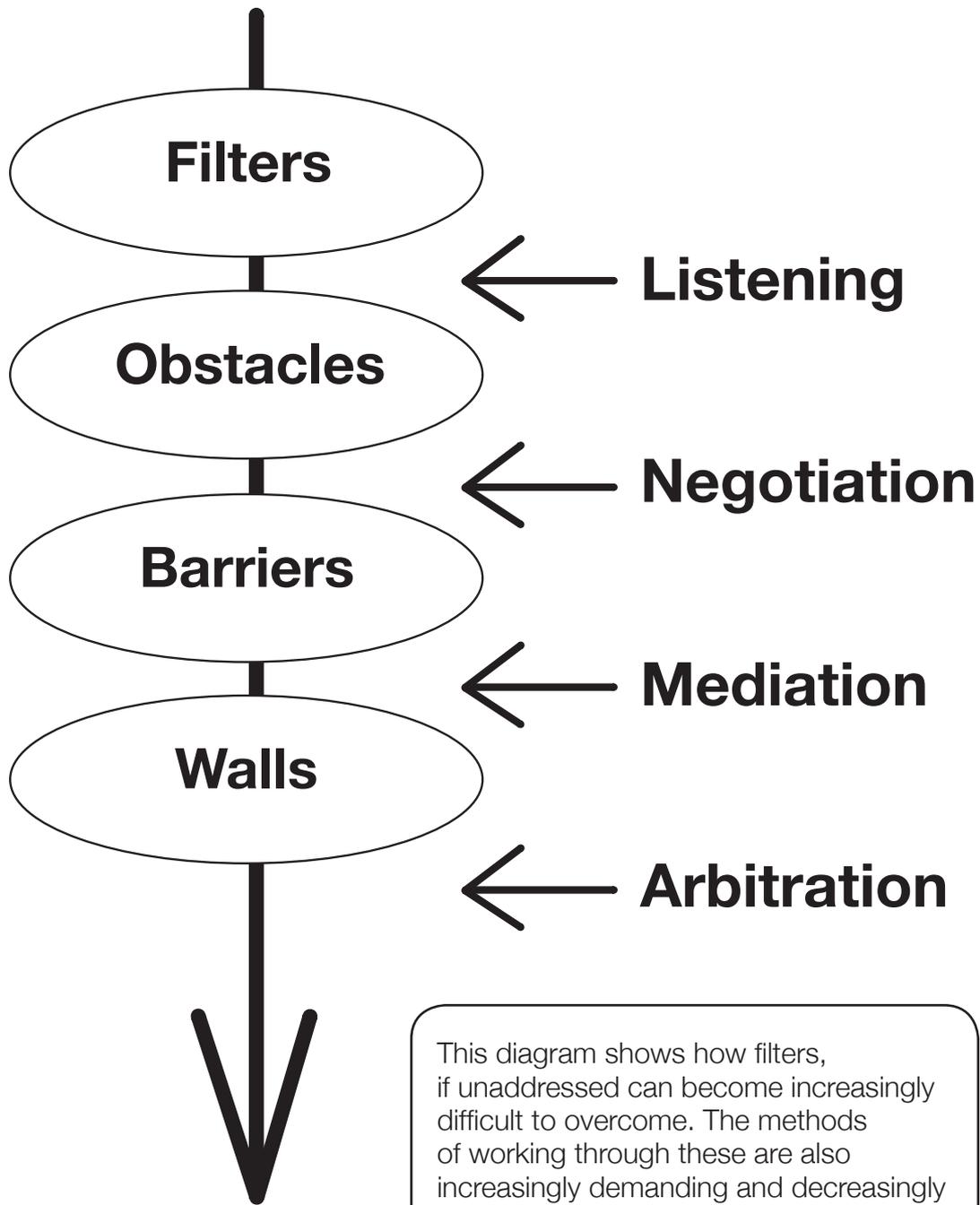
*“Good Communcation takes place when  
‘Intent’ and ‘Impact’ are almost the same”*

## Gottman Diagram 2



*“Filters stop the message getting across”*

# Diagram 3



This diagram shows how filters, if unaddressed can become increasingly difficult to overcome. The methods of working through these are also increasingly demanding and decreasingly effective in holding the whole community together.

# Individual Listening Skills



## Opening Activity

Refer to the sketch on page 36

Sketch requires 2 people - pastor (Voice 2) at desk writing. Voice 1 knocks and timidly enters office

**Aim:** To provide a light-hearted introduction as to how NOT to listen

**Time:** 5 minutes + brief discussion time

**You will need:** 2 copies of the script given in advance to 2 confident readers/actors

## Discussion

**Q:** What was happening in that encounter?  
What was the effect on the person needing help?  
What did the pastor need to do?



## Individual Listening Skills Opening Activity

**Voice 1:** Are you busy, Pastor?

**Voice 2:** The Lord's work is never done, but I can spare a few moments from Job and his so-called comforters. Now there's an example of counselling that makes you wonder doesn't it?

**Voice 1:** If you say so. Actually I wanted to talk to you about something that has been troubling me for some time. You did say that we could always come and talk to you; that you were available at any time?

**Voice 2:** Of course! A trouble shared is a trouble halved.... Well unless you're Job I suppose... umm interesting. I'll just jot that down. Now, come on, out with it. Tempus fugit and all that

**Voice 1:** I believe that I might be called to the mission field.

**Voice 2:** Ahh, I was called to foreign parts once. Oh yes, I'm a bit like St Paul you know – all things to all people. It's hard to know where in the world one can be most useful. I fancied I was called to Mauritius – lovely place.

**Voice 1:** I'd like to test the call. I mean I'm probably not suitable. I've never thought of myself as a particularly good Christian...

**Voice 2:** (cutting in) Oh, they'll take anyone these days, but back in my day it was tough. People knew then how to test a call. Oh yes, I could have had a great ministry amongst the natives, but it was the wife. Terrible fear of spiders she has. One has to make great sacrifices to keep the fairer sex happy. So I never went, but this country is crammed with pagans too you know. Heaven knows I've had my work cut out.

**Voice 1:** I'd hoped that you might pray with me.

**Voice 2:** A pastor's lot in this country is no picnic I can assure you. It's been an uphill task all the way. Two sermons on Sunday; a congregation who'd rather eat arsenic than change, and no decent pay to speak of. You tell me who has the harder time?

**Voice 1:** Perhaps I should come back at a different time?

**Voice 2:** Job thought that he had problems. But at least his friends came to him. Who cares about me? I'm at the beck and call of every whim and fancy. Every loser and no-hoper that thinks they've heard from God...

**Voice 1:** Pastor, perhaps I can pray for you...

**Voice 2:** What! Pray for me? Don't be ridiculous. I'm the expert. I'm the one who prays. But if you've got things off your chest, I'm glad I've been of help. You can come anytime. Always glad to be of assistance – interruptions never throw me. Could you read on Sunday?

**Voice 1:** Nods sadly, excuses themselves, leaves quietly.

(Adapted from original script by VM Lassetter – used with permission) Interactive Teaching and Exercises in Listening

## Individual Listening Skills



### Listening Practice

**Aim:** To give people practice in listening skills.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**You will need:** Room for people to work in pairs or threes comfortably. Copies of the Exercises in Paraphrasing (pages 39 &40) for each participant.

Good listening is key to conflict management. If people feel that they have been properly heard and understood, then their anxiety levels drop, and they will become more able to hear other points of view.

To do this effectively we need to:

**1. Bracket our own concerns.** Set aside our own judgments and values, and seek to properly enter the other's situation. Our pastor was simply sparked into his own reminiscences and his own concerns. He did not bracket at all.

**2. Avoid responding inappropriately.**

**Q:** What are some of the traps we fall into when we try to listen? (List them on a board as people call out.)

Examples of traps include:

**Advising:** Why don't you just... If I were you...

**Judging:** Aren't you overreacting? That's not a very constructive approach...

**Analysing:** I think what's behind that is... I wonder whether your relationship with your mother...?

**Questioning:** Why did you do that? Can't you just forgive her?

**Minimalising:** Don't worry... Cheer up... You'll be fine...

# Exercises in Paraphrasing

## Practising our skills

**Time:** 10 – 15 mins

- Get into 3's.
- One person tries talking for 4 minutes about “things that really irritate me”. The other two try to slip inappropriate responses into the conversation as unobtrusively as possible.
- Then stop and repeat the exercise with no advising or evaluating.

**Q:** How was it? What was easy/difficult? What was helpful/unhelpful to the speaker?

**3. Learn to paraphrase.** This is a key skill in listening. The aim is to reflect back the key points of what someone has said so that they feel assured that you have really heard them. Again, this is particularly important when the temperature is raised in a discussion, or in a conflict. People feel that they can relax and trust someone who is presenting their case better than they can.

- Focus on the speaker’s experience. This emphasises that you have heard their situation. “You feel...”, “So you believe...”
- Notice facts and feelings. “He did not respond. That upset you.”
- Summarize empathetically. Exclude judgments and personal reflections. “The way you see it is...” (NOT “You believe x, but perhaps there is another way to look at things...?”)
- Be brief. Summarise the speaker, not embellish.
- Use introductory statements. Ensure you don’t sound mechanical. “Let me see if I can say this in my own words before I try to respond.” “Can I just check that I’ve properly understood?” “ So basically you’re...”

## Practising our skills

**Time:** 20 – 30 mins

**You will need:** Copies of Exercises in Paraphrasing (p.39 -40) for each participant.

### Instructions for Leader:

1. Ask people to fill in 1 and 2 individually and then check with each other to see if their responses were perceived to be appropriate.
2. Then request people to get into pairs and choose one of the scenarios from 3 – 7. Instruct them that one person acts as listener and the other as the injured party, and then after a few minutes swap over roles and do another scenario.

## Exercises in Paraphrasing



1. “There you are! I’ve been waiting for you to turn up. Next time your group meets here at night, make sure the doors are locked and the lights are out when you leave! The police were phoning me at 2.30am and I had to walk them round the church in the small hours! It’s all right for you, but it’s me they phone each time. I’ll tell them to ring you next time!”

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2. “He has made a complete fool of me! He said that he would get all the visuals sorted for the presentation, and I was relying on those. I looked ridiculous trying to describe a graph and a load of bar charts. It was so unprofessional and I’ll never trust him again!”

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**Section 2.2 Handout**

## Exercises in Paraphrasing

### Paraphrasing in Pairs

In pairs decide who will be the listener and who the speaker. The speaker starts by using the scripted line and then both develop the scene as they wish. The listener focuses on paraphrasing, responding to the speaker, only after paraphrasing their views. After you have let one situation develop, and the listener has had several opportunities to paraphrase, stop and choose another scenario with swapped roles.

#### 1. Youth Leader as Listener

Angry Youth group member “Why can’t you trust us to be in the girl’s dorm after 9pm? What difference does the time make – if you trust us at 8.55, why do you think we become raging sex-maniacs at 9.05? Its pathetic!”

#### 2. Chair of Deacons as Listener

Frustrated Pastor “You are asking me to resign because people are saying that my sermons aren’t ‘spiritual’ enough. So how come not one person has said anything to me and I seem to get very positive feedback on Sunday mornings?”

#### 3. Pastor as Listener

Upset man from a different ethnic background “I can’t believe that you asked my wife to take part in a service, without consulting me. You have trampled over our cultural sensitivities with typical disregard. You have never tried to understand us, and I feel that I can no longer continue attending here.”

#### 4. Friend as Listener

Hurt Friend “ Where were you? I waited over an hour in the pouring rain, because you’d promised to help me choose something for Jill’s wedding. You know how much it matters to me, yet you let me down again! Ever since your boyfriend has been on the scene, you’ve just forgotten about your other friends!”

#### 5. Employer as Listener

Employee “This morning I discovered my salary had been cut, without anyone informing me in writing. I know that we are in difficult times and I know we’ve talked about this possibility, but it is utterly unacceptable to do things this way, and I’m not going to stand for it.”

# Healthy Talk



**Aim:** To develop further skills in helping people to state their own views and encourage others to do the same.

**You will need:** To be familiar with the material below.  
You may want to copy this section as a handout. Alternatively put the headings up on a board/ OHP slide as you go through them. If people do not have the whole section, you can use the template on page 44 for an overhead projector slide, or a handout to enable people to practice turning 'You' messages into 'I' messages.

**Time:** 30 minutes input.  
15 minutes practising statements.  
15 mins discussion about how these skills might change church life.

For communication to be healthy we need to be thoughtful and careful in the statements we make. The following are essential skills to practice.

## 1. Inform me statements

These are designed to help the speaker to share their thoughts.

- *Tell me a bit more about...*
- *Help me to understand your thinking about...*
- *Fill that out a bit more...*
- *Avoid asking questions as much as possible. Say I'm confused about ... or Explain a little more about... rather than asking why, what or who.*
- *Ask for specifics. It would help me understand better if you gave me a specific example of what you mean.*

## 2. Statements about purpose

These are helpful to begin conversations. It lets people know what you are coming to see them about, and what you aim to achieve. Vague arrangements like "I'd like to see you some time", can leave people feeling uneasy or more cautious and on their guard. You need to be prepared for a difficult meeting, and to have clarified your own motives and feelings before the encounter. You can then clarify them for the other.

- *I'm here because I want to maintain good relationships with you, and it would help me a lot if we could talk about what happened last night.*



### 3. Agreement statements

These help to build bridges and affirm the things we have in common. We need to keep finding common ground throughout a conversation, so that we are assuring the other that we have more in common than we have in conflict.

- *I agree with you that...*
- *I share your concerns...*

### 4. Using “I” rather than “we”

This is a pernicious tendency in church circles. Because many of us prefer to avoid conflict rather than address it head on, there is a tendency to hide behind some collective. Rather than say, *“I feel that the services go on too long”* it is common to say *“People are saying that the services are too long”* or, *“We feel...”*

When people hide their own preferences in this way the person listening sees, in their imagination, a large hostile crowd in the room, rather than just the individual, and may well react accordingly. They will become hurt and defensive, and the relationship may be damaged.

It is far better to just speak for yourself, not on behalf of an anonymous collective.

### 5. Using “I” rather than “you”

This is a key skill in discussion, particularly when there is disagreement and the temperature of the discussion is rising. Using the word ‘you’ tends to sound accusatory. It is all too common to speak in terms that sound as though we are blaming a person for an occurrence. This tends to make the situation worse.

**What is said:** *You made me late again this morning and you made me angry.*

**What is heard:** *I made you late. You’re angry. You think I’m a bad person. You don’t like me.*

The person will tend to react defensively.

A better way of saying what you feel is to use “I”. *I was angry with you for my being late again this morning.*

The same message is communicated, but the person does not feel so judged by the statement. The onus is on the feelings of the other, not on the shortcomings of the listener.



This is a really important skill to use in church life. It enables us to speak truth without diminishing the other person. We are not aiming to hurt or belittle the other, but we do need them to modify their behaviour. The best way to do this is to enable them to hear the impact their actions have on us.

Go to page 44 for Practice Sentences

### **6. Preference statements**

These clarify for the listener what you would actually like to happen. This helps the discussion to reach a conclusion. Too often we are reluctant to own our preferred option, and manipulate people towards what we want. This is not a very open and transparent way of behaving and does not bring the best out in people.

It is more helpful to say what we'd prefer, and then people can respond equally candidly. Remember that stating a preference does not mean it is non-negotiable.

### **7. Specific proposals**

It is helpful not only to raise a problem, but also to offer some solutions at the same time.

Dumping problems on people without suggesting ways forward can be destructive in community. Often the pastor hears all the problems and is left to struggle for solutions on her or his own. A good personal habit to develop is to never complain about something without also offering some possibilities for change at the same time. This helps to develop a greater sense of corporate responsibility. It is better not to dwell on what you are against, but rather state what you are for.

#### **Turn your concerns into a proposal or request.**

- *What I'd like to see happen is....*
- *I believe that my concerns would be met if we...*

#### **Discussion**

- Why do we find talking openly and honestly about what we think and feel so difficult?
- Is it more difficult in church than in other fields of life? Why or why not?
- How would the simple skills we have been looking at help our church life?
- How can we encourage one another to use these, so that they become natural reflexes?

**Practice translating some of these 'you' messages into 'I' messages.**

1. You're so inconsiderate. Why don't you ever help clean the kitchen?
2. Will you stop interrupting me! Why can't you ever listen to me?
3. You are always putting me down in meetings and you make me look like an idiot.
4. You said you'd do it and you haven't! Now you've really got us into a mess.
5. You just don't understand. You never seem to take any notice of my feelings and you just carry on regardless.

# Unhealthy Talk: Dealing with Gossip



**Aim:** To help people face the destructive power of passing on second-hand information.

To teach some alternative ways of handling concerns in church life.

**Time:** 1 hour 30 minutes.

**Method:** A mixture of plenary and group discussion, centering on a dramatic reading, which could be accompanied by PowerPoint characters displayed on the screen, or if your group is big enough, get each character to bring some of the audience up to the front as more people are involved in the spreading rumours.

**You will need:** Questions on Overhead Projector, PowerPoint, or large sheets of paper. Sheets of butchers paper. Textas. Enough copies of “A Week in the life of Integrity BC” (page 47) for everyone. To organize some visual interpretation of the story!

## Introduction

1. Open honest communication is important to a healthy church community. However, often when there is a point of difference or tension rather than deal with it openly people can resort to gossip, selectively sharing negative critical information with others.

2. In groups of 4 discuss the following questions. (Allow 20 mins.)

- What is destructive about gossip to the church community?
- Look up the following verses – what do they add to our understanding? Proverbs 16:28, Proverbs 26:20, James 3.
- What is the difference between gossip and ‘sharing’?

3. Ask the groups to share some of the findings and put them onto sheets of butchers’ paper.

4. Hand out sheets of butchers paper to each group, and ask them to do the following. (Allow 15 mins.)

- Make a list of as many different reasons why gossip happens, as you can. Make them all “I” statements e.g. “I sometimes do it without even realising it”, “I persuade myself that I am being helpful without thinking of the implications”, “I want to undermine another person or group’s credibility.”

## Unhealthy Talk: Dealing with Gossip



5. Hang all the sheets on the wall and ask people to reflect on what they read.

6. Read out the following 'A Week in the life of...' (page 47) enacting the process if possible, or simply adding stick people onto a board each time more get involved in the process.

### **Discussion:** (20 mins)

Hand out the full story to each participant, and get into different groups of 4

- At each day how could people have responded more helpfully?
- How could the various people in this illustration have handled things differently and focused on real rather than imagined and distorted information?

Exercise continues on page 48.

## Unhealthy Talk: Dealing with Gossip



### **A Week in the Life of Integrity Baptist Church**

**Day 1:** Bill rings Jim one of the church elders and his wife Lois answers and says, “It is not a good time, can he call back later?” Bill thinks he hears raised voices in the background that sound like Jim and his son Peter arguing.

**Day 2:** Bill shares with his prayer partner Ken that he is concerned for Jim and Lois, as they seem to be having difficulties at home, especially with Peter.

**Day 3:** Out of concern for Jim, Ken asks his home group to pray for Jim and Lois, as they are having difficulties with Peter and possibly also in their marriage.

**Day 4:** Jean, a member of the home group, shares at a small ladies coffee group that Lois may be getting a hard time from Jim and encourages the other women to visit Lois to encourage and support her through this difficult time.

Vince, another member of the home group, is concerned that Peter who is one of the Youth Group leaders is about to lead an adventure camping activity which his son was to attend, and feels it his responsibility to ring the other parents and inform them that Peter is in big trouble at home, possibly over drugs, and may not be a suitable example for the young people to follow.

**Day 5:** Geoff, a member of the home group, is a deacon and raises at the next deacons meeting that he has heard that Jim is having difficulties in his marriage and with Peter and has even heard a suggestion of domestic violence. He asks the deacons request that the pastor stand Jim down from eldership as he no longer meets the criteria of being able to control his family properly. They then draft a possible statement to be read to the church explaining the reasons for Jim being asked to stand down.

Angela, also from the home group, shares what she has heard with the ladies Bible Study group where they discuss the matter. They decide it is no wonder their marriage is on the rocks, as since Jim started working part time to give more time to the church, Lois a nurse, had take an evening shift at a residential care facility. She was obviously neglecting her responsibilities as a wife and mother and it is no surprise that Jim is angry and unsatisfied and Peter rebelling.

**Day 6:** In a meeting of the worship group Jim is suggested for leading the church’s anniversary service next month. Bruce, who is Jean’s husband, shares confidentially that he has heard Jim has problems with anger and violence at home and it may not be a good time for him to do it. A discussion follows where several members say they can understand this as they experience him as often very bossy and forceful in trying to get his own way with them when preparing for a service, and others think he harangues the congregation when leading, trying to force people to do things they don’t want to. They decide he must be taken off the list of worship leaders altogether.

**Day 7:** Pastor visits Jim to ask for his resignation.

## Section 2.4 Exercise

# Unhealthy Talk: Dealing with Gossip

## **Dealing with gossip:** (30 mins)

The best way to deal with gossip or the destructive use of selective information sharing is to create a climate where there is an expectation that all issues will be dealt with honestly and openly.

We need to train ourselves to refuse to collude with destructive negative comments about others, and to always encourage the person to take appropriate steps to work towards resolving them.

- How can we as individuals best challenge those who come to us with gossip? How can we direct them to deal with it properly?
- Can you come up with a simple set of questions to guide them in the right direction?

## **Some suggested questions might be:**

- “Have you told them directly?”
- “Can I come with you, and support you while you tell them?”
- “Can I raise the issue on your behalf, so that it is easier for you to follow up and talk with them about it?”

## **Practice:**

Practice these questions together, so that they become a familiar and expected response. Imagine Person 1 has been upset by someone ignoring them in church last Sunday. They tell Person 2 about their distress and their desire to keep it confidential.

In a group of three, take turns of playing the following three roles, (take them seriously and try and explore realistic responses not just simple ‘yes/no’ type answers):

Role 1. A person wanting to share a negative criticism with another person in confidence. Use a hypothetical but realistic church issue.

Role 2. The person who is being told the information and is trying to get the person sharing it to deal with it appropriately.

## Unhealthy Talk: Dealing with Gossip



Role 3. You merely observe the interaction between 1 & 2 and then reflect on with 1 & 2 how well they moved towards an agreement to deal with the issue properly.

## Understanding the way we listen in Groups

**Aim:** To recognise that when we come together in a church meeting or similar gathering, we are already prejudiced by what we know of people and this can stop us actually hearing what is being said.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Method:** A short piece of drama, involving 3 characters and a narrator, followed by discussion.

**You will need:** A copy of the script for each character (pp 51-53)  
A way of recording any applications that emerge from discussion.

**Instructions:** Before the session give three people their characters and their speeches so that they can be prepared.

**At the session:** Do not state the aim of the session before you begin! Set the scene (as outlined below). As the various characters rise to make their comments, you will give the rest of the group the running commentary on the background of the speaker.

### Scenario

“You are a part of the New Directions Baptist Church, which is a well-established church, whose sense of warmth and acceptance holds together a diverse congregation. Recently the church’s Mission Group brought to the attention of the church its concern about the under-use of the church’s hall. It is a large, flexible facility, but is really only used for tea and coffee after worship on Sunday mornings.

A Working Group was commissioned to research the issue, and helped the church to distil a long list of possibilities down to two options. Option A is that the hall be converted into an emergency accommodation facility for the community’s homeless community. Option B is that the hall be redeveloped into a centre for prayer and healing.

You are presently at the open forum that is being held after church one morning to explore the options. At the end of the meeting, there is an opportunity for everyone to share his or her inklings about how God may be leading the church. Three significant speeches are made.”

## Understanding the way we listen in Groups



Charismatic Clarice rises to her feet

### **Leader reads:**

“Clarice believes she has the gift of prophecy. She is revered by some as being an important source of the voice of God. Others find her spiritualised manner and emotive language totally excessive. Over recent years, her “words from the Lord” have included a denunciation of a local new age festival, an exhortation for the leadership to put the affairs of God before the affairs of men, two calls to prayer and fasting, three calls for the church to repent and be healed, and a number of visions.”

### **Clarice gives her speech.**

Our God is a God who brings healing to people. God loves to heal and set people free. God longs for us only to ask, so that people may be delivered to the glory of the Father. Prayer is vital for us in releasing the power of God to heal and to save.

Last week, when I was praying, trusting the vision of a healing centre to God, I had a vision of God’s heart, weeping for the people of this community. I saw God walking the streets at night – walking through the sub-ways and the back streets, and his heart breaking for all the people who had no place to call their home. And I sensed the Lord saying to me, “Is this not the healing I desire?”

I believe the Lord is saying that we must be in prayer for the healing of our land and for the releasing of the people in bondage to the injustices of our community and of our streets!

Community Conscious Connie stands up to speak

### **Leader reads:**

“Connie is a social worker, who is very active in the local community. She frequently writes letters to the local paper and has stood for the local council on two occasions, advocating for greater justice for the marginalised. She is currently working on a community-funded project to address youth unemployment in the local region. Her influence has been important in establishing some broad community credibility for the church, but there are some who find her constant talk about social issues to be too one-sided and uncomfortable.”



## Understanding the way we listen in Groups

### **Connie makes her speech.**

As you know, I was part of the Working Group that developed these two options. In our consultation with council and with community workers, it became obvious that we live in a deeply divided and fractured community. We proclaim that we have Good News to share. Well, I want to say that it is time for us to share it. For our hall to remain so under-used is nothing short of a blasphemy against the Gospel!

The malaise in our community is deep. There are many issues causing fragmentation: unemployment; drug abuse; domestic violence; and severe injustice. All of these are leading to social breakdown. All of these are contributing to homelessness. All of these are creating despair.

I have come to the strong conviction that unless we minister in ways that bring deep healing at every level of our society, we will be putting false limits around the Gospel. My own journey has helped me to realise the foolishness of social action without prayer. So I say, let us not limit the Gospel. Let this hall become a place of prayer that will bring healing to all the despairing people of this community and set them free.

Historical Hubert staggers to his feet.

#### **Leader reads:**

“Almost everyone cringes when Hubert gets to his feet. He opposes everything! Nothing that is done today is as good as the ministry exercised in the past. He keeps statistics on how many hymns are sung against how many choruses and raises the matter at every church meeting. He opposes the changed seating in the church, even though it happened 15 years later and everyone else has embraced it. He opposed the ladies’ drop-in using the sanctuary, opposed the use of the “mission” budget in local outreach, and opposed the redevelopment of the manse.”

### **Hubert makes his speech and sits down.**

This hall was dedicated, to the glory of God, by the Reverend Cuthbert Christiansen in 1937. Its purpose was to bring glory to God, and it has! Don’t any of you young people think that over the years, this hall has been under-used. Over the decades it has been used as a Sunday School Hall with hundreds of young scholars finding the Word of life in Christ. It has been used for youth evangelism, for Vacation Bible Schools, for mission rallies. I

## Understanding the way we listen in Groups



remember the famine dinner of 1978, at which over \$10,000 was raised for famine relief in Africa. And I recall the blessed night in 1963 when my wife and I first heard the call of God to be married and dedicate our lives to the service of this church. To the glory of God!

This is our heritage. I know community research is fashionable these days, but we need look nowhere else than to the past to find our guidance for this time. Of course it is a disgrace that this building lies empty throughout the week. But, I believe the glory of God will be served as we use it for the Gospel. Would we prefer a homeless refuge or a prayer and healing centre? I don't think it matters nearly as much as that we recapture the spirit of our history and use it to the Glory of God!

### **Leader responds:**

"Thank you all for your contributions. I suggest that we continue the meeting by going into discussion groups, after a moment of quiet prayer."

### **Discussion**

1. Ask people to gather in groups of 3-4 and summarise the positions of Clarice, Connie and Hubert. (Allow 10 mins.)
2. After 10 minutes commence a plenary discussion.
  - Did we all hear the same things?
  - Were we influenced in what we heard by what we were told about the person?
3. Ask everyone to return to their group to discuss the following questions, which you display on the OHP or on a board. (Allow 15 mins.)
  - In our own meetings is our hearing coloured by what we know about a person?
  - How do we avoid this? Each group to develop some suggestions.
4. In plenary, share and discuss suggestions, with a view to implementation at the next meeting.





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# Section 3



Fit4  
*Life*

Promoting Health for Growth

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# Section 3

# Handling Difference



Happy are those who work for peace.  
God will call them his children...

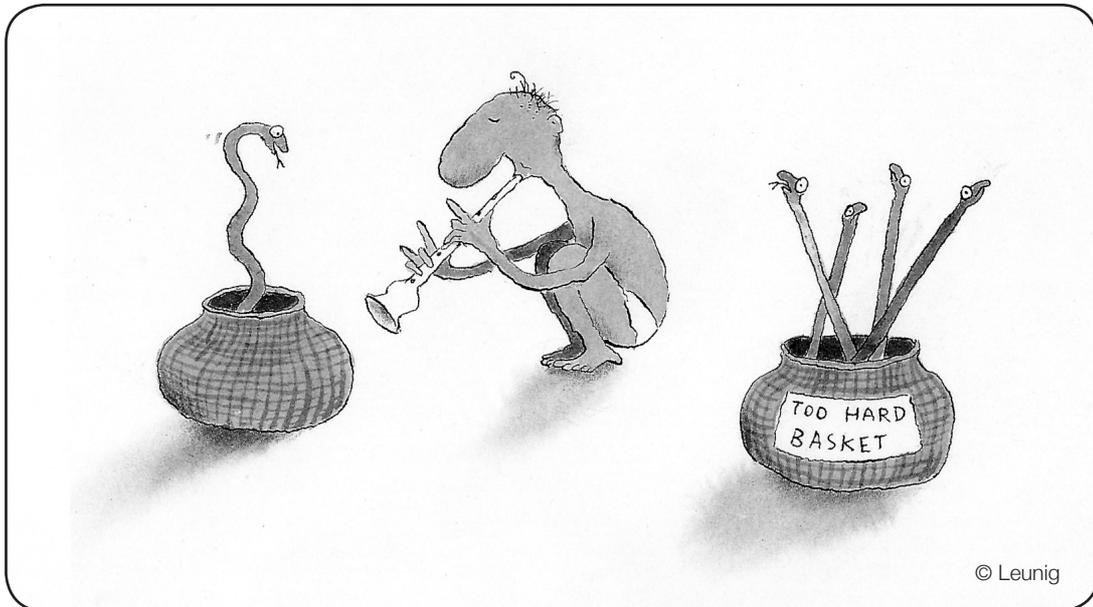
Matthew 5:9

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## Section 3 Contents

## Dealing with the “Too Hard Basket”



In Church and personal life there are many difficult issues, rather than deal with these situations we often put them in the “too hard basket”.

- Some issues overwhelm us with their complexity, and will usually will need a long term approach where a proper process is followed through to a satisfactory resolution.
- Others require courage to face; as to resolve them the interests or power of significant individuals will need to be challenged. How do we create an environment where we can all feel safe to bring it out in the open and come to a satisfactory resolution?

**Aim:** In this introductory exercise we are going to explore what a healthy church could do to empty the “too hard basket”.

This is only an introductory exercise, to raise the issues rather than find complex solutions.

Hopefully the material in the exercises for this section on handling differences will then help develop better skills for dealing with our differences.

## Dealing with the “Too Hard Basket”



**Time:** 20 minutes for Part 1, for initial discussion in groups. 15-20 minutes for Part 2 – optional. 10 minutes plenary discussion.

### **You will need:**

#### **Part 1**

- Enough small baskets for the number of groups required (6-8 people per group) and each basket labeled “Too Hard Basket”.
- Copies of the issues on page 61 for each group – cut into strips and one of each placed inside each basket.
- An overhead projector / PowerPoint / whiteboard on which to display the questions for groups to consider when addressing an issue.

#### **Part 2**

- Enough blank pieces of paper for each person who will be present.
- Pens and pencils – enough for all those present.

### **Part 1**

Introduce purpose of the exercise and direct people into groups of 6-8. (They will not have time to consider each issue)

Give out the following instructions:

#### 1. Instructions to the groups

Take one strip out of the “too hard basket” and discuss the issue briefly (5 minutes) How could a healthy church approach resolving it properly?

### **Consider the following questions:**

- In what context could it be sensitively raised?
- Who needs to deal with it – leadership, whole congregation, specific task group, the individuals involved, etc.?
- How can a course of action be decided on?
- What steps would be involved?
- Does it require some outside facilitation?
- What would prevent it happening again?



## Dealing with the “Too Hard Basket”

2. After 5 minutes encourage them to move onto another issue.
3. Repeat as time allows.
4. Reconvene. Conduct a short feedback discussion with the whole group. Some possible questions to get a general response from the group could be:
  - What were some of the helpful suggestions for dealing with issues that tend to get put in the “too hard basket”?
  - How do we create an environment where these types of issues can be dealt with that is safe for all involved?
  - Did this exercise highlight any deficiencies in our church’s processes for dealing with difficult issues?

Record any good comments or suggestions to be followed up later.

### **Part 2 (optional)**

(If basket has not been emptied, instruct the groups to ensure it is first before proceeding.)

1. Hand out a blank slip of paper to each person, and ask everyone to take a few minutes to think of and write down an issue they think may have been consigned to the “too hard basket” in their church, and then place the issue in the basket.
2. Proceed as in Part 1, straight through to the group discussion.

### **1. Pastor issue**

Pastor Jim is much loved and respected by the congregation, but after most leadership meetings, which are fairly informal, Jim ignores most of the directions that were agreed on by the team, and does things his own way. When asked why, he always laughs it off and says, “I had a better idea following the meeting, and didn’t it work out well anyway?” – which it usually does! But he certainly also communicates a sense of ‘this is a non-negotiable issue – so don’t press it!’ It is causing increasing frustration and annoyance to the leadership team; several previous leaders have withdrawn rather than make a big issue out of it.

### **2. Leadership issue**

The church has been growing in the last few years and many of the people who are new have come from other denominations. Most of them are enthusiastic and very involved in ministry, but many of them have not been baptised as adults and are not able to become members. They are therefore not allowed to vote in any meetings and cannot hold any formal leadership positions. The church leadership are older and have been members of the church for many years. They refuse to raise the issue of opening up membership, claiming it would be compromising Baptist principles and be too divisive if discussed openly in church meetings. The new people feel their convictions are not respected, and somewhat ‘used’, as they are doing most of the ministry and mission of the church. It is becoming a ‘new’ versus ‘old’ issue and the rising level of tension between the groups has reinforced the leadership’s view that their clear uncompromising position on the matter is the best way to avoid open conflict.

### **3. Congregational issue**

Old I B Kissinger a much loved and revered elderly patriarch of the church has become entrenched as the greeter on the door for Sunday services. It is the one ministry he still feels able to contribute to and delights in. I B is certainly gifted for the task but insists on kissing all of the women on the lips as they come in. The male diaconate think it is just a reflection of I B’s era and friendliness, therefore basically harmless, and not worth offending him (especially as he makes no secret of the fact that the church will benefit greatly from his will!). Most women find I B’s attempts to kiss them very confronting and feel violated, many of them now use a side door to enter the building, and most want I B removed.

### **4. Personal issue**

Two families from the church are in a bitter legal dispute. John was the employer who sacked George for not being able to fulfill the requirements of a job; George is suing for wrongful dismissal. Their dispute is now spilling over into the church as they both try and gather personal support for their perspective on who is right. It has started to affect various ministries as people of opposing views are losing trust in each other and church meetings are becoming very aggressive and argumentative.

# Bible Studies



**Aim:** To show that disagreement is normal, healthy and inevitable in any living and growing community. To recognise the volume of scriptural texts about disagreement and conflict. To discover biblical processes for dealing creatively with disagreement.

**Time:** Indicated on each individual study.

**Method:** A range of optional studies which stand alone, or which could be done as consecutive studies over a number of weeks

**You will need:** Materials as outlined in each individual study.

**Studies available:**

1. Jesus and Conflict.
2. Conflict in the Community.
3. A process for Reconciliation.
4. When it's bigger than us.

# Jesus and Conflict



**Aim:** To recognise the paradoxical nature of the Prince of peace.  
To discover his pattern of living, so that it might shape ours.

**Time:** 45 minutes.

**You will need:** Some large sheets of paper. Textas. Bibles.

**Leaders Notes:** Jesus says “Peace be with you” or “Go in peace” more than 10 times in the gospels, but although he speaks peace to people and his life is all about ‘shalom’ (that is, the biblical concept of peace which involves living in justice and righteousness – walking humbly with one’s God) he never uses the term ‘peace’ about himself.

The title Prince of Peace and the allusions to the Peace Bringer – the one who causes wars to cease – are Old Testament Messianic attributes.

However, Jesus does say, “blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt 5.9) and he tells people on several occasions to make peace, or to be at peace with their brother or sister. (Mt 5.24, Mk 9.50)

Reconciliation was obviously a key value to Jesus, and this is clearly picked up by the apostles and the writers of the epistles.

Paul repeatedly describes Christ’s ministry as that of making peace – of breaching the wall between outsiders and insiders. Jesus is the peacemaker – “He himself is our peace” (Eph 2.14) and the task of the church is to do as Jesus did – we are to imitate Christ (1 Cor 11).

However what sort of peace did Jesus make, and how did he make it?

## **Group Questions:**

1. What are the images that spring to mind when one says the word ‘peace’ – quickly write them on a large sheet of paper as people call them out.
2. When we think of Jesus as the Prince of peace, what images or actions do we imagine? What stories in the gospels do we recall? (See some of the verses above if prompts are needed.)

## Jesus and Conflict



3. Read the following passages in pairs – each pair being allocated a different passage.
  - Mt 10. 32-39
  - Mt 23. 29-36
  - Jn 2.13-17
4. Each pair is to answer the following questions:
  - a) What is happening in these passages? What do we find inspiring? What do we find disturbing?
  - b) What do these passages do to our image of Jesus as the Prince of peace?
  - c) What sort of peace is Jesus interested in?
5. After joining back into one main group, ask how do you think that Jesus made peace?
6. What light does Eph 2: 14-18 shed on this?
7. If Jesus' path to peace involved crucifixion, what does this mean for the way we make peace today?
8. What is one action you could take, that would be about following Jesus' way to peace?

# Conflict in the Community



**Aim:** To discover the variety of conflict situations faced by the early church, the different ways they used to deal with those conflicts.  
To reflect on how we face conflicts in our local church today.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**You will need:** A copy of the material below for each participant.  
A pen for each participant. Bibles.

**Read the following passages – a different person reading each one:**

- Acts 6:1-7
- Acts 15:1-29
- Acts 15:36-41
- Philippians 4:1-2

**Then respond to these questions with these scriptures in mind.**

1. My first impression when reading these situations might be best described as.....
2. What sort of issues did the early church seem to get into conflict over?
3. What do you learn from the ways they dealt with conflict?
4. My observation is that Christians in today's church seem to get into conflict over ....
5. In my experience, as part of the church, I reckon Christians most often deal with conflict in these ways (tick 2 of these)
  - Ignore it
  - Become very angry and express that anger openly
  - Talk about it with someone else to gain support for their view
  - Go and talk with the person they are in conflict with



## Conflict in the Community

- Pray about it
- Seek help from a wise person as to what to do
- Withdraw from the person or church

**Share which two you ticked with the group**

6. My greatest need when it comes to conflict in the local church is to...

Each share your responses with the group then each person pray for the person on their left using their response to question 6 as the basis for prayer.

Someone read John 17:20-23 and finish with a time of silent reflection

# A Process for Reconciliation



## **Matthew 18: 15-20**

**Aim:** To discover together a biblical process for handling disagreement in church

**Time:** 45 mins – 1 hour

**You will need:** A copy of the passage. Sheets of butchers paper. Textas.  
N.B This is started in pairs.

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile or a tax-collector.*

*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”*

1. Go through the reading and use the following symbols to mark

Things that are new ★

Things you query ?

Things that challenge you !

2. Now imagine that you overheard Susie at church say something quite unkind and quite untruthful about you to the pastor. What would your first reaction be? What would you want to do?

3. According to this process that Jesus outlines what would be the ‘right’ process? See if you can trace the right pattern of actions, presuming that Susie denies ever saying anything so outrageous!

**Some questions to ponder – join with another pair to make a 4.**

- Note that Jesus assumes that there will be sin and conflict in the life of the community and that what is important is how we respond to it. What is the aim of the process he suggests?



## A Process for Reconciliation

- What does 'to regain' mean?
- Why does Jesus suggest going to see Susie alone?
- One or two others – who would be the most suitable people to take with you? Are there some people in your congregation who would be particularly gifted at this kind of work?
- When Jesus says 'tell it to the church' how exactly would you follow this through in your context?
- If some one doesn't listen, or refuses to be accountable to the community of faith, Jesus says that they are to be treated 'As a Gentile or a tax collector'. What do you understand by this?  
This verse is often used as the basis of church discipline, BUT how did Jesus treat Gentiles and tax-collectors?
- Note too the context. This is sandwiched between the parable of the lost sheep – which stresses God's relentless pursuing of an individual, and the parable of the unforgiving servant – which is all about forgiveness. Does this give any clues about how we should read this?
- Note also the context of v20. When have you heard people quote this verse? Yet it is linked to this passage about Christ's followers dealing well with disagreements within the body. Being reconciled with one another is crucial to our sense of God's presence. To what extent is this held to be true in your church?

Put some of your key findings onto a piece of butchers paper.  
Share these briefly with the other groups

### **Application for Discussion together – as a whole group**

If people followed this process through in your church as a matter of course, do you think that it would make a difference to your life together?

How could we make this a more central part of our life together?

List some possible ways on a piece of butcher's paper and take them to your next church meeting for wider discussion.

# When it's Bigger than us



Throughout this material we are addressing issues that cause dysfunction in congregations. Normally this is a result of poor processes and human failure. Sometimes there can be a deeper spiritual power at work as well, and this requires a spiritual engagement (in addition to practical endeavours) in order to bring freedom and release us to a new healthier future. A few examples of where this may be at work:

- Some destructive pattern repeats itself, such as the unhappy ending of the last 5 or 6 pastorates.
- Everything the church tries seems to fail.
- A church self-destructs every time it experiences any real growth.
- An external derailing: some person or power from outside diverts the church from its mission.
- Something in the past that has been covered up, which undermines the spiritual health and vitality of the church (even though most of the current people are not aware of it).

These things can become part of the corporate personality of the church, and continue to inhibit the growth and mission of the church despite all efforts to improve processes and skills. The only way to break free seems to be to deal with the spiritual root cause of the dysfunction. There are many views on what is at work here, from a subversive cultural dysfunction that subtly infects everyone who becomes involved in the church, to direct demonic attack. Most of these situations probably involve elements of both.

What is apparent is that there is a real need to seek a work of God, to break the power that it has over us and release us to a new freedom for the future.

Read some of the following Bible passages (and any others you think are relevant) and then consider some of the questions that follow, especially those that raise issues relevant to your current situation.

- Mt 16:18-19
- Eph 6:13-20
- 1 Jn 1:8-9
- Rom 12:9-21
- 2 Cor 10:3-5
- Rom 8:26-27
- 1 Pet 5:8-9
- Mt 5:27-36
- Rom 8:28-39
- 1 Jn 4:1-6;
- Heb 4:12;

Some things to reflect on and discuss:

- As you look back: are there any repetitive patterns of poor behaviour that never seem to change or get properly resolved in your church?

## When it's Bigger than us

- How do we discern when there are spiritual forces at work in our personal and corporate life that inhibit and oppose the mission and ministry of our church?

If we discern that there are issues, how will we deal with them?

- What spiritual resources do we have to help engage with and overcome these powers that bind us up?
- How do we pray in these situations? What kinds of prayer would be helpful?
- Is there a need to seek reconciliation over unresolved issues of the past? How could this be done?
- What does loving your 'enemies' really mean?
- Is there a need for us to deal with any issues of: confession of sin, repentance, giving and receiving of forgiveness, making restitution for past injustice?
- Are there cleansing rituals or symbolic actions that may help release us? Do we need to explore the possibility of some form of 'exorcism'?

# Understanding the nature of conflict

**Aim:** To realise that as we experience increasing intensities of conflict we lose our ability to deal as rationally with information, and need to take appropriate action

**You will need:** a whiteboard or flip chart or OHP projector and screen.

## Teaching

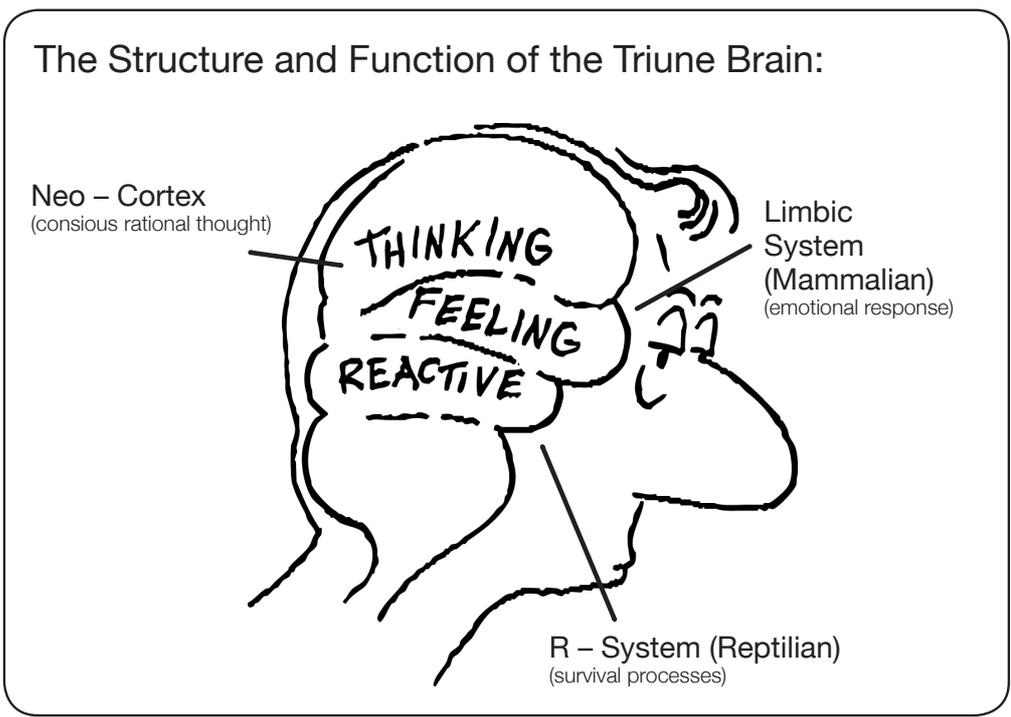
- Ask the group to finish the sentence “Conflict is like...”
- Put suggested words on the board

Root = conflare – to strike together, generating heat  
Generally negative word associations

Yet Chinese symbols for conflict are a combination of danger and opportunity – a much more creative definition.

We have to move from an understanding of conflict as something gone wrong, and something bad, to a sense of conflict as an inevitable part of human living and as an opportunity for growth and change

## Conflicts use different parts of our brain (Draw on flip chart)



Section 3.3 Teaching

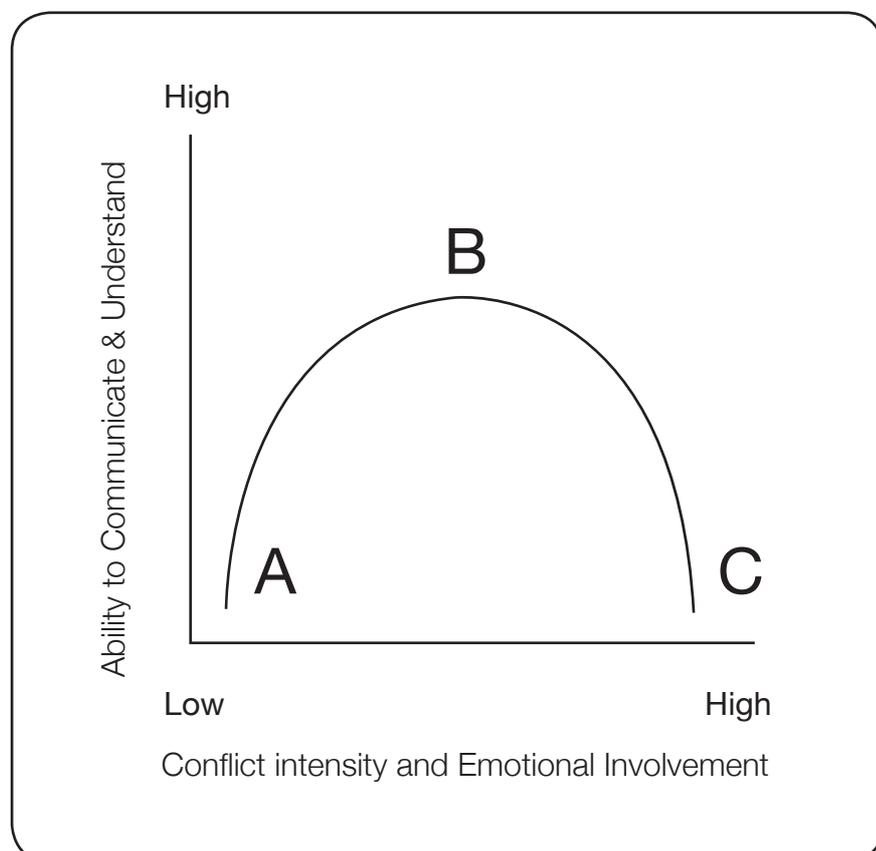
## Understanding the nature of conflict

- In normal circumstances we tend to use the Neo-Cortex, the rational, thinking part of our brain.
- When we become more emotional we use the feeling part of our brain, which is termed our mammalian response – what do we associate with mammalian behaviour? Mammalian – caring, nurturing, protective of young, playful
- Intense conflict is experienced in the most basic part of our brain - the reactive or reptilian part. How do reptiles react when threatened? Reptilian- fight and flight, self-preservation, eat young if threatened

As the pressure increases, people become less able to respond rationally; they become more instinctive, and in extreme circumstances very distanced from the normal warm responses to people and situations.

**The graph below seeks to depict this.**

### Section 3.3 Teaching



## Understanding the nature of conflict



In this graph people need a certain amount of emotional involvement and engagement to achieve maximum ability to process and communicate information (B), but after an optimal performance level, if the intensity continues to increase the ability to perform begins to decline rapidly.

After point B, we need healing strategies, opportunities to diffuse the intensity, strategies to lower the sense of threat and anxiety, if we are to get the best out of people.

Good leadership in meetings involves practising ways of holding people in process without getting over anxious.

**Sometimes it feels as if there is another level...**



**Section 3.3 Teaching**

# Spectrum Exercise

**Aim:** To enable people to be aware of how different ways of dealing with conflict are often a result of family background, and how we need to be sensitive to each other in the church community.

**Time required:** 15 mins

**You will need:** 2 'signs': "Conflict and disagreements are good" and "Conflicts and disagreements are appalling".

Enough room to allow everyone present to stand in a long line either down or across the room

Place the signs at different ends or sides of the room in which you are meeting, and fill them out a bit – as below.

Ask people to position themselves along the line between the 2 signs at a place which represents the way conflict was dealt with in their family home, or in the place they were brought up.

So if they lived in a family where everything was out in the open and there was lots of shouting and arguing, but they quickly made up and so grew up not to fear arguments, (A) then they should be close to the "Conflict is good" sign. However if disagreement was suppressed, and the aim of life was to keep everything calm and controlled, then the person (B) should stand near the other end

Section 3.4 Exercise

"Conflict and disagreements are good"

A

B

"Conflicts and disagreements are appalling"

Conflict is a good thing; to be welcomed and seen as healthy

Conflict is horrible and should be avoided at all costs

## Spectrum Exercise



Allow people a little while to position themselves.

Ask them to talk to the people nearest to them about their experience and feelings.

Take soundings from different points on the line, so that a range of representative views are expressed.

Recognise that we have different approaches because of messages we heard as children. Part of discerning the body is to be sensitive to the way we function because of our background. Some people do not mind getting into an argument, because they have learnt that people can disagree and still love one another. Others will feel that the least disagreement means that the relationship is severely jeopardised.

- Can you see those who speak their minds at church meetings being clustered at one end of the spectrum?
- How can this group help the other end of the spectrum to share their views more easily?
- Is there anything that the two ends would like to say to each other that might make our communication in gatherings easier?



# My Responses to Conflict – Exercise in pairs

**Aim:** To enable participants to share their own responses to conflict with another person. To identify the common issues and responses in the group.

**Materials required:** One copy of exercise booklet for each person. (Use the templates on page 77-78. These can be copied and fairly quickly cut up and stapled together)

**Time required:** 35 mins – 20 mins in pairs, 15 mins plenary

## The Process:

**Step One:** Ask the participants to pair up with another person (preferably someone they do not know very well.)

**Step Two:** Read the instructions to the group.

Do not look ahead in the booklet, since the experience is effective only if your answers are spontaneous and unrehearsed. This booklet contains a series of open-ended statements intended to help you discover and share your reactions to conflict and your ways of dealing with it. You will also have an opportunity to learn from your partner's responses. The ground rules are:-

- a) Take turns initiating the discussion, so that each person only completes alternate sentences. Complete each statement orally. (Do not write in the booklet.)
- b) This discussion is confidential. The plenary discussion which follows will deal with general issues, not personal issues.
- c) Do not look ahead in the booklet.
- d) Do not skip items. Respond to each one in the order in which it appears.

**Step Three:** Plenary feedback.

From listening to the responses of your partner and yourself what are some things you can say about conflict and how it affects us?

<p>Conflict Resolution</p> <p>Do not look ahead in the booklet. In pairs, alternate between completing the sentence and listening to the other person. Only one person completes each sentence.</p> <p>1</p>	<p>The most important outcome of conflict is...</p> <p>7</p>
<p>Conflict is...</p> <p>2</p>	<p>I usually react to negative criticism by...</p> <p>8</p>
<p>The time I felt best about dealing with conflict was when...</p> <p>3</p>	<p>When I confront someone I care about, I...</p> <p>9</p>
<p>When someone disagrees with me about something important, or challenges me, in front of others I usually...</p> <p>4</p>	<p>feel most vulnerable during a conflict when...</p> <p>10</p>
<p>When I get angry I...</p> <p>5</p>	<p>I resent...</p> <p>11</p>
<p>When I think of negotiating, I...</p> <p>6</p>	<p>When someone avoids conflict with me, I...</p> <p>12</p>

<p>My greatest strength in handling conflict is...</p> <p>13</p>	<p>My greatest weakness in handling conflict is...</p> <p>19</p>
<p>When things are not going well I tend to...</p> <p>14</p>	<p>When I think about confronting a potentially unpleasant person, I...</p> <p>20</p>
<p>I imagine that you handle most conflict by...</p> <p>15</p>	<p>I sometimes avoid directly confronting someone when...</p> <p>21</p>
<p>I will sometimes avoid unpleasant situations by...</p> <p>16</p>	<p>I am most likely to assert myself in situations that...</p> <p>22</p>
<p>I am most likely to confront people in situations such as...</p> <p>17</p>	<p>With you and me, conflict could...</p> <p>23</p>
<p>I usually hide or camouflage my feelings when...</p> <p>18</p>	



# Separating out the causes of disagreement

**Aim:** to recognise that there are layers of causes for conflict, and these often form a hierarchy in terms of difficulty in resolving them

**You will need:** the ohp slide on page 81

**Time required:** 30 mins

Show the ohp slide. There are often different causes of conflict/ misunderstanding in churches. Here are a few:

**Facts** – simple misinformation – often a cause because of poor communication

**Methods** – the way something happened, which hurt people's feelings; the process

**Goals** – people have different objectives which are not clarified

**Values** – these are not shared

**Relationships** – reactions to different personalities.

In churches people often focus on the Values dimension as the source of a problem – they have a different theology, a different attitude to scripture etc. and tend to ignore the earlier factors, which might be the key.

## Illustration

A church in California in 1980's. It was at the time when there were many refugees fleeing the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and seeking safety in the States. The Mission Committee proposed at a church meeting that the church support an El Salvadorian refugee - this led to extreme polarisation. 50% were very enthusiastic, 50% were deeply opposed – it was too political. There was lots of anger and disappointment - People were arguing over the principles of refugee support – stuck at the values level.

But a wise mediator in the congregation got them to sort out the levels of conflict

**Facts:** there was a wrong understanding of the nature of support proposed. Some people had assumed that the church was being asked to offer sanctuary – which was illegal. But in fact it was practical and financial assistance that was proposed, which was legal.



## Separating out the causes of disagreement

**Methods:** the Mission Committee had bypassed the Deacons, and gone straight to the Church Meeting, because they thought it urgent. This had upset people, and the committee apologised.

**Goals:** Part of the opposition came from the objection that surely church money could be better spent. So the committee proposed separate fund raising for this concern so that there was no diversion from the committed giving of the church.

By this time the values dimension seemed less important, because a lot of the tension had been diffused. The presenting issue – whether we support refugees from war zones - was not in fact the real issue for many.

We need to recognise the different components of any conflict.

### **Exercise**

In pairs, share a recent experience of conflict, and see if you can help one another break it down into different components

### **De-brief**

Returning to the whole group, talk about any discoveries you have made and whether there are any principles that can help the whole church.

# Types or Layers of conflict

Facts

Methods

Goals

Values

Relationships



A hierarchy of  
difficulty of resolution

# Mapping Conflicts

**Aim:** To provide a tool to enable a group to discover the underlying interests and issues and thus enable new light to shine on a previously intractable situation

**You will need:** Copies of the Map grid (page 84)

**When to use:** When people/ situations are stuck, confused (where do I start?), hopeless

## Process

### 1. What is the Problem?

Name it in broad terms.....

- ”Division of workload”,
- “The way we make decisions around here.”
- “Music in the church.”

It is important to use big picture language without blaming people or naming a solution. Write this in the centre of the map

### 2. Who is involved?

Name the individuals, groups or factions.

### 3. What do they really want?

- (a) Needs (Respect, stability, a tidy house.)
- (b) Fears. (Loss of face, being caught out, loss of employment, failure, doing the wrong thing, financial security, loss of power, cultural loss)
- Do not seek solutions until the needs and fears of all parties are listed.
- Do not be sidetracked by “What about?”. Put them on a separate piece of paper.
- We need to focus upon what they say they need or fear, not what we may think. E.g. “Meetings are a waste of time. They go on and on and we seem to get nowhere.” What are the possible needs/fears being expressed here?

## Mapping Conflicts



### 4. Map Reading

- Look for new insights/ learnings.
- Look for common ground.
- Look for a common vision.
- Try to combine different values.
- Look for hidden agendas.
- Look for areas of difficulty which may require most attention.

These matters will provide structure to the conversation.

### Map Grid

Use the grid on the following page in groups. Think of a situation you have experienced in your church and see if you can tease it out, using this grid.

<p>who:..... needs:..... .....</p> <p>who:..... fears ..... .....</p> <p>needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears ..... .....</p>	<p>who: ..... needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears ..... who: ..... .....</p> <p>needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears: ..... .....</p>
<p>who: ..... needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears: ..... who: ..... .....</p> <p>needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears: ..... .....</p>	<p>who: ..... needs: ..... .....</p> <p>who: ..... fears: ..... .....</p> <p>needs: ..... .....</p> <p>fears: ..... .....</p>

**The Issue**

# Levels of disagreement and conflict



**Aim:** To enable people to diagnose the stage any given conflict has reached and to take appropriate action, both in individual and group situations.

**You will need:** ohp slide of levels of conflict (page 87), a copy of the 2 handouts for each participant (pages 87 - 90)

**Time required:** Part 1 – 30 mins, Part 2 – 45 mins.

Conflict in churches can sometimes paralyse us. We so dislike the sensation of being out of sorts with one another that we tend to sweep things under the carpet but, sadly, negative emotions tend to fester if left unacknowledged, and will burst out at unexpected times and cause damage.

Similarly, because we often refuse to acknowledge that there is negative stuff around we do not address it until the issue has become almost too deep to handle. These exercises and handouts aim to help people to begin naming the level of conflict they are experiencing, and taking appropriate action at the right time. This is particularly important to recognise when things are going wrong in groups. For example we may think we are in crisis, when in fact the reality is that we are a couple of levels further back and there is action that can still be helpfully taken.

## Part 1

As individuals

- Think of a conflict with another person that you have experienced.
- On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate it?
- List some of the factors that make you rate it at this level.

## In pairs

- Share your feelings and reactions to conflict. Is there any similarity about how you view the intensity of the conflict?
- Now look at the handout – *“Identifying Levels of conflict in interpersonal relations.”* How does your score relate to this description? Do you find these questions useful in interpreting the level at which a situation has reached?
- What action might usefully be taken at each of the 5 stages?
- How might this be used in your church?



## Levels of disagreement and conflict

### In plenary

- Pool ideas for action at each stage – by whom?, with whom?, when? etc.

### Part 2 – Conflict in groups – 45 mins

The handout for this exercise identifies five levels of conflict. The purpose of the chart is to assist congregations to determine the level of a given conflict and to suggest the skills that are necessary to de-escalate a conflict.

These are not discrete levels – there will obviously be overlap, but they do give some helpful indication as to when conflicts can be handled by skilled people within the congregations and when help might be required from outside.

#### 1. Understanding the levels

- Divide the group into 5, and give each a different level to focus on.
- Ask the group to read the characteristics of the level and clarify what the statements really mean.
- They are then to act out, to the rest of the group, a conflict which is at this level of intensity, choosing the appropriate language and attitudes. Each drama should last no longer than 3 mins.
- At the end of each short drama, the group can ask questions to clarify what, and why, things are happening.

#### 2. Skills and response

- The group can now look at all the skills and responses
- Do we know where to find the skills needed?
- Do we have a strategy to strengthen our own skill base?  
How can we move forward in these areas?

# Identifying Levels of Conflict in inter-personal relations

Discomfort

- Are you mulling over the situation because it does not sit right with you?
- So far you have said very little about it?

Incidents

- Can you point to one or more incidents when you clashed ?
- Has something occurred that has left you feeling irritated or upset?

Misunderstandings

- Do you feel that the other person has misinterpreted your feelings, motives or responsibilities? How?
- Could you be misinterpreting theirs? How?
- Do you keep churning this over in your mind?

Tension

- Has the way you view this person changed for the worse?
- Is the relationship a constant source of worry and concern?
- Does each new interaction confirm your poor opinion of them?

Crisis

- Has a major explosion occurred?
- Were extreme measures threatened?
- Were extreme measures executed?
- Was the outcome destructive?
- Is normal behaviour and functioning difficult?

Characteristics	Skills needed	Response
<p><b>Level 1: Problem to Solve</b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Real disagreement; conflicting goals, values, needs</p> <p><b>Emotions:</b> Short-lived anger, quickly controlled; parties beginning to feel uncomfortable with each other</p> <p><b>Orientation:</b> Tends to be problem-oriented, rather than person-oriented.</p> <p><b>Information:</b> Open sharing of information</p> <p><b>Language:</b> Clear and specific</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Solving the problem, wanting unanimous agreement. Willing to use collaborative style.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Collaborative agreement. Win-win mutually acceptable agreed solution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust/rapport building skills</li> <li>• Ability to think theologically</li> <li>• Good listening skills</li> <li>• Collaborative skills</li> <li>• Problem-solving and decision - making skills</li> <li>• Knowledge of available resources</li> </ul>	<p>On-going training in basic skills in communication and handling difference for all congregation. Use of case studies and role playing.</p>
<p><b>Level 2: Disagreement</b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Real disagreement: mixing of personalities and issues; problem cannot be clearly defined</p> <p><b>Emotions:</b> Distrust beginning. Caution in mixing with "the other side"</p> <p><b>Orientation:</b> Begin personalising the problem; shrewdness and calculation begin.</p> <p><b>Information:</b> Selective holding back of information occurs on both sides</p> <p><b>Language:</b> More vague and general "some people.." "they", hostile humour, barbed comments and put-downs</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Face-saving; come out looking good. Tend to move toward consensus.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Attempt collaborative solution, or negotiate acceptable agreement; win-win with effort.</p>	<p>All skills needed in Level 1, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical skills</li> <li>• Understanding of power dynamics</li> <li>• Mediation skills</li> <li>• Self-awareness skills and ability to bracket own concerns</li> </ul>	<p>As above, plus</p> <p>Some members consider some specialist training in conflict resolution</p> <p>May be useful to use skilled outsider to act as facilitator</p>

Characteristics	Skills needed	Response
<p><b>Level 3: Contest</b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Resistance to peace overtures. Focus on people as 'enemy'. Start of win-lose</p> <p><b>Emotions:</b> Cannot function in presence of 'enemy', however admire worthy opponent. Not willing/able to share feelings constructively</p> <p><b>Orientation:</b> Personal attacks. Formation of factions/sides. Threat of people leaving</p> <p><b>Information:</b> Distortion is a problem. Information shared only within factions</p> <p><b>Language:</b> Overgeneralised "you always..." Attribute diabolical motives to others</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Shift from self protection to winning. Objectives more complex</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Decision-making – compromising, voting, some will leave the church</p>	<p>Skills as in levels 1 &amp; 2, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing and negotiating contracts</li> <li>• Clear recognition of one's own limits</li> <li>• Understand interaction of personality types</li> <li>• Facilitator in group process</li> <li>• Skilled in developing clear process of decision-making</li> </ul>	<p>Use outside help –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mediation team</li> <li>• consultant</li> <li>• access to individual trained to use personality instruments eg. Myers/Briggs etc.</li> </ul> <p>May be last opportunity to find ways to resolve issue</p>
<p><b>Level 4: Fight/Flight</b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Shift from winning to getting rid of person. No longer believe that people or situation can change</p> <p><b>Emotions:</b> Cold self-righteousness. Will not speak to other side</p> <p><b>Orientation:</b> Factions solidified. Clear lines of demarcation</p> <p><b>Information:</b> No acceptance or listening to contrary information</p> <p><b>Language:</b> Language solidified into ideology – talk of 'principles' not issues</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Now desire to eliminate others from the environment. Hurt others or group</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> High probability of split, with significant numbers leaving church.</p>	<p>Skills in levels 1, 2 &amp; 3, plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to access professional organisations and resources</li> <li>• People with proven track record in deep conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use experienced professional consultant</li> </ul> <p>Acknowledge that issue is unlikely to be resolved, but damage can be limited and some strategies developed to negotiate a settlement</p>

### Level 5: Intractable

#### Characteristics

**Issue:** No clear understanding of issue; personalities have become issue.

**Emotions:** Relentless obsession in accomplishing the objectives at all costs . Vindictive. No objectivity or control of emotion

**Orientation:** Sees opposition as harmful to society, not simply to the offended group

**Information:** Information skewed to accomplish objective

**Language:** Focus on words that imply the destruction and/or elimination of the other

**Objective:** To destroy the offending party eg. ensure fired pastor never gets a job elsewhere

**Outcome:** Highly destructive

#### Skills needed

All skills required for levels 1-4, plus

- Strong support and counselling resources for persons involved
- Ability to practice Stress management techniques

#### Response

Strategy for rebuilding remaining relationships

Strong pastoral care and support

Healing process for those caught in the crossfire.

No reconciliation possible at this stage – consultant's role is to minimize that damage of conflict and enable group to function again

# Co-operation rather than Competition



**Aim:** A teaching segment and a game enable people to develop a different approach to viewing a problem or issue in the church. The material aims at helping people to become soft on people and hard on issues, to discover the shared interests in any situation and to find collaborative approaches to issues

**Process:** If there is time, playing the Red/Blue game first forms a useful, experiential introduction to this teaching segment. (see pages 97 – 100)

**Time required:** Red/Blue game – 40 mins, teaching input and discussion – 20 mins, exercise in collaboration – 30 mins

**You will need:** a copy of page 96 (2 models of bargaining) copies of the two case studies (page 95) to enable people to practice co-operative/ collaborative working. You may also want to copy the handout 3.10 on page 101 which summarises a number of aspects to collaborative working.

## Teaching Segment

Imagine 2 children playing with a toy

They disagree

**“its my turn to play with the toy”** – issue

But the other person quickly becomes the problem

**“You never let me play with the toys”** – person

Problem broadens as the conflict intensifies – becomes less specific and more general:

**“You’re horrid!”** – denigrating person

We need to recognise in church life that basically every individual wants the best and believes that their actions are in the best interests of everybody, and we need to affirm and encourage people, not destroy them. The aim is to be soft on people and hard on issues.

To do this we need to

- 1) determine the interests and
- 2) use collaborative skills

## Co-operation rather than Competition

Refer to ohp slide (2 models of bargaining) p 96

The usual confrontational model [1] makes the other person the problem. The parties are adversaries and the goal is for one to achieve a victory over the other. The outcome is Win-Lose.

In order for this to happen parties are often forced to undermine their opponent in order to assert their opinion, and to take an increasingly extreme position. Polarising quickly takes place and people find themselves in holes that they cannot climb out of.

A different model that we need to encourage is a strategy for Win-Win negotiation. This involves getting the parties on the same side of the table and together confronting the issues. [2] The key strategy is to identify the underlying interests rather than the positions. That is, we seek to discover why someone wants a particular outcome.

### Scenario

**Person A** thinks that the morning service should be at 9am, and that those who want a later service are showing a distinct lack of discipline and commitment. We should be celebrating the Lord's Day at the beginning of the day.

**Person B** wants the service to move to 11am. This would be more accessible to outsiders who tend to have a lie-in on Sundays, and the church should be mission-focussed, not simply concerned with internal preferences.

It can be seen that this could quickly become a confrontation which could become nasty. At present the issue is being approached at the values level – this often happens in churches (see section 3.8 on how conflicts escalate) However the real issues might be quite different.

Lets try to see what the underlying interests are:

Person A always has their elderly mother for lunch on Sundays and she expects a full roast. A really needs more time to get everything ready, now that they have to collect their mother as well.

Person B has 2 teenage kids who will not get out of bed and every Sunday involves an exhausting hour of shouting, arguments and pleading, and everyone arrives at the 10am service grumpy and tired. B needs a less stressful time before church.

Once these interests are on the table we can work on them together.

## Co-operation rather than Competition



### A process for win-win bargaining

**1. Preparation.** Arrange a time to meet, and prepare people to come and see if we can work on the issue together. Let there be a clear agreed agenda

**2. It is important to highlight the shared interests, and document them.**

It is clear that the current service time suits neither party, so they share a problem with it.

**3. List the main concerns of each party.** This can be started by each person expressing how they feel about the issue, while the other listens. Before stating their point of view, the listener first summarizes what they have heard the speaker say. If B has correctly summarized A's concerns B can speak. However if A is not happy with the summary, then A needs to clarify and B again summarizes. This will also happen after B has spoken as this process ensures that both have fully heard and understood each other

A; more time to care for elderly relative

B; less stressful start to the day

**4. Seek to find at least 2 solutions to each concern,** without discussion or evaluation at this stage. Particularly look at how A could meet B's interests and vice versa. This is brainstorm time – keep the ideas coming.

**A's issue:**

B always prepares potatoes for Sunday lunch on Sat pm, they could prepare extra for A each week.

B's older son comes over for lunch each week and could pick up mother on his way, and save A the time.

**B's issue:**

Would an evening service geared to the needs of teenagers be an option to explore?

If A paid B's teenagers to come and do an hour's odd jobs before church, would it help them get up more quickly?

## Co-operation rather than Competition

### **Shared concerns:**

A and B may also come up with some joint proposals, such as suggesting to the church leaders that they conduct a survey to see how others feel about the service times.

Is there any mileage in having 2 services in a morning?  
Etc etc.

**5. Choose the ideas with greatest possibilities** and work out how to take them further – how, when, where and who?

At the end of this process nothing will necessarily have been decided about the best service time, but A and B will understand each other better and have started to clarify an important issue for the church, which can be explored without generating unnecessary heat. Both will hopefully leave feeling that they have been listened to, understood and that others are sharing their particular burden. They will also feel that there are some ways forward, and that the issue will be pursued by others.

This is win-win.

## Co-operation rather than Competition 2 Case Studies



### Practice

Work in pairs. Player A is able to listen and use collaborative skills, where as Player B displays little ability to do this, and in each case begins the conversation. When you go to the second roleplay – swap roles so that each of the pairs gets a chance to practice being the skilled person.

#### 1. Mission co-ordinator vs. Junior Church co-ordinator

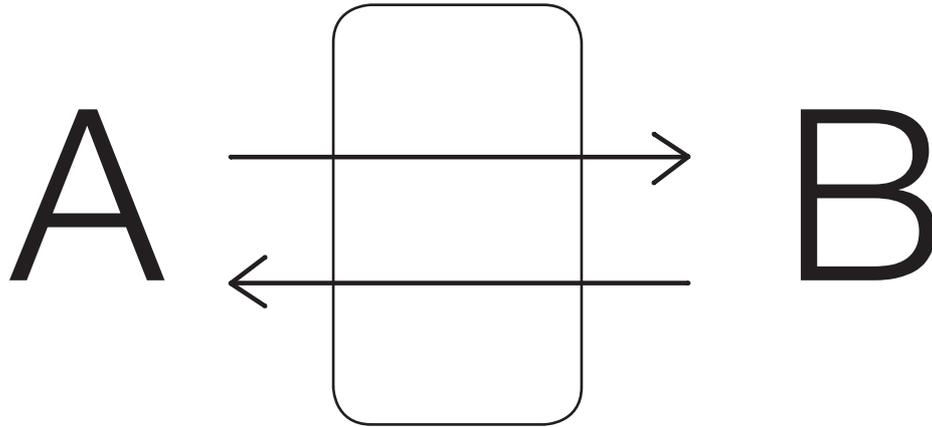
**A. Mission Co-ordinator.** You are in a small sub-urban church that has struggled to grow for many years. Recently a new person has come to faith, and started attending the church. He has a background in Yoga teaching, and sees the physical benefits and the calming effects as wholly consistent with his new found faith. He has offered to do a series of classes in the church, and you have developed a short course of reflections to accompany each class, which helps people begin to explore spiritual questions, and this will form an excellent way of contacting people in the local community who would never normally dream of coming into church. You are really encouraged that the list of applicants for the yoga is nearly full, and you have a group pledged to pray for this exciting initiative.

**B. Junior Church Co-ordinator.** You reluctantly agreed to this yoga initiative when it came to the church meeting, but now you discover that the classes will be held in the sanctuary – because they need a warm, carpeted space. This is a step too far. The sanctuary should be solely for the worship of God – there’s no telling what influences these eastern religions can have and you feel that you need to protect the young people and children in your charge from the pollution of these possibly evil influences. You approach the Mission Co-ordinator and demand that the classes be cancelled immediately.

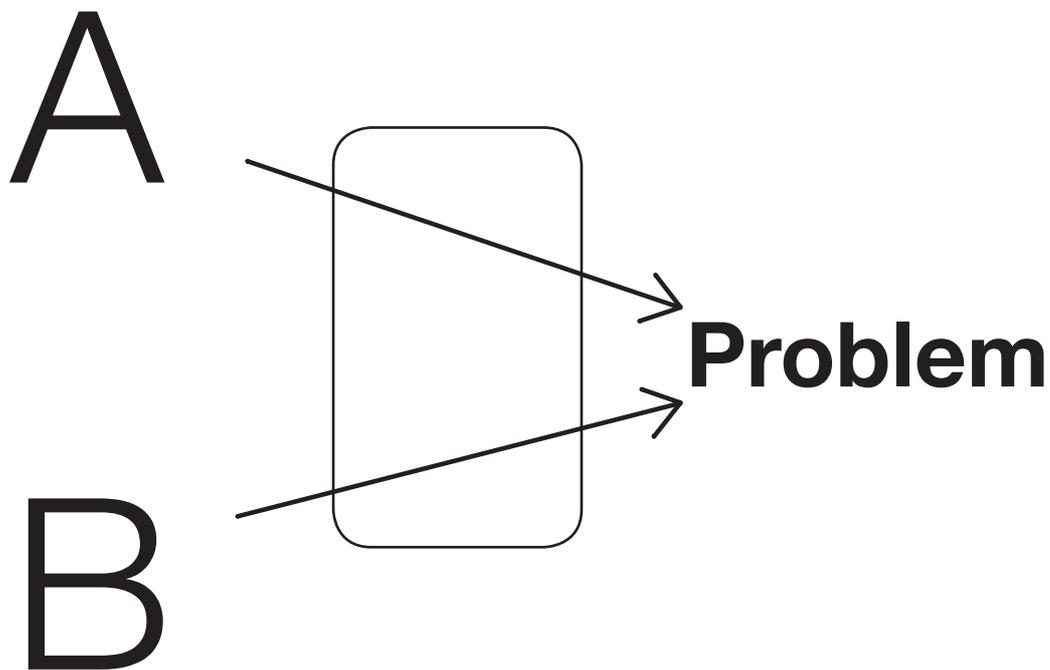
#### 2. Pastor vs Church Member

**C. Pastor:** Hearty Baptist Church has employed you full-time for the last 5 years. Last year, with the full permission of the leaders and church meeting, you began working as chaplain to the local shopping center. It has been a demanding year, but you have been brought into contact with a whole new segment of the community and have been able to have many significant conversations about life and faith with all sorts of people who would never darken the doors of a church. You feel that your pastoral ministry has grown through these encounters and that the mission of the church has been furthered by your relationships in the shopping centre. You have recently begun an early morning “pause for thought’ in one of the bigger stores and a couple of people have started attending the church’s Alpha course.

**D. Church Member.** You are angry that the Pastor seems to be spending more time shopping than praying these days. You have noticed him sitting in the shopping mall café on several occasions recently. He is neglecting his own flock, just to get discounts in the shops by virtue of his being part-time staff. We pay him to care for us, not those riff-raff that waste their time in the mall. Recently your mother had to go into hospital and no-one from the church bothered to visit her. You have been talking with several others and they all agree that enough is enough – the pastor must go! You never trusted a man with an earring anyway.



Position – based bargaining



Collaborative,  
Interest – based bargaining

# Red/Blue Game



**Aim:** To introduce the concept of negotiating outcomes, and raise issues about winning, losing or collaborating.  
(NB Do not announce this aim before the game!)

**Time:** 40 mins - 20 mins for game, 20 mins debriefing

**You will need:** An instruction sheet for each person. The score sheet for each group of up to 10 people. A large central score sheet on OHP slide or butchers paper. Textas. Ideally have a room for each group, but at least enough space for groups to gather in circles away from each other.

## The process

Divide participants into 2 groups of equal size (max 10 per group)  
(If you have more than 20 people, you will need to have more teams of 2 groups and appoint another leader as an observer to each pair.)

The 2 groups sit in a circle at different ends of the room, or ideally in different rooms. They are to give themselves a team name.

Hand out the Instruction sheet and one score sheet, and ask them to read it through fully, and discuss a game plan.

As leader you will need to visit the different groups and invite them to play a certain colour. If you are in the same room, this will need to be whispered to you so that the other group does not hear.

When you have both groups colour's recorded for each round announce the results loudly to both parties, and put on the central score sheet.

You will also need to decide how fast you push the game along. Initially you might force them to make speedier decisions and then, if they are deep in negotiation with each other, give them time.

Note that after the fourth and eighth rounds you will ask if the groups wish to confer with each other. You are not forcing this – just offering the opportunity.

At the end of the tenth round, call the groups back together and share the final scores.

# Red/Blue Game



## Debrief

- What did we learn about negotiation?
- Did we feel under pressure to win the game? Why? Where did this pressure come from?
- Did we confer with the other group – why/why not?
- If groups negotiated, was it difficult to trust the other team? What did we learn about church life?



# Red/Blue Game - Instruction Sheet Read Carefully

## Objective

The objective of this exercise is for your group to end up with a positive point score based on the scoring system below.

## Procedure

- An observer will visit your group and ask you to decide whether to play **Red** or **Blue**. You will not be told which colour the other team has played.
- After each group has made their decision for each round, the observer will announce the colours that have been played and you fill in your score sheet.
- Scoring is as follows:

Group A plays	+	Group B plays	The Score is...	Group A	Group B
Red	+	Red	=	+3	+3
Red	+	Blue	=	-6	+6
Blue	+	Red	=	+6	-6
Blue	+	Blue	=	-3	-3

- There will be 10 rounds
- After the **FOURTH** & **EIGHTH** rounds the observer will ask the groups if they would like to confer. This conference will only take place at the request of both groups. If either does not wish to confer no meeting will take place.
- The scores in the **NINTH** & **TENTH** rounds will be doubled.

**Remember:** The objective of the exercise is for your group to end up with a positive score.

# Red/Blue Game – Score Sheet



	Colour played		Score	
	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B
Round 1				
Round 2				
Round 3				
Round 4				

A conference may be arranged at this point if both groups request it.

Round 5				
Round 6				
Round 7				
Round 8				

A conference may be arranged at this point if both groups request it.  
NB Scores in the next 2 rounds are doubled.

Round 9				
Round 10				

Total		
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**Group A      Group B**

**Section 3.10 Game**

# Useful Collaborative Skills



- 1. Plan.** Only talk about your concerns when there is enough time. Best to book an appointment. Think through how to present what you want to say.
- 2. Provide the purpose.** Clarify your intentions so that others understand your motives. “My purpose of this visit is that I would really like to maintain good relations with you. It would help me a lot if we could talk about what happened last night.”
- 3. Bracket.** Put your own judgments and reactions to one side until you have really listened to, and tried to understand, the other’s point of view.
- 4. Paraphrase.** Put the other’s case to them in your own words. This helps the other person to realise that you have heard what they have said; this makes it easier for them to hear your own view.
- 5. Build bridges.** Agree with people as much as you can. “I agree with you that...” or “I share your concern about...”
- 6. Focus on interests; ignore positions.** Try to find out why someone is saying something. Respond with “Say more about why you feel that’s a fair solution...” or “Help me to understand your reasoning...”
- 7. Speak for yourself.** “I feel that...” Not “Many people think that...” or, “I know that others feel the same way as I do.” Only ever speak for yourself.
- 8. Use ‘I’ statements.** Communicate your own feelings. “I’m feeling really quite angry about the way things have worked out.” NOT “The way you handled that was outrageous!”
- 9. Be specific, don’t generalize.** Talk in terms of who, what, where, and when. “I’ve felt frustrated because twice this week you neglected to call me when you promised” NOT “You never keep your promises!” Similarly, ask for specific examples from others so that you can better understand.
- 10. Generate multiple options.** Don’t get locked into one solution – try brainstorming and listing different options first
- 11. Preference stating:** Help others in making decisions by providing clear, direct info about your desires or choices. “I would rather...” or “My preference would be...”





# Section 4



Fit4  
*Life*

Promoting Health for Growth

# Section 4

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# Healthy Decision-Making



“If you have ears, then listen to what the spirit says to the churches”

Revelation 2:7

## Contents

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| 4.1 Introduction | Why does making decisions together cause so much conflict.             |
| 4.2 Bible Study  | Discerning God’s voice together.                                       |
| 4.3 Teaching     | Creating the environment for listening to God.                         |
| 4.4 Exercise     | Can poor theology stop good decisions in your church?<br>Extra Reading |
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| 4.6 Exercise     | Good process in decision making.                                       |
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## Section 4 Contents

# Why does making decisions together cause us so much conflict?

*“The peace that Christ gives you is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful. Christ’s message in all of its richness must dwell in your hearts.”  
(Colossians 3:15-16 Good News Bible)*

The story is told of 5 animals seeking some warmth on a crisp but sunny mid-winter morning in Farmer Brown’s shed. The only shaft of sunlight into the shed, fell across the very place where the farmer’s 4-year-old son had left his red trailer. After lamenting about how cold they were, and what a terrible place it was to leave a trailer, the animals wondered if they might try to move it. The cat could lean against it, the dog could put his paws against it and push, the rooster could perch on its edge and flap its wings, the mouse could pull on its string and the horse could nudge it with his long muzzle.

They did, and they exerted enormous effort to try and move the trailer. Their prize was the prospect of lying down together in the lovely warming sun. All in their own way, they strained every muscle they could employ, but although the trailer rocked a little and even rolled a little, there was no moving the trailer. They were just about to collapse exhausted and dispirited, when one of them had an idea. “Suppose we were all to try to move the trailer in the same direction!”

## Section 4.1 Introduction

**Aim:** This introduction seeks to raise the five key areas of church life that seem to cause difficulty in decision-making. The stories provide an illustration of a typical scenario, which is based on our experience in churches. The stories can be used as teaching aids in sermons, or could form the basis of small group discussion.

**You will need:** the OHP slide on p. 110

It is extremely rare to find a church member who sets out to damage the church. Mostly, we all want to work together for the purpose of loving and serving God. Yet, sometimes, despite our best endeavours, we end up expending huge amounts of energy going nowhere. We find ourselves pushing in different directions. We contend with one another to have our voices heard, our convictions taken seriously, our desires validated. And bit-by-bit, the church we love becomes frustrated, dispirited and exhausted. Somehow, despite all the effort we invest in it, instead of making us healthier, our decision-making processes often leave us very sick indeed.

So what actually goes wrong?

Why does making decisions together cause us so much conflict?



**1. Sometimes, we genuinely don't know how to discern the will of God together.**

The Discernment Baptist Church knew that it needed to develop a genuine sense of mission to its local community. But it didn't know how to decide what to do. Every time it met to discuss the issue, people would end up advocating for different things: outreach to youth, a shelter for homeless people, a door to door evangelism campaign, a drop-in for senior citizens, a playgroup ministry, a community festival, articles in the local newspaper on social values, advocacy for indigenous people and for refugees. All ideas had their passionate supporters, and all of them seemed good ideas, but nobody knew how to negotiate their way to a community decision. So they remained frustrated and no outreach to the community began.

**2. Sometimes, we trip over traditions and language that tie us up in knots.**

Community Baptist Church had a very consultative style of decision-making. Everybody was involved in discussing the church's vision and direction and some wonderful proposals were put forward. But they all seemed to get blocked by people who knew how to mount plausible arguments. They would talk eloquently about the principles of congregational government, about Jesus being the Head of the Church, and about the priesthood of all believers. Apparently all this meant that they had the right to personally oppose decisions they didn't think were the will of God. People felt frustrated, but also felt powerless to know how to challenge such pious sounding statements. The proposals remained blocked and the church began a frustrated stagnation.

**3. Sometimes, we are confused about who has authority to make which decisions.**

Authority Baptist church were in the final stages of an exciting building program. In fact, the opening of the new worship centre was only 3 weeks away. During a meeting to plan the opening, the pastor took a phone message from the fine furniture artist who had been creating the new communion table. Above all aspects of the building development, the new communion table had arrested everyone's imagination - it was to be a symbol of a new approach to being God's gathered community. But the fine furniture artist's business had just been put into liquidation and the table was only half constructed. Quick decisions were required. What should they do? One of the members at the meeting said that as the communion table was central to the life of the church, only a church meeting could decide what

Why does making decisions together cause us so much conflict?

to do. Another said that it was clearly a matter for the building committee. Another thought it a problem that the Worship Group should handle. Yet another thought it an issue for the church leadership team. Others thought that the pastoral team was best placed to make a quick decision. So who's decision was it? Who had the authority to decide what to do with the incomplete communion table? In fact, a heated argument developed, and the planning meeting for the opening ended in disarray.

#### **4. Sometimes we use processes that leave people feeling ignored and unwanted.**

Streamlined Baptist Church had developed a wonderful playgroup ministry. During a presentation to the church council, the coordinators of the ministry explained that they had enough leaders, enrolments and church helpers to run with a 3rd playgroup on Wednesday morning. But this would require converting the mostly unused meeting room into a larger playgroup facility. One member indicated that she thought this was the room used by the Ladies' Mission Group for their monthly meeting for preparing parcels for missionaries. However, in the excitement of this developing ministry, this was considered an irrelevant consideration. Even if that had been their usual meeting room, there were plenty of other rooms they could use. Failing that, they could meet in one another's homes. Three weeks later, the Ladies' Mission Group arrived to discover that their meeting room was in turmoil as major renovations were under way. As a response to a faithful ministry lasting many decades, the ladies felt deeply hurt that they had been cast aside. No other rooms in the church met their particular needs.

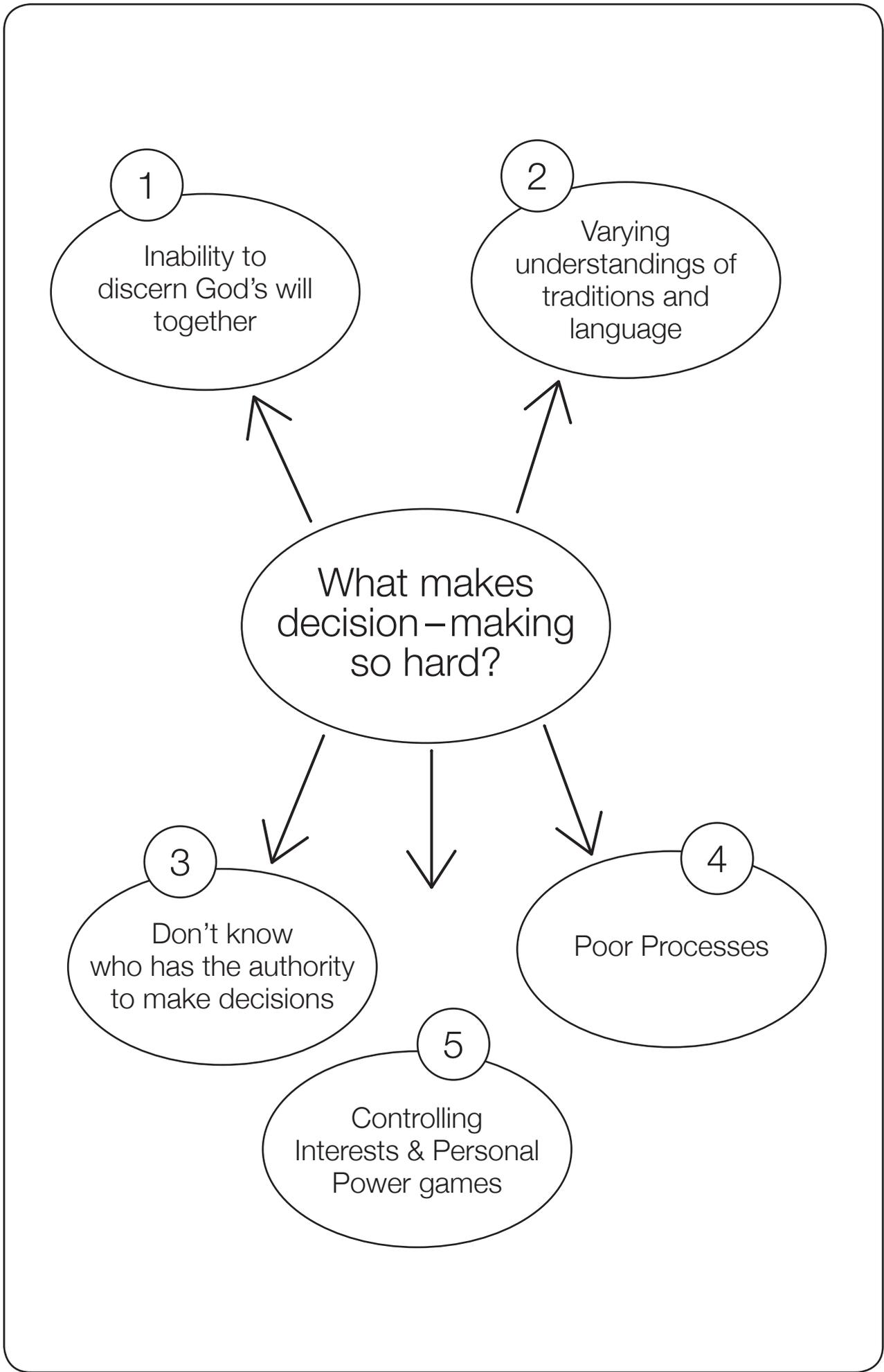
#### **5. Sometimes, our needs to protect our own interests mean that we try to control the decision.**

Jeff had been a deacon of the Changing Times Baptist Church for 30 years. He had given his time and energy with extraordinary faithfulness and sacrifice for as long as most in the church could remember. But the proposal to move to 2 different services on a Sunday morning did not meet his approval. It was a mix of things, really. He hated the idea of breaking up the church into 2 groups. He was genuinely concerned about the extra workload it would put on the church, and the dividing of creative talent. But he also hated the idea of having to stay at church so late that he would not be able to preserve his treasured Sunday routine of a 12:30pm roast lunch, a snooze, an afternoon walk, and scrambled eggs before returning for the evening service. He began to lobby the congregation to resist the move - at least in part as a matter of personal loyalty to him. When the proposal came

Why does making decisions together cause us so much conflict?



to the diaconate of an open forum and small group discussion to explore the issue, he resisted it. In fact, during general business at the next members' meeting, he moved a pre-emptive motion that the morning service be kept at its traditional time, thus keeping the church family together.





# Biblical Reflection On Discerning God's Voice Together

**Aim:** To reflect on the ways God used to communicate with His people in the bible and what this might say to us as we endeavor to hear God's voice in our local churches.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**You will need:** Enough copies of the material below for each participant. Pens for each participant. Butchers paper for each group to record their responses. Textas for each group.

## 1. Small group research

In small groups research the bible material below asking, "What do we learn here about God and how His people heard his voice as individuals and together?"

Write up your discoveries on butcher's paper and then in a plenary session share your responses.

- Genesis 6:8-14 & 7:1
- Genesis 18 1ff
- Exodus 3:1-10
- 1 Samuel 3:1-10
- 2 Samuel 12:1-7
- Acts 1:12-26
- Acts 5:1-11
- Acts 6:1-7
- Acts 8:26-30
- Acts 10:9-23
- Acts 13:1-3
- Acts 15:1-21
- Acts 16:6-10

## 2. Small Group Practical Reflection

Read Romans 12:1-2 together.

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"*



## Biblical Reflection On Discerning God's Voice Together

### **Romans 12 1-2 cont'd**

Pull apart these verses and work together in thinking about what the practical realities are of discerning the will of God. Don't be happy with "spiritual" language but try and get to some down to earth realities of what it might mean for you as individuals and as a church or leadership.

Reflect together in a plenary session then spend some time praying that these things might become reality for you and your congregation.

### **3. Read individually through Revelation chapters 2-3**

Note the pattern in the letters that Christ has written to 7 churches.

An address: "To the angel of the church in..."

A self description: "These are the words of Him who..."

Strengths: "I know your works..."

Weaknesses: "But I have this against you..."

Action: "Remember...Repent, and do..."

Invitation: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Promise: "To everyone who...I will give..."

## Biblical Reflection On Discerning God's Voice Together



- In your group reflect on what you learn in these chapters about how Jesus speaks to his church
- Do some brainstorming about what Jesus might say if he were to write a letter to your church:

What might he commend you for?

What might he rebuke you for?

What might he encourage you to do?

- In a plenary session share your responses to this particular question



# Creating The Environment For Listening To God

(This material is mostly a summary of input from the Breakwater Community at a BUV Ears to Hear conference.)

## 1. The importance of taking time

Time for listening to GOD in silence individually & together.

Time for research and dialogue, listening to others both inside & outside the church or leadership group.

Time for insight, listening to our selves, what is happening inside us.

## 2. The importance of active waiting

God speaks in many ways including the common mind of a group and the strong conviction of an individual in the group. When these are in disagreement then there is need for a time of active waiting on God and continuing the research and dialogue.

## 3. The importance of psychological honesty and maturity

We need to be able to discern if a person is speaking from maturity or for other reasons. For example, hidden agendas can cloud our thinking and speaking or unresolved tensions may impact how we see a particular situation. Our personal history forms a lens through which we view reality and form opinions and we need to be very conscious of that history.

It is particularly important that the relationships between the leaders of the church community are honestly looked at and sorted out.

## 4. The importance of the quality of our relationships and a deep sense of belonging to a group

Trust is crucial and that can be affected by poor relationships. When we have a strong sense of belonging, where we feel safe and valued and where our sense of identity and self worth is not affected by whether we are right or wrong then we have opportunity for good discernment. It is therefore vital in the group or the church that we meet often in a whole variety of ways to develop that sense of trust and belonging. Such things as meals, picnics, fun times, sharing our stories, doing a project together and camping can all contribute to this.

## Creating The Environment For Listening To God



### **5. The importance of experiencing God's grace through the love of and generosity of others.**

If we have known what it is to have come from all kinds of pain, failure and struggle and have received forgiveness, acceptance and encouragement within and through a community of God's gracious and generous people we will be able to bring to the process of discernment something very special.

### **6. The importance of tolerance, respect and frankness**

Discernment will be greatly enhanced by the following:

- Open and tolerant environments
- People of very different personalities and backgrounds being able to express themselves without fear of recrimination
- A basic respect for all people as bearers of God's image
- Dialogue that is frank but respectful
- Prayer for one another

### **7. The importance of accountability**

When consensus can't be reached listening to others outside your community can bring objectivity and help that is significant.

We need to be accountable in our communal life and our personal life so that we might be kept on track, so that blind spots can be exposed and so that we might learn new things that will help us come to clearer discernment of what God is saying.

Such accountability is not easy because we don't like being told "NO" or being told that there is another way.



# Can poor theology stop good decisions in your church?

**Exercise** This exercise lends itself best to a small group discussion.

**Aim:** To explore our understanding of important expressions and values often quoted in decision-making processes in Baptist churches.

**Time:** About 60 minutes, plus 20 minutes if you do a plenary with the full church.

**You will need:** Enough copies of the handout “How is our theology affecting our decision-making” (pages 119 – 120) for at least one per group, or you could do one for each person.

**Background** (which you may like to share with whole group before commencing)

When we are involved in decision-making processes in our church, we actually carry with us a whole lot of baggage that we scarcely know we have on board:

- The way our church has made these sorts of decisions before;
- The way other churches (and denominations) we have previously been part of have handled these sorts of issues;
- The way our Baptist pattern of church-decision-making has shaped us;
- Our understanding of the Bible’s teaching on the church and how it discerns the leading of God.

Often this baggage expresses itself in certain phrases that are often repeated in our life together. In Baptist churches, phrases like, “The priesthood of all believers”, “Congregational government” and “Christ as Lord of the church” are often quoted when talking about how we discern the mind of Christ. These expressions are very powerful for us. They have the feel of final truth after which there can be no debate.

Problem is, we don’t really stop to be clear about what they mean. And so there’s a whole world of potential for misunderstanding and confusion. Worse still, these phrases can be used emotively to sway a meeting – largely because the phrase sounds like it comes with the authority of God, and can make it sound like the person who says it must be right. Wouldn’t it be good to know what these phrases mean?

Added to all this, many of our churches have strong baggage around the role of leadership. These vary all the way from “The pastor and leaders are



## Can poor theology stop good decisions in your church?

appointed by God and must be followed by the church” to “The pastor and leaders must not be allowed to get away with anything; all their recommendations must be fully reviewed by the congregation.” The potential for conflict is enormous unless we talk about it and come to a shared understanding of the role of leadership in our church.

### **Suggested process:**

Take each question in turn. Invite each member of your small group to individually indicate which of the multiple choice options best expresses their understanding. When everyone has made an individual selection, go around the small group as each person shares their preferred response. Are there any differences? Discuss these together briefly and see if you can come to a consensus.

When you have completed all 4 questions as a group, look back over your consensus responses.

- Are they consistent with each other?
- If they are not – where are the main areas of difference?
- Do these reflect some significant areas of uncertainty in church life?
- Are there other expressions used in your church that have the effect of “sealing the argument”, even though it’s not explained what they mean? Such as a significant person saying, “God has told me...”

Finally, it may be helpful to conduct a plenary session at which the small groups report back their conclusions.

- Have the groups come to different conclusions?
- How might you come to an agreement as a church about the beliefs and values you bring to your decision-making?

Eg. Some Sunday teaching? Some work for home groups? A course for new members/ new regular attenders?

### **A few ideas for going deeper**

- Would it be helpful to do some work on what these expressions actually mean? A paper written by Frank Rees (Professor of Theology at Whitley College) is included as extra reading to this section.

Can poor theology stop good decisions in your church?



- How can you make sure that words and expressions used in your church decision-making are clearly understood and are actually helpful in seeking God's direction?

## Section 4.4 Exercise

# How is our theology affecting our decision-making?



## **1. Which of the following explanations best fits your understanding of “the Priesthood of all believers”?**

- a) Every church member has the right to be consulted on all church decisions.
- b) Every believer in Jesus has the right to serve at the communion table.
- c) Every believer may exercise any ministry of the church.
- d) The church together continues the priestly ministry of Jesus, each one of us offering our gift for the common good.
- e) While there is a role for pastors and leaders in the church, they must never make decisions without the whole church meeting to give their approval.

## **2. Which of the following explanations best fits your understanding of “congregational government”?**

- a) We must run our churches along strictly democratic lines: all significant decisions must be referred to the vote of a church meeting and gain 50%+1.
- b) All believers – those committed to Christ and to the church by membership or covenant - are invited to meet with God and with each other to seek together the leading of God.
- c) No decision must be made in a Baptist Church unless all members have had adequate opportunity to express their view.
- d) We must have complete consensus before we make a decision on matters of church direction.
- e) Key decisions about fundamental ministry directions are made together; detailed ministry issues are entrusted to people appointed to make them.

## **3. Which of the following explanations best fits your understanding of “Christ as Head (and sole authority) of the Church”?**

- a) Because Christ is Lord of my life, I must seek His will, advocate for it within the church and stand against anyone who expresses a contrary view.
- b) Christ’s rule is expressed in the church in the same way he lived among us: not by earthly power or dominance, but by love and service.
- c) We must seek perfect unity in all our decisions so that we can be sure that Christ’s way is perfectly seen among us.
- d) Christ is Head of the Body; so as the Body of Christ all believers become co-workers with Christ, active in the things he seeks and wills.
- e) There should be no pastors or leaders; only Christ as Lord of the church.



How is our theology affecting our decision-making?

**4. Which of the following statements best fits your understanding of the role of leadership in the church?**

- a) God appoints and gifts pastors and leadership groups for the purpose of leading the church, and so a faithful church will follow their lead in all things.
- b) We must allow pastors and leadership groups to get on with the job they have been appointed to. At the same time, the church's role is to keep its leaders accountable and the leadership's role is to keep the pastor accountable.
- c) Pastors and leaders may make decisions about worship and pastoral issues, as well as day-to-day management of the church, but decisions about fundamental ministry direction (e.g. vision, pastoral appointments and property development) must only be made by the church.
- d) Pastors and leaders must only make decisions about the matters the church meeting has expressly authorised them to handle.
- e) God has given the ministry of discernment to the church, not to individuals. So pastors and leaders must only bring recommendations to the church for its discernment and decision.

# Extra Reading



## **Reflections on issues relating to 'authority', 'Lordship of Christ', 'priesthood of all believers' and 'congregational government' by Frank Rees**

The following reflection is included because difficulties often arise when people mean different things by various theological/biblical phrases, yet this is rarely fully articulated. We encourage congregations to reflect together on this material and begin to clarify the way we use and interpret these key terms.

All Christians agree that Christ is the head of the church and that the life of each church and each Christian should be conformed to Christ.

The difficulty is to say exactly what this means in practice. How do we ensure that the way of Christ is the governing principle of our life and practice?

I propose that we need to start at a different place: not with what we need to do, first of all, but with what Christ is doing. The Bible uses a wonderful word closely related to 'authority' to describe the Christian life. Christ is 'the author and finisher of our faith' (Hebrews 12. 2). The word has the sense of pioneering or initiating and thus it suggests that the life we live in faith is the life Christ himself is authoring. Our life as Christians is a story Christ is writing and telling.

This way of thinking contrasts strongly with the contemporary focus on the self-directed life (and the self-interest encouraged by some forms of evangelism. While the church is a 'voluntary society', in fact Christians acknowledge that Christ is their Lord and that his way and purpose governs their lives.

We need to think of the church as participating in a story God is telling in and with the world. If we do, then some basic questions arise for us:

- How do we know the way of Christ, the plot of the story?
- What is the story? What is known?
- How does Christ make this happen?

### **How do we know the way of Christ?**

- The basic answer to this question is that God has made this known. God has given us Jesus, a life lived fully in God. In the divine human person, the way of God is known; and not just as information, but as relationship, as experience. Here, the way of God is seen as redemptive love, overcoming sin and death.
- The way of Christ is known through the Scriptures, as taught and preached, studied and lived. Again, this Word is not information, but a living word, drawing us into relationship with God.
- The way of Christ is known by Christians, alive to faith in God, discerning God's will and purpose. The experience of Christians and the church in the past and in the present is one medium of God's self- disclosure. These experiences are, for Baptists, interpreted in the light of scriptural principles and the witness to Jesus. God does not guide us in ways contrary to the example of Jesus.
- The Spirit of God, makes this possible. Jesus has sent the Spirit so that we can continue

## Extra Reading

to know him and be led into truth and freedom as he wills (John 8.32, 15.26, 16.13). The Spirit, as one person of the trinity, lovingly serves Christ by enabling us to know and follow him.

### What do we know of the way of Christ?

- In Christ we know that God is the meaning and hope of all life. God's love is eternally devoted to the well-being of the creation God has made.
- This saving love comes to us through Jesus, as a call to receive, trust and live into this love. Christ is not dead, but is a 'life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor. 15. 45). In the present, the living Christ calls us to God's way of life.
- The life to which we are called is a common life, a community. As God is a living community of three living as one, so too we are called to life in community, in God and like God's life.
- The Bible makes it clear this is not possible with us, but with God it is possible. Where we cannot achieve, God can. The Spirit of God, the spirit of community, enables us to grow into a life together, in Christ. This life together is known as the body of Christ, in which his way reigns. He is the head of the body.

### How then is Christ 'head' of the church?

- Christ 'rules' in the church in the way he lived amongst us: not by earthly power or dominance, but by the strength of love.
- Christ loves the church by directing our lives, individually and collectively, enabling us to live in mutual service, finding fulfilment in this way.
- In shaping a living body which vibrates with living trust and hope-filled love, Christ offers to the Father a restored creation, an offering of glory to God.
- The Spirit moves amongst the creation and especially within the community of the church, evoking awareness of God's way and enabling people to make these choices, in wisdom, courage and patient commitment.
- In the way of Christ, people become co-workers with Christ, members of his body, active in the things he seeks and wills: in redemptive love, overcoming the power of sin and death (2 Cor. 6. 1).
- Christ is our one high priest (Heb. 2.17, 4. 14) and the body he directs lives a priestly life. The life of the community of faith is a priesthood, characterised by Christ's form of priestly service: knowing God and making God known; interceding for the people, even suffering for them, and offering sacrifices of love to God and for them, and in this way making real to the people God's gift of salvation.

## Extra Reading



- 'The priesthood of all believers' is a common life of loving service to God, directed by the way God lives and acts in the world. It is not a set of rights, but a life together, an offering of living worship, in home, work, relationships and in churchly fellowship.

### **The life of the congregation: church gathered and church dispersed.**

- The church is not only the church when gathered, but also when dispersed in many places. Wherever we go, we are the church, offering our priestly service, individually and collectively, as God's people. (Consequently, the gathered activities are only one focus point, and arguably not the most important, of church life.)
- In this life together, all have a sacrifice to bring, a gift to offer. But not all have the same gift. All have an equal responsibility, an equal value and a common purpose. But we do not all have the same gift, or the same task.
- The priesthood of all believers does not mean that anyone can do anything. There has to be a recognition of different gifts. Every person has some gift to offer, whether in the gathered life or in the dispersed life, or both. But no one person has all the gifts.
- Neither does the priesthood of all believers mean that any individual has a right to decide what happens or how they want things done. On the contrary, the body of Christ is to be characterised by the same Spirit of mutual service, deference and love that exists within God and is made known by Jesus. The priesthood of all believers is a collective priesthood, not an individual priesthood of each (separate) believer. Together, each working as part of the body of Christ, we offer a life of praise and service to God.

### **What then do we mean by 'congregational government'?**

- Baptist churches follow a pattern of participatory democracy, in which the people together make the decisions about how our community is shaped, what we do and who will lead us. In so doing, however, this does not mean that every person is consulted about every matter.
- Leaders are called and appointed by the church, to deal with those matters delegated to them by the local church's covenant or constitution. (For example, most groups have rules about how the treasurer is authorised to spend money up to a certain limit, while large or unusual expenditures are brought to the church meeting for approval.)
- The church meeting is not like a 'share-holders meeting' — commonly attended by only those who have a larger stake than others and who therefore wield large amounts of power (in a church this might be because of their wealth or influence or age or history of service) and by the disgruntled, and a small number of very faithful supporters, while the large majority do not attend. This model treats the deacons as a 'board of directors' and the pastor as a CEO and fails to include any of the central elements of the life of the church as a community alive in Christ. It is an abrogation of our general responsibility to each other, as members of the body of Christ.
- The church meeting is primarily a vehicle for expressing the life of the church: it is best understood as a verb rather than a noun. It is the church, meeting: meeting with God and

## Extra Reading

with each other. As a church, we come together to share the life we are given in Christ. This may include reports and some decision-making, but the main purpose is to discern the way Christ is with us and is leading us. As a result, the church meeting is a part of the continuing life of the church, reading the Scriptures together, praying and sharing in fellowship, and out of all this discovering more and more of Christ's way and will amongst us, in all the aspects of our life, dispersed and gathered.

- Out of this common life, priorities and possibilities emerge. Leaders may articulate concerns and directions. In so doing, they offer a lead. Leadership is not dictating a direction. Equally, there must be a place for leadership to discern and explore new directions and then to invite the community to consider this way. 'Congregational government' requires a patient and conscientious commitment of all, to explore and consider how and where Christ is leading the church, and then a willingness to follow that way. This means that when we come together, to a church meeting, we may indeed have prepared what we have to offer, to say and share. But we must also come prepared to change our minds, as we listen to and learn from each other, within the body of Christ.

- The Spirit of Christ is a spirit of challenge and a spirit of peace. To follow Christ requires courage and forbearance. It does not mean that we always 'win'. The Spirit moves mostly by consensus; that is, when a community comes to discover a way which meets the needs and concerns of all. But this is possible only when all are willing to consider that consensus is not the same thing as getting our own way. A compromise may mean finding a way in which we can all achieve what is most important to us (the will of Christ). To do this, we have to open to what Christ may be saying to us through each other, including those who are different and may disagree with us. This form of compromise is not weakness, it requires the strength and patience of the Spirit, to trust that God will lead and enable us all to go forward in unity, despite differences in approach or priorities. This is the way of peace and love which will show the world that we truly are disciples of Christ (John 13. 35). This also is the way Christ exercising his authority in the church.

### **Addendum:**

The following is part of a paper I delivered recently, relating to the priesthood of all believers.

It seems to me that the most important question to consider here is how the gathered life of the church, including and most importantly the worship service, acts of baptism and the laying on of hands, gives expression to the priesthood of all believers. This idea is perhaps the most misunderstood of all in our heritage, especially where it is taken to mean, as one commentator put it a generation ago, 'getting the laity to help the clergy with their work'.

Beginning with an outright refusal of the distinction between clergy and lay, I would suggest that we need to re-think the idea of the priesthood of all believers in such a way as to recognise, with the earliest Baptists, that all Christians are called into ministry, each of us and all of us, as one life together in and with God. This is not a priesthood of each Christian, but of all. There is one, collective priesthood in which we each have a contribution.

## Extra Reading



Secondly, I think it vital to say that the priesthood of all believers does not mean that anyone can do anything, in the ministry of the church, totally, nor specifically in the gathered activities such as worship. The priesthood of all believers does not mean that everyone is gifted for everything; nor that some are gifted for everything (despite their messianic pretensions). Rather it means that all are gifted, and that together there is a ministry which is offered to God as an expression of our life in Christ, our one great high priest. We are together called to be 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Peter 2. 9).

Thirdly, in explaining what this means for Baptist life, I find it helpful to distinguish the gathered life and the dispersed life of the local congregation. The gathered life of the church includes all its organisational expressions, the groups and meetings and missions and machinations, while the dispersed life includes all that the people do and are, at home and work, at leisure and in the wider community.

*A strong biblical argument for the priesthood of the whole church is presented by John A T Robinson in On Being the Church in the World, Chapter Four, 'The Priesthood of the Church', London: SCM Press, 1960. There is a helpful Baptist discussion of this idea in Nathan Nettleton's unpublished Masters thesis The Liturgical Expression of Baptist Identity, Chapter 11. (Melbourne College of Divinity, 2001).*

I want also to argue very firmly for the importance of the dispersed life as the primary context for ministry and worship. The priesthood of all believers is about offering the whole of our lives, and our whole life as a people of God, as worship.

In terms of the worship of the gathered community, however, the priesthood of all believers, understood in this way, is quite crucial. It is not about who can do what. Rather, it is about whose life is mentioned and challenged and prayed for and offered in worship.

Just as we asked the critical question, 'Whose hands?', in the laying on of hands, or the right hand of fellowship, so too it is a critical question whether the worship service is in fact the gathering of the whole lives of all the people. If we see our whole lives as immersed in the mission and life of God, then the worship service must be a gathering and naming of that whole life, individually and collectively, in prayers of thanksgiving and of supplication. Our preaching and praying will be acts of discernment and expectation: seeking where God is and what God is doing, and pleading God's blessing for those we know who are in need, in prison, in suffering and confusion, or praising God with those who are enjoying health and success in their endeavours. In such worship there must be prophetic challenge and positive inspiration, and a sending of all in the assurance that we do not take Christ into the world, rather we meet him, we go with him, alive in the Spirit. In short, if our lives are shaped by our baptism, if we are immersed continually in the life of God, then the worship service will be the gathering and the focussing of who we are, in all aspects: it will be the offering of all that we are, to the glory of God.



# Where do decisions get made?

**Aim:** To clarify if everyone is clear about where various church decisions get made, and who is involved in the process.

**You will need:** A copy of the table for every participant.

**Time:** 5 minutes to fill out the table individually  
15 minutes group discussion,  
10 minutes plenary discussion

## Background:

There are decisions being made all the time that affect church life. These can be made in many different ways, involving various groups of people, eg.: pastor, leadership, ministry leader, church members, specific groups of people and the whole congregation.

In a healthy church everyone knows how decisions are made, what processes need to be followed to make a good decision and what authority each group in the church has to make various decisions. Generally the larger the church the more we delegate decision making to specific individuals or groups.

This exercise is primarily about whether people understand where decisions are currently being made.

The exercise may raise issues for future discussion about changes that could lead to some healthier processes where necessary. These should be recorded for follow up as part of your ongoing process of becoming a healthier church.

## Process:

1. Everyone individually completes the table.
  - On the table below tick in the appropriate column to indicate where you believe the decision is currently made. (Some may be made in consultation with more than one group)
2. Gather in groups of 6-8 people and note where you agree and disagree.
  - Does this indicate everyone is very clear about where decisions are made or are there many different perceptions?
  - Are differences spread over most categories or only in a few?

Where do decisions get made?



- Are you happy with where decisions get made or do you think changes should be made?

3. Leader/Facilitator conduct a discussion with the whole group

- How clear are we all about where decisions get made?
- Are we happy with the levels of delegation for decision making?
- Has the exercise raised issues for further discussion and clarification in future meetings? Make a record of any responses requiring future action.

# Where does the decision get made?

	Pastor	Leadership	Ministry leader	Members only	Whole congregation	Only the people involved	Don't know
1. What teaching materials will be used in the Sunday School.							
2. Should we sell the current buildings and relocate to another site.							
3. Appoint a new church treasurer.							
4. Whether the youth group should focus on outreach or nurture of our own young people.							
5. Who can become a member of the church.							
6. Which home group or bible study you attend.							
7. The purchase of a video projector for the church.							
8. Start an additional worship service of a different style.							
9. Appoint an associate pastor for pastoral care.							
10. Start a new outreach ministry in the community. eg. to single parents.							
11. Setting the vision and direction for the church over the next 12 months.							
12. Whether the church should join in an ecumenical peace service involving other religions.							
13. Appointments to the formal church leadership group, eg. elders, deacons, etc.							
14. The date and venue of a church family camp.							
15. The style of music used in the Sunday worship service.							
16. Appointment of a new senior pastor.							
17. Which ministries each of the leadership should take responsibility for giving oversight to.							
18. Whether an additional playgroup should be started.							
19. Everything involved in a project to refurbish the church kitchen.							
20. The amount of support given to each of the church sponsored missionaries.							
22. The appointment of home group or bible study group leaders.							
23. Changes to the church constitution.							
24. How much the youth pastor should be paid.							
25. Who preaches in each Sunday service.							
26. Approving the church budget for the next 12 months.							

# Good Process in Decision – Making



**Aim:** To think about the way we make decisions  
To devise an ideal decision-making process for our particular church

**Time:** 60 to 90 minutes, as per the breakdown below

Step 1 – 10 mins total

Step 2 – 5 mins

Step 3 – 15 mins

Step 4 – 5 mins

Step 5 – 25 mins

**You will need:** Sheets of butchers paper and textas for each group of 3. One large sheet (2 normal sheets joined together) A copy of the “Group Discussion about Decision Making Processes” (pages 130 – 131) for each person. Enough copies of the “Example of a Good Decision-Making Process” (page 132) for each group or person.

## **Process:**

Gather participants in groups of three, provide them with the “Group Discussion about Decision-Making Processes” handout and invite them to commence working through the steps.

Provide regular reminders to groups regarding time and ensure groups are not getting stuck on a particular stage.

Provide the “Example of a Good Decision-Making Process” handout as groups are ready for it.

After Steps 1-4 are completed, draw everyone together to work through Step 5 as a whole group. Provide each group with an opportunity to explain their suggested process.

Once everyone has shared, dialogue with the whole group to identify the core aspects for an ideal process for this church.

Could the final ideal process form the basis for the way decisions are made from now on?



# Group Discussion about Decision-Making Processes

## Step 1 – (10 mins total)

Think of a significant decision you have made recently, and share this briefly with your group of three. Now pool your answers to the following questions:

- Did you make the decision quickly? How long did it take?
- What made the decision hard to make?
- What helped you in your thinking?

## Step 2 – (5 mins)

Now think about how we make decisions in church.

- How are decisions made in church?
- Are you happy with this process?
- It has been said that “surprised people tend to behave badly” has this ever been your experience in church gatherings?

## Step 3 – (15 mins)

On the butchers paper provided try to draft an ideal process for a significant decision in the church to be made.

Eg. To begin a second service on a Sunday morning (9am) as an outreach activity to families with pre-school children  
OR To buy a piece of land beside the current church  
OR To sell the current buildings and relocate to another site

(Don't get bogged down in the details of the issue – you are focusing on the best possible process for any such decision)

## Step 4 – (5 mins)

Receive the “Sample of a Good Decision-Making Process” handout. Compare your process with that on the handout.

- What are the similarities?
- What are the differences?
- What could usefully be added to the handout?
- Do a final version of your suggested process for this church and prepare to share your insights for the whole group.

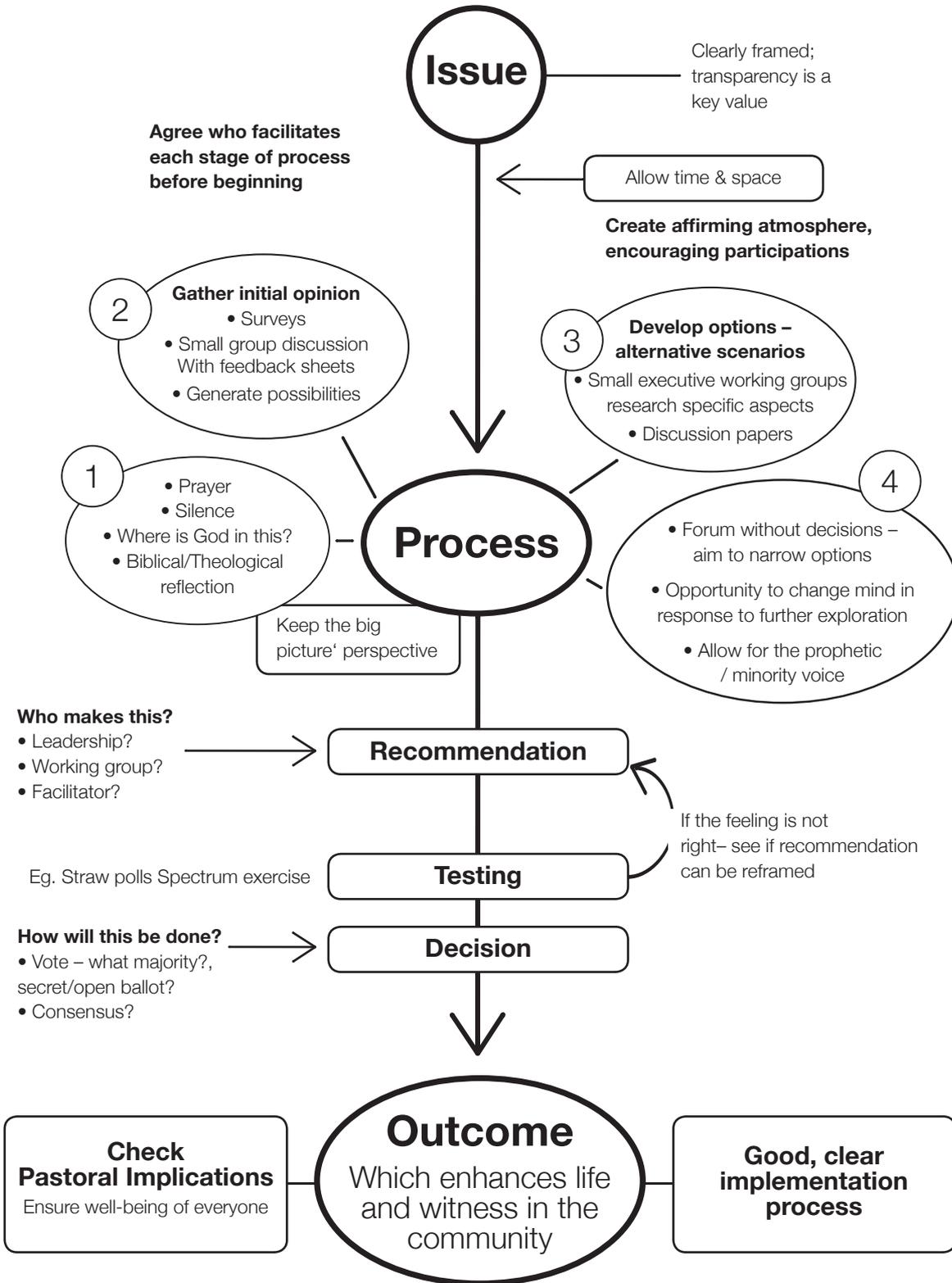
# Group Discussion about Decision-Making Processes



## **Step 5 – (25 mins)**

All groups join back together, and each group shares their recommendations. The goal is for the whole group to form an ideal decision-making process for this church.

# Example of a Good Decision – Making Process



# Six Thinking Hats



**Aim:** To offer a structured method of improving the thinking through of issues in groups.

NB. This is best used in smaller leadership groups. It might be best to be introduced and practiced at a day away so that people can grasp the different kinds of thinking.

**Time:** According to the discussion topic and the method being used.

**You will need:** Enough hats (or hat substitutes) of each colour for each person to have their own hat for each colour.

## Background:

Early in the 1980s Dr de Bono invented the Six Thinking Hats framework for thinking. The method promotes fuller input from more people. In de Bono's words it "separates ego from performance". Everyone is able to contribute to the exploration without denting egos as they are just using the yellow hat or whatever hat. People can contribute under any hat even though they initially support the opposite view. The key point is that a hat is a direction to think rather than a label for thinking, so the hats are used proactively rather than reactively.

Six Thinking Hats is widely used in schools, industry and commerce due to its simplicity and effectiveness. An important aspect of the Six Thinking Hats techniques is that by its discipline it avoids adversarial discussion and even when there may be vast differences in opinion it allows for these considerations to be 'laid out in parallel' in order that a creative consensus is reached.

The main point is to get everyone using the same type of thinking at the same time instead of jumping all over the place. The Six Hats method therefore requires an orderly use of the hats. It is no use mixing all the hats up together, there is a time for each type of thinking (or hat) in the structure of the discussion.

## The Discipline in Six Hats.

The use of Six Hats is primarily in meetings, conversations and discussions involving other people.

One needs to allot time for each of the hats. The time limit for each should be brief enough to prevent attention from wandering. With practice the

## Six Thinking Hats

time allocation is shortened to 'sharpen up' the attention to the focus of the particular hat. Time discipline is part of thinking discipline. If necessary, switch thinking abruptly to the next hat. One must become accustomed to switching thinking at will and in a controlled manner instead of drifting along.

There are six metaphorical hats and the thinker can put on or take off to indicate the type of thinking being used. This putting on and taking off is essential. The hats must never be used to categorize individuals, even though their behaviour may seem to invite this. When done in a group, everybody 'wears' the same hat at the same time.

### **White Hat Thinking**

This covers facts, figures, information we have or need. Have we got all the pertinent information? Is the information complete? Do we need more information? How are we going to get more information? White is neutral and 'pure' - pure facts and figures.

### **Red Hat thinking**

This covers intuition, feelings and emotions. The red hat allows the thinker to put forward an intuition without any need to justify it. "Putting on my red hat, I think this is a terrible proposal." Usually the feeling is genuine but the logic is spurious. The red hat gives full permission to a thinker to put forward his or her feelings on the subject at the moment.

### **Black Hat Thinking**

This is the hat of judgment, caution and why it will not work. It is not in any sense an inferior or negative hat. The black hat is used to point out why a suggestion does not fit the facts, the available experience, the system in use, or the policy that is being followed. The black hat must always be logical.

### **Yellow Hat Thinking**

This is the logical positive, the optimistic. Why something will work and why it will be good. It can be used in looking forward to the results of some proposed action, but can also be used to find something of value in what has already happened. Perhaps the yellow hat is less natural to survival than the black hat and as such needs more thinking effort and practice without 'going over the top'. It creates concrete proposals and permits visions and dreams.

## Six Thinking Hats



### **Green Hat Thinking**

This is the hat of creativity, alternatives, proposals, what is interesting, new ideas and changes.

### **Blue Hat Thinking**

This is the overview or process control hat. It looks not at the subject itself but at the 'thinking' about the subject. "Putting on my blue hat, I feel we should do some more green hat thinking at this point." The blue hat is concerned with evaluating how well we are covering all the angles in the process.

### **Optional Purple Hat Thinking**

This is an additional hat, not part of de Bono's original approach. The purple hat can be worn when we need to think specifically theologically or biblically on an issue. What has God said/done before in these kinds of situations? What is the Jesus way of looking at this?

### **Use of the Six Hats.**

#### **The Systematic Use**

Here the hats are used in sequence, one after another, in order to explore a subject quickly and thoroughly. Each hat may be used as many times as required in the sequence. The sequence of hats may be planned in advance or may be worked out as the meeting progresses.

#### **Use in Meetings**

The main value of the Six Hats method is in meetings in order to get meetings more productive and focused. The hats allow minds to think in a richer way instead of being locked into a position which has to be defended.

The most important thing in a meeting is that everyone must make an attempt to use the designated hat. If a yellow hat is designated then it is not a matter of the yellow hat being only used by the supporters of an idea while the opponents keep quite. The hats are not a description of individuals or their preferred thinking behaviour. Rather than wait for volunteer contributions it may be necessary to ask individuals in turn for their thinking under the hat in use. The point about the method is that everyone should make an effort to think in parallel for the cooperative exploration of the subject.



## Six Thinking Hats

With the exception of the blue hat, it is not permitted for an individual to interrupt or to say “Putting on my black hat...”. Participants must stick to the designated hat whether they like it or not.

The facilitator, the chairperson or person organising the meeting will usually wear the blue hat. Others can make blue hat suggestions and ask for summaries etc.

If a thought comes to mind that would fit under a different hat while you are working within a hat, discard that thought, do not even make a note of it - resist the temptation. There are two reasons for this. Firstly one must give exclusive attention to the current hat. Secondly by noting thoughts for different hats one is just classifying thoughts rather than focussing thoughts within the time allowed for each of the hats.

In meetings there should be no disagreements or contradictions during the use of the hats. If there is an alternative or different point of view it must be ‘laid alongside’ the original point of view.

There are many books that give more detail on using this method as well as many internet sites with helpful information on exploring it further.

### Section 4.7 Extra Idea

# Transparency and Secrecy in Making Decisions



This exercise could be done either in one large group or in small groups.

**Aim:** To invite people to explore how the items on a leadership team agenda could be creatively shared with the congregation.

**Time:** About 30 minutes

**You will need:** Only the questions and agenda below.

## **Introduction:**

Healthier churches tend to operate with high levels of openness and transparency in processes of making decisions.

By contrast, less healthy churches tend to operate with secrecy, and with high levels of protectiveness as to who has rights to information.

## **Confidentiality**

Of course, there are aspects of church life where information should not be shared. This is known as confidentiality. It arises wherever a person or leadership group or ministry group is dealing with personal information about people.

## **Exercise:**

- Turn to other people around you and spend five minutes thinking of as many situations as you can where confidentiality needs to be observed.  
(E.g. Details of a person being considered as part of a pastoral search process;  
Details of a person's medical situation shared during a pastoral visit;  
Details of the domestic situation of a child attending a holiday program.)
- In general, this sort of information should only be shared with the express permission of the person concerned.
- A full treatment of confidentiality in relation to the Privacy Act is addressed in the Privacy Policy of the Baptist Union of Victoria.

## Transparency and Secrecy in Making Decisions

### **Inappropriate secrecy**

However, in many churches we have created a culture in which many other things are handled with high levels of secrecy. This has often been true of the culture of leadership groups.

There are reasons why this has developed. Leadership groups have sought to operate in secrecy so:

- They have time to fully explore, research and pray through issues so that a carefully thought out proposal can come to the church.
- People don't have to contend with possibilities that might upset them.
- Unnecessary controversy can be avoided.

However, these practices often confirm churches in unhealthy patterns:

- Church members may be treated like children who are unable to cope with the complexities of church life and are limited in their capacity to enter into a process of discerning the mind of Christ;
- In desiring to protect people from distress and controversy, people are denied an opportunity to grow together into greater maturity in Christ;
- An environment of secrecy and suspicion may develop, in which the leadership group becomes quite isolated from the rest of the church community. This can create high levels of hurt and misunderstanding for both leaders and members of the church community.
- They can be a means through which the leadership group controls the church, rather than serving it;
- They can be a means through which people can protect their own interests and power-bases.

## Transparency and Secrecy in Making Decisions – Handout



Overleaf is a list of items on the agenda of the leadership team of the Open Community Baptist Church.

- In a healthier church, which of these items would be shared with the congregation? What means of communication could be employed?
- Which of these items should be opened to the congregation for an open discussion? What means of discussion could be employed?

## **Open Community Baptist Church Leadership Team Agenda March 6, 2004**

1. Opening devotion
2. Sharing of ministry highlights and concerns - an opportunity to share the personal journey together
3. Prayer for one another
4. Reports of ministries - reports for March:
  - Youth and Young adults ministry
  - Worship ministry
  - Men's ministry
  - Pastoral care report
5. Triplets for prayer around prayer cards
  - Other matters
6. Matters of vision and direction:
  - Proposal to commence a monthly coffee shop creative worship event
  - Proposal to draft guidelines for a facility extension and property master plan
  - Discussion paper of involving young adults in church decision-making processes
7. Matters of ministry development
  - Proposal for a month of focus on "following Jesus at work and school", incorporating pulpit teaching and home groups
  - Proposal for a regular baptism class in the lead up to Easter each year
8. Matters of our covenant together
  - Plans for a covenant renewal service
  - Plans for a pastoral review
9. Other issues
10. Concluding review
  - Is there anything that has troubled us in the way we have worked together tonight that we need to resolve before we leave?
11. Benediction and Passing the peace

# 10 Tips for Communicating Well in Baptist Churches



Transparency requires constant attention to good communication - especially between the leadership team and the congregation. How that can best happen in your church will depend on the means at your disposal - and just how creative you want to be! There must be a hundred and one good ideas for clear communication within a church. Here is a list of just 10 ideas to get you started.

- Which of these would work at your church?
- What other ideas do they suggest for you?

1. Use the newsletter/noticeboards creatively.
2. Don't bog a service down with endless, boring announcements. Instead, find creative ways to communicate a few key things well.
3. As leaders, let the congregation know the key issues you are working on at your meetings (e.g. put them in the newsletter and ask for prayer).
4. Let people know about key decisions you have made.
5. Use visual ways of communicating around the church.
6. Give people time to think through big issues they need to make decisions about. Have a "no decision" meeting to air issues and invite feedback before you finally shape a recommendation.
7. Make sure people have the basic information needed to back up a recommendation well before the meeting to decide the issues.
8. Give financial reports using no more than 1 page of A4 paper and with as few numbers as possible. Include weekly offerings and how they are going against budget, other income, expenditure, bank balance and any signs of joy or concern.
9. Have an open church forum every 6 months just to give people a chance to ask questions and suggest new ideas.
10. Use email with key leaders for agendas, prayer issues, ideas, spiritual challenges, articles, etc. [NB. Email should not be used to avoid face to face contact!]





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# Section 5



Fit<sup>4</sup>  
*Life*

Promoting Health for Growth

# Section 5

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# Clarifying Roles and Expectations



Like good stewards of God’s grace,  
serve one another with whatever gift  
each of you has received

1 Peter 4:10

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5.2 Exercise	Where We Can Go Wrong – Stories Where Coordination Fails
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5.5 Extra Reading	The Role of Deacons/Leadership Team
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5.8 Exercise	Clarifying Expectations – All Volunteers

## Section 5 Contents

# Clarifying Roles and Expectations

*“... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

Ephesians 4:15-16

A healthy church - just like a healthy body - has all its parts working in a coordinated fashion to achieve its objectives.

When we drive a car, kick a football, cook a meal, or play a musical instrument, a healthy body is able to coordinate arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet to achieve the desired effect - all while our eyes, ears, noses, touch and taste are actively giving us important feedback about what we need to notice. Amazingly, once practiced, the body is able to do a lot of these things without much conscious effort.

A healthy church is able to express the same miracle of coordination. It can transform the individual contributions of people into a united, cohesive ministry that expresses the loving presence of Christ. It can also mature to the point where the actions that enable coordination become second nature.

However, just like learning to drive a car, or kick a football, or cook a meal, or play a musical instrument, it requires a lot of conscious - and persistent - effort in order to learn the practices and disciplines that will make our churches bodies that are coordinated, cohesive and united.

It is actually quite a complex business to be a healthy, well-coordinated church. After all, the church is almost entirely made up of people who come with diverse backgrounds, opinions, interests, personalities, gifts and limitations. Plus, increasingly in our highly mobile society we come from different church backgrounds. In fact, we come with a whole host of different needs, understanding and expectations. Getting us all humming along in the same cohesive direction requires us all to be focused on Jesus (so that we're doing what the Head directs), and takes a lot of practice!

**We need to make sure that each part of the body is clear about its role and how it coordinates with the healthy functioning of the whole body!**

# Where We Can Go Wrong: Stories Where Coordination Fails

**Aim:** To help groups to understand how things can go wrong when roles or expectations are not clearly understood

**Time:** About 1 hour 30 minutes  
Each story should take around 20 minutes to read and discuss.

**You will need:** Copies of the stories below for each small group.

## Exercise

Ponder the following stories and reflect on how clearly outlined expectations and defined roles might have helped.

It would be best to do this in small groups, but you can do it individually, or in a large group.

### The story of Paul, the pastor

After years of productive ministry in an affluent leafy suburb, the Boomtown Baptist Church was in decline. From a comprehensive church review they discovered their community had undergone massive change. The young families of the last 25 years had moved on, replaced by a young professional community who were rarely at home during the week and had no interest in the church. They began a pastoral search with a difference - to find a pastor to professional people. During the interview process, they explained that they wanted their new pastor to strongly focus on mission to this new challenging community. They did not want their new pastor to be weighted down with a heavy burden of pastoral care for the church members; they could look after each other. What they needed was some leadership in enabling the church to have a ministry within its community. Paul, a pastor with a background in social research and community development, was the ideal choice for the job.

However, within 2 years, a number of pastoral crises had beset the members of the church. The secretary's wife was having a battle with cancer, the office administrator had separated from her husband and one of the church's stalwarts for half a century had been confined to her home after a severe stroke. The pastor was kind and gracious, but was rarely to be seen in their homes. In fact, the congregation began to wonder whether Paul's care was superficial and to question what he was doing with his time. Nor did they care much for Sunday services being moved to the informal setting of a wine and coffee bar. As disharmony grew, a number of rumours began to circulate, questioning pastor Paul's commitment to the church, and undermining his personal integrity. A letter of complaint came to the diaconate, requesting that the pastor's appointment be terminated.



## Where We Can Go Wrong: Stories Where Coordination Fails

- What could have been done in this situation to preserve healthy coordination within this church community?
- How might it have helped if expectations and roles had been consistently clarified and communicated?

### **The story of Sarah, the worship coordinator**

Sarah had no formal training, but she was wonderful in leading worship. Somehow her own deep spirituality led people into a deep awareness of communion with God. It seemed natural to ask her to take on the new role of worship coordinator. She had a heart to serve the church, and accepted the role with delight. But almost immediately, things started to become awkward.

When she tried to introduce new music, the musicians made it very clear that choosing the music had always been their job. Sarah could make suggestions, but they would continue to choose the music. When Sarah researched the costs of a new data projector and presented her recommendation to the Treasurer, she was told flatly that there was no budget for such extravagant expenditure. When she introduced a drama troupe one Sunday morning, she was told by the deacons that she had no right to change the “fundamental ethos” of the church’s worship service without taking the matter to the church for decision. Broken-hearted, Sarah handed in her resignation. She no longer leads worship.

- What could have been done in this situation to preserve healthy coordination within this church community?
- How might it have helped if expectations and roles had been consistently clarified and communicated?

### **The story of the vision group**

Go-ahead Baptist is at the cutting edge of ministry and it is growing. In a desire to avoid getting too comfortable in predictable patterns, they decide to bring together a new ginger group to keep the church’s visionary edge fresh. The Pastoral Team, the Elders and the Church Council are already too busy and feel unable to give such a role adequate attention. But there is within the church a bunch of creative, young, gifted people who need a stronger voice into the church’s leadership structure. It seems the ideal scenario - meeting a present need and grooming new leadership.

The Vision Group embraces their new role with great passion and enthusiasm.

## Where We Can Go Wrong: Stories Where Coordination Fails



They do considerable research into their community and come up with some well-developed strategies for new missional engagement with some significant groups the church is not currently reaching. Despite a lot of warm, personal encouragement for their work, their proposals never quite seem to get anywhere. The Pastoral Team meets with them and says that they have named the strategies that will take the church into the next decade. The Elders pray for them and say that they are encouraged to see such passion for ministry among young people. The Church Council sends their proposals back to them asking for more information, or greater integration into the church's mission statement or for more attention to the criteria for evaluation. After a couple of years, the Vision Group starts to lose momentum and 2 couples leave the church.

- What could have been done in this situation to preserve healthy coordination within this church community?
- How might it have helped if expectations and roles had been consistently clarified and communicated?

### **The story of Chris, the great new hope**

Good Mates Baptist Church had a rich community life. In so many ways, it was everything you'd want a church to be, but it was small and it constantly struggled with viability. It knew it needed to grow, but lacked the leadership and resources to forge new pathways in ministry.

Chris' arrival from interstate was just what the church needed. A corporate high-achiever, with a theological degree and gifts in strategic planning and communication, he offered the church everything it could have wanted. The church embraced Chris' ideas, and a flurry of activity developed. There had been some concern that Chris was not all that reliable when it came to turning up for meetings. And sometimes he would volunteer to do things during the church service, and simply not show up. But he was a busy man, much loved by the congregation and people thought it would be ungracious to say anything critical.

A community festival, no less, was organised under Chris' leadership for the Labour Day weekend. Except that, 2 days before the festival, Chris rang the pastor to say that he and his wife had been given tickets to the opening of a new show in Sydney, and would be away for the weekend, but he felt confident that the pastor "could handle things".

## Where We Can Go Wrong: Stories Where Coordination Fails

In fact, the festival was a flop. Half the publicity brochures had not been distributed, the advertised carnival for children did not turn up - the firm had been given the wrong date - and they had to move to the church's car park when it was discovered that the public reserve had already been booked by a horticultural show.

- What could have been done in this situation to preserve healthy coordination within this church community?
- How might it have helped if expectations and roles had been consistently clarified and communicated?

One of the causes of loss of health in our community life is that we do not clearly communicate our expectations or clarify the roles and tasks we ask of people. We experience a lot of unnecessary distress and expend a lot of energy on the misunderstandings that result. Being the Body of Christ means operating together in the way modelled by Jesus - loving and serving one another. This at least means being clear, truthful and transparent in communicating what we are asking people to do.

# Clarifying Expectations - the Pastor



## **Introduction:**

Most churches do work hard to clarify the pastor's role into a clearly stated job description. The Advisory Board of the BUV has a number of exercises to assist in this process and the BUV Leaders' Manual (pages 4-17 to 4-29) includes a guide to the preparation of a "Statement of Understanding" which can help churches to clarify the terms and conditions of a pastor's appointment.

However, the role of pastor has so many diverse, unstated expectations attached to it, that the clarifying of the pastor's role needs constant vigilance. Here is how one pastor reflected on his role in his diary:

"I am appalled at what is required of me. I am supposed to move from sick-bed to administrative meeting, to planning, to supervising, to counseling, to praying, to trouble-shooting, to budgeting, to audio systems, to mediation, to worship preparation, to newsletter, to staff problems, to mission projects, to conflict management, to community leadership, to study, to funerals, to weddings, to preaching. I am supposed to be 'in charge,' but not too in charge, administrative executive, sensitive pastor, skillful counselor, public speaker, spiritual guide, politically savvy, intellectually sophisticated. And I am expected to be superior, or at least first-rate, in all of them. I am not supposed to be depressed, discouraged, cynical, angry, hurt. I am supposed to be up beat, positive, strong, willing, available. Right now I am not filling any of those expectations very well. And I am tired."

(Chandler W. Gilbert, "On Living the Leaving" in Edward A. White (ed.) *Saying Goodbye*, Bethesda, Alban, 1990, p. 25.)

## Clarifying Expectations - the Pastor

**Small Group Exercise:** Clarifying expectations for the pastor's use of time

**Aim:** To help people to gain realistic expectations of what a pastor can actually achieve in a normal working week.

We may have great ideals of all the qualities we need in a person, but we need to prioritise their time accordingly. If someone is to major in certain areas, there may not be time for other functions.

This is a particularly helpful exercise for the entire congregation to go through during a pastoral search process before it determines the pastoral profile. However, it can be useful at any time in clarifying expectations of the pastor.

**Time:** 60 minutes

**You will need:** One large sheet of butchers' paper or an OHP slide for the "Core functions" (see below) to be clearly displayed. A second display that recognises special events and time for the pastor's personal development (see below for details). A third display that outlines any already agreed major emphases for the pastor's ministry (see below for details). Blank butchers paper and felt pens for as many groups of 4-5 as needed.

### Part 1: Educative process

1. In the full group, share together and write down on a sheet of butchers paper or OHP slide the aspects of the pastor's role that would be seen as "Core functions". They may include things like:

- Administration (including deacons and other meetings)
- Pastoral Care (including visitation, counseling, coordinating others' care)
- Preaching/ teaching (including time for preparation and home groups)
- Evangelism
- Community involvement and social justice issues
- Vision/goals/direction setting
- Equipping people for ministry
- Worship preparation and involvement
- Prayer (including prayer meetings and personal prayer)

## Clarifying Expectations - the Pastor



2. On a second sheet of butchers paper, record other events which may not be perceived as core functions, but which normally are part of a pastor's ministry and may take significant preparation time. This could include things like:
  - Special focus functions e.g. funerals, weddings, baptisms, infant dedications
  - Denominational and inter-denominational connections and ministry
  - Major community events like carols by candlelight or community festivals
3. We also need to allow for the time pastors need for their own spiritual and theological development. Add these to the 2nd sheet. They may include:
  - Retreats, supervision, spiritual direction
  - Personal study
  - Study courses for skills or professional development
4. On a third sheet, add any areas of special emphasis you want the pastor to major on. These may include things like:
  - Youth or children's and families' ministry
  - New missional developments
  - Multicultural ministry
  - Specialised counseling ministry
  - Developing new approaches to worship

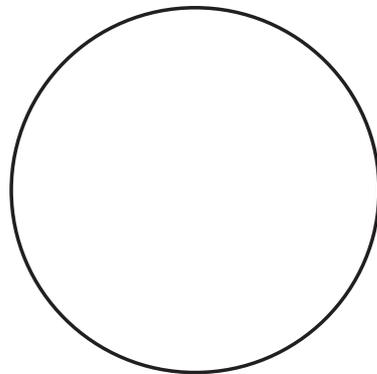
### **Part 2: Time Use exercise**

NB This is an educative exercise. We do not want to endorse the notion that a minister is 'employed' for a certain number of hours. Ministry is a vocation, and a response to the grace and call of God. A congregation does not employ a person to work for them. A congregation frees a gifted person to follow God's call to minister in the community. This is an important distinction, because conflict often arises in a church which believes it 'owns' its pastor. However this exercise aims to set realistic boundaries around what can be reasonably expected of someone, and helps to address the mystery, expressed by many, "what does a pastor do all week?"

## Clarifying Expectations - the Pastor



1. Put people into groups and clarify how many hours a week the pastor is employed for. Ask the group to draw a large circle on their butchers' paper to represent the total available hours.



### Section 5.3 Exercise

2. Ask the group to work out how much time each week (on average) their pastor should spend doing the things outlined on the display sheets.
3. Use the circle on the butchers' paper to develop a pie chart.
4. Bring the groups together, display the results and encourage discussion. Is there any consensus as to what is a priority and what can take a back seat? Do the agreed priorities form a realistic pastoral profile? How important to the church are the ministries that have not made it onto the pastoral profile? If they are important, how else - other than leaving them with the pastor - might they be achieved?
5. See if you can develop a clear statement of pastoral roles and expectations, outlining what you would like the pastor to take responsibility for and outlining clearly what you do not consider the pastor to be responsible for.

## Clarifying Expectations - the Pastor



### **Follow up activities**

1. If your church already has a pastor, it would be helpful for the deacons, elders or leadership group to discuss and negotiate the resulting pastoral profile with her/him.
2. An agreed pastoral profile could then be clearly communicated with the church. This should be done on a regular basis so that it remains clearly understood throughout the church community.
3. It would be helpful to review the pastoral profile on an annual basis. Any changes should be clearly communicated throughout the church. In this way, the stated pastoral profile and informal expectations can be kept as close together as possible.

## Clarifying Expectations – the Leadership Team and Ministry Groups

From reading the New Testament it is clear that Jesus did not leave his disciples with one universal model for church leadership. Rather, it appears that we are given the freedom to develop a way of operating that reflects our church’s discernment of how Jesus would have us minister to our community in our time.

However, if we are to be cohesive and united in our life as a church, it will be important that we clarify what is expected of each leadership group (and ministry group) in the church. What is its role? How are people appointed to it? Who makes sure it is doing what the task the church community has entrusted to it? Who supports it? Who does it need to communicate with?

### Exercise

**Aim:** To prepare a “job description” for each leadership or ministry group within the church

This exercise may be done in a number of ways. Two examples are:

A. The church’s leadership team (e.g. diaconate or church council) could use this method to develop its own job description. The leadership team could then take responsibility for developing coordinated job descriptions for every other committee of ministry group within the church. They could hold a joint meeting with each committee or ministry group for this purpose, or they could appoint one of their number to visit each committee or ministry group to guide them through the process.

B. Alternatively, the leadership team, other committees and ministry groups could each be entrusted with the exercise of writing their own job descriptions. The leadership team could then review them to make sure that overlaps or gaps are negotiated.

Whatever method is used, once finalised, it would be good for all job descriptions to be approved by the appropriate church processes and communicated widely.

All leadership team, committee and ministry group job descriptions could be reviewed annually as a matter of course to see if they need to be updated in any way.

## Clarifying Expectations – the Leadership Team and Ministry Groups



### Process

Spend some time at a meeting writing a suggested job description for your team, committee or ministry group (referred to from here as “group”). It should include the following:

1. The name of the group.
2. A statement of who is a part of the group and how these people are appointed.
3. A one-sentence statement of the aim/purpose of the group.
4. Is this group called for a particular task and time (e.g. a pastoral search committee, a future directions working group), or does it have a continuing role in the life and ministry of the church (e.g. a diaconate, a worship coordination group)?
5. A point-form statement of the various responsibilities of the group.
6. A clear statement of key relationships between this group and others in the church:
  - To whom (person or group) is this group accountable? How and how often does it report to them?
  - To whom does this group provide leadership and oversight? How does it receive reports from these people or groups? How does it provide accountability and guidance to these people and groups?
  - With which other groups in the church does it need to maintain regular communication? How will it achieve this?
7. What is the group’s budget? How much money does it have authority to spend? To whom does it request authority to spend more? How does it do this?
8. What arrangements are there for the group to review its contribution to the church? How often does this happen? Who initiates the review?

## Section 5.4 Exercise

# The Role of Deacons/ Leadership Team

The traditional model of church leadership in a Baptist Church centres around a diaconate that meets regularly to support the pastor and oversee the church's ministry. This model continues in many churches. In others, it continues under a different name, e.g. leadership team or church council, but preserves the same role. Regardless of the name, despite its key role in church life and health, we have often not clearly specified what the role of a deacon or church leader actually is.

The following outlines one attempt to specify the role of a deacon or church leader. It may need to be adapted for your church, but reflecting on it may be a helpful exercise for your church's diaconate or leadership team.

## **The Ministry of a Deacon**

The role of a deacon can be summarised under four headings:

1. The care of the fellowship
2. The care of the pastor
3. Helping shape vision & direction
4. Leadership in structural implementation

### **Each of these areas will now be explained a little more fully:**

#### 1. The Care of the fellowship

While everyone shares in care for each other, deacons have special responsibilities to:

- Get to know all members.
- Develop a system of pastoral care - so nobody slips through the cracks.
- Welcome visitors.
- Visit applicants for membership.
- Accompany the pastor on certain occasions when requested.

#### 2. The Care of the Pastor(s)

While the pastor and his or her family are part of the whole church's responsibility for mutual care, deacons have special responsibilities to:

- Be encouraging.
- Pray for him/her.

## The Role of Deacons/Leadership Team



- Ensure that opportunities are provided for study, retreat.
- Ensure adequate and timely remuneration is provided.
- Ensure days off are taken and respected.
- Provide adequate administrative support.
- Maintain pastoral reviews.
- Share responsibility for ministry.

Note: Deacons are in an ideal position to become the pastor's partners in ministry, confidants and even friends. But because of the pastor's role, there are particular disciplines required. They include commitments to:

- Preserve confidentiality.
- Avoid public confrontation.
- Never just complain, but offer constructive feedback.
- Do not seek to be 'best friends' - the pastor can never offer exclusive rights of friendship to anyone.

### 3. Helping shape vision and direction

The discerning of vision and direction is a task for the whole church to share, but deacons have a special role to share with the pastor in leading and facilitating the church in seeking God's guidance. As a deacon, then, there is a special responsibility to discern the mind of Christ together with your pastor. This requires a lot of listening - to God, to the pastor, to other deacons and to the congregation.

Practical expression of this will often be given through the deacon's attendance at deacons' & church meetings. Therefore the responsibilities of the deacon's role includes:

- Prayerful preparation for meetings.
- Shared responsibility for bringing ideas and initiatives.
- Prayerful listening to the pastor and other deacons.
- Where there are differences of opinion, a commitment to prayerfully work together to seek God's leading.
- Corporate ownership and support for initiatives.

## The Role of Deacons/Leadership Team



### 4. Leadership in structural implementation

As a deacon you share with the pastor and other deacons the delegated responsibility to lead the church. If the pastor is to give time to helping the church to discover the Word of God to the church, it will be important for deacons to ensure the smooth practical running of the community and its facilities.

This will mean:

- Using your gifts to free others to use theirs.
- Being reliable when you take responsibility. If you can't do it, ensure someone else does.
- If asked to lead in a particular area, lead! Do not keep directing people back to the pastor.



# Helping Church Leaders Evaluate Themselves

Over the last few years leadership teams have been reflecting about how they evaluate themselves. Many pastors feel they are always getting reviewed and some have asked, partly tongue in cheek, about their leaders having a review. Below is one attempt to come up with a process. It is adapted from a 1991 *Leadership* magazine article entitled, "Ideas that Work".

## **Process:**

It is critical to see that the main purpose of such evaluation is to help each leader to reflect on their walk with God and their ministry and to look at ways they can grow in that walk with God and can be more effective as a leader. This is not a chance for people to tear each other apart and the whole process needs to be carried out with prayer and sensitivity.

1. The pastor and leaders agree to the process.
2. Each person on the Leadership Team is asked to reflect on the questions over the next 2 weeks and give written response to the questions.
3. The team meets over a meal with no other agenda than to share their responses with each other.
4. Taking one section at time, each leader shares their responses. Take time for group reflection and questions regarding what the leader shared.
5. After each leader has shared the group gathers around, prays for them and affirms them.
6. For the section about the team as a whole, all the responses could be written on butchers paper and from those responses some goals/strategies can be agreed to for the year ahead.

## **Evaluation Questions**

1. My role as a leader:
  - a. My main areas of responsibility this past year have been...
  - b. A typical week for me in regard to the life of the church looks like this...
  - c. My assessment of my ministry is...
  - d. I have felt good about.....
  - e. I have struggled with.....
  - f. I would like to do the following to be more effective in the next 12 months...

## Helping Church Leaders Evaluate Themselves



2. My ongoing journey with God:
  - a. Areas of growth in my life this year have been...
  - b. My current walk with God is...
  - c. The ways I would like to develop my walk with God in the next 12 months are...
  
3. In reviewing the ministry of the whole leadership team I would make the following observations:
  - a. These are things we do well...
  - b. These are things we could do better...
  - c. These are things we could do in the next 12 months that would help us be more effective...



# How To Be Your Pastor's Friend

by Robert P. Fry, Jr.

Why is it that many of our pastors—the people we respect and admire most—lead lonely lives?

And why do many lay leaders feel frustrated in their attempts to build a friendship with their pastor?

On the one hand, there is a tendency in every congregation to canonize the pastor in a way that Catholics wisely reserve for those long dead. We don't often argue politics, complain about the schools, ask him or her to help fix our fence, or tell him our favorite jokes out of a misguided notion that these things (and our interest in them) are somehow beneath him or her.

On the other hand, in many congregations the pastor is also the designated target of criticism. If the sermon is too long or the hymns are too new, if the denomination is too liberal or there is not enough parking, the pastor takes the heat.

What's a friend?

We all recognize that our pastors need people who will accept them and enjoy them as they are, without either awe or arrogance - in short, friends. And most of us would like to be friends with our pastor.

But what exactly does it mean to be a friend?

In a wonderful work entitled *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis writes, "Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)."

If Lewis is right, there is really nothing we can do to become close friends. We will either share a common interest and common vision of the world, or we won't.

We can, however, choose to be friends to our pastors.

During the past seven years I have enjoyed becoming good friends with my pastor. Our relationship has developed solely through the church; as a result, I find myself relating differently with him than I might with other people. Over this time, I have developed, unconsciously, some "rules" for being a friend to my pastor.

## **Rule 1: Preserve confidentiality**

I make it a practice not to share with others things the pastor has shared with me. Unless we are willing to preserve our pastors' privately expressed opinions, we cannot be their good friends. Why? A friend is first of all someone with whom you can talk. If our pastors cannot be assured that we will keep confidences, they will not feel safe talking to us.

Preserving confidence is part of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer means, in his classic work *Life Together*, when he talks about "the ministry of preserving another person's reputation." If you have enjoyed a private conversation with your pastor on a given subject, you may know more than he wants to make public. That information simply cannot be used in conversations with others.



## How To Be Your Pastor's Friend

Clearly, there is a component of sacrifice in this. I have a hard time not sharing with others the things I discuss with my pastor. Most of the time, such knowledge is of minor, everyday things, no different than the things we talk about with anyone. But within the church, as with any group, inside information (no matter how trivial) is exciting. It presents the opportunity to build one's self up in the eyes of others. Such building comes, however, at the expense of eroding friendship. The only way I have found to resist this temptation is to steel myself to not talk about even the existence of many conversations.

### **Rule 2: Avoid public confrontation**

As far as I am able, I never criticize my pastor in front of other people. The pastor's ability to function depends largely on the respect he or she commands in the congregation. Anything I do to lessen that respect diminishes his effectiveness. Consequently, I try to avoid arguing with him publicly.

This is something I have not always done well. At an officers' retreat several years ago, our pastor was leading a discussion of the church's master plan. I thought the plan was incomprehensible and of little utility, and I said so, in essence, through a couple of rather pointed questions.

What a jerk! Afterward I felt I had abused our friendship. Furthermore, nothing positive came of my comments. The master plan remains to this day, the entire discussion is long forgotten, and the direction of the church was unaffected by my opinions.

By publicly criticizing my friend and pastor - or at least the work he was doing - I broke my own rule: My remarks were public and not private. If I had said nothing, the discussion simply would have ended sooner and we could have spent time on a more useful topic.

That blunder renewed my commitment to present ideas and concerns privately, particularly if I think my pastor is headed down a wrong path. In private, he has a greater opportunity to change his mind without appearing to buckle under pressure.

If I am not able to communicate my concern face to face (the preferred method), then I write a letter. Letter writing is a good discipline. We sometimes realize the brutality of our remarks as we reread them, and then we have opportunity to rethink the things we say.

Paul begins and ends his most critical letters with assurances of God's love and his love for the people. Our pastors need the same assurance of our love whenever we offer advice.

### **Rule 3: Never just complain**

Rather than just complain, I attempt to propose a solution. To complain without proposing a solution (and without being willing to be part of that solution) is merely to turn my irritation into the pastor's burden. It is unfair.

We also ought to wait a while before being critical. Allowing time between our initial irritation and our comments can be merciful.

## How To Be Your Pastor's Friend



I also try to judge the spiritual issues involved. A Sunday school teacher leading the class down heretical paths is unjustifiable; running out of coffee between services is inconvenient. Since one is a spiritual issue of great consequence, and the other is not, they ought to be handled differently. Many minor items can be ignored.

The value of these rules proved themselves when my pastor and I were on a nominating committee seeking an associate pastor for our church. We had been working for months and were tiring of the process.

One evening, in a private conversation after the meeting, the pastor said to me, "I think we've done enough. Let's just call Joe" - then our leading candidate.

I disagreed, saying, "No, I don't think so. We need to wait and continue to look for an older and more experienced person." Then I mentioned a name on a new résumé.

My pastor knew the man but did not know he had applied for the job. His response was, "Oh! We have to talk to him!" As all good stories end, that man is now the associate pastor at our church.

The point here is that rather than simply complain, I proposed another option, and I was willing to work on that. And when I spoke out, it was privately and on an issue of spiritual significance. I do not have to roll over and play dead simply because I try not to just complain. And the result is usually that I may have greater influence than otherwise. More important, out of work done together in that spirit, friendship has arisen.

Rule 4: Don't seek to be "best friends"

This leads me to the hardest rule of all: to realize I simply cannot be my pastor's best friend.

Frequently, being "best friends" is just one more thing we want from our pastors. That desire becomes another burden for them. Ironically, to be friends to our pastors the first thing we must do is give up our desire for that very thing.

Why? The pastor's time and life are not his or her own. Rather, he or she has to have time for all who look to him or her for encouragement and guidance.

So if we are going to be real friends to our pastors, we have to be more concerned about loving and serving them than the benefits that might flow to us. We demonstrate love by supporting them while holding the relationship lightly and not demanding too much from it. We need to be willing to accommodate our schedules to theirs.

If we honor confidences, and are considerate, encouraging, faithful in prayer, and desirous of our pastors' success, then at least we will be good friends to them. If we also share a common vision for the church and can be good companions, then we may end up being close friends as well. In so doing, both their lives and ours will be richer.



## Clarifying Roles and Expectations - All Volunteers

Churches can be notorious for asking people to do jobs, without giving clear guidance as to what the job actually involves, who supports the person when in the role, who they are accountable to and for how long the appointment is made. Failure to address these things can lead to people feeling confused, unsupported, and over-burdened.

It is better and far healthier to be clear about the expectations of a role. Then a person can enter into a much clearer process of discerning whether this role matches their gifts and availability, and ultimately lead to a more fulfilled church, as everybody works and grows together in their walk with God.

**Exercise:** Clarifying a ministry role within the church

Think of a ministry role you are familiar with in your church. It could be one you are already doing, or a new role you are considering. (E.g. serving on the morning tea roster, worship leader, home group leader, or property caretaker.) See if you can give the role a clear and brief description, using the following outline.

You may find it helpful to copy this form (or adapt it) and use it for all ministry positions in your church.

# Job Description for Ministry Volunteers

**Title:**

**Aim or purpose of role:**

**Accountable to (supervisor):**

**Specific tasks or goals:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

**Other people to liaise with:**

**Special resources provided by the church:**

**Training required:**

**Review date:**

**Supervisor's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Volunteer's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**





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# Section 6



Fit<sup>4</sup>  
*Life*

Promoting Health for Growth

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# Section 6

# Covenanting for Health



...I want you to get out there and walk – better yet, run! – on the road God called you to travel. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (The Message)

## Contents

- 6.1 Teaching      What is a covenant?
- 6.2 Exercise      A Process for Developing a Covenant
- 6.3 Covenants    Samples for leadership and for congregations
- 6.4 Teaching      Covenanting for healthy teams

## Section 6 Contents

# What is a Covenant?

A covenant is basically an agreement between two parties. In the Bible God makes a covenant with the people of Israel which stated that Yahweh would be their God and they would be Yahweh's people. However this was not simply a statement of fact, rather it had certain behavioural implications. God promised his everlasting love and guidance, and the people promised to live in a manner befitting those who served Yahweh – who were called to be a holy people. The covenant had ethical and behavioural dimensions.

The new covenant embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus stresses the undeserved grace of God, but the response to this love and grace is a gratitude that shapes life differently. The followers of Jesus are called to be holy – to reveal in their lives the love of God and the values of the Kingdom. This is our covenanted response to God's initiative in Christ.

We are part of a covenant with God AND with God's people.

As the body of Christ we are a covenanted community – we willingly enter into an agreement to be in community together – working together to fulfil God's purposes. In the past, this covenant has been enshrined in a set of shared beliefs. When we become a member of a church we are often given a declaration of faith which asserts some key doctrines that the church gathers around.

What is being suggested in this material is that we encourage Baptist Churches to reassert a behavioural component to our covenanted basis of membership. We promise that when we become members of a given church, we will behave towards each other in certain ways to ensure the well-being of the community.

We can hold one another accountable to this covenant, and new members are welcomed as those who agree to live by this covenant. In time it is hoped that this will begin to change the culture in our churches, and maintain a healthier approach.

A Covenant can be a key instrument in establishing and sustaining healthy community.

# A process for developing a covenant



**Aim:** To design and implement a church covenant specific to your church situation, which helps to create or maintain a healthy church.

**Time required:** Initially 60-90 minutes, but the covenant will require time to evolve, to ensure that everyone owns and understands it.

**You will need:** scrap paper & pens

## Process: 1. Disussion Together

- What does the word 'Covenant' mean to people?
- In what situations have they heard it used? – biblically? In finance? A marriage covenant?
- How would we translate its meaning for someone – a binding promise? A relational commitment?
- What are the advantages of covenants in the church situation?" Ask people to get into threes, and list these advantages on scrap paper. Then pool ideas together in the full group.

### Here are some suggested advantages:

- Creates a safe environment, by establishing clarity and security – this is another dimension to our Duty of Care policy.
- Enables trust.
- Aims towards integrity – matching how we behave with what we aim for.
- Underlines our witness.
- Basis for Accountability/discipline.
- Link to membership – shifts understanding of membership from purely defining who's 'in' and 'out' to embracing the way of relating we aspire to.



A process for  
developing a covenant

## **2. In small groups: (Allow 10-15mins)**

- “What behaviour does the Gospel call us to practice amongst one another and the wider community?”

NB Be specific and practical – e.g. If valuing difference is an aspiration, how will this be shown? How will we deal with conflict? What do we feel about inclusive/exclusive language?

If people are struggling to think of ideas, pass around some of the sample covenants included earlier

## **3. In the whole group:**

List all ideas on the wall, and group statements with similar themes.

Delegate a trusted individual or pair to produce a composite document for discussion.

It may be helpful to hold this list in prayer and encourage people to continue praying it through, once they have their own draft copy.

A further meeting should then be planned within the next month or so.

## **4. At the next meeting:**

Present the summary document for further discussion.

Is anything unclear?

Is anything missing?

Is anything unworkable?

Have people sat comfortably with this as they have prayed it through? Has anyone discerned God speaking to them about these statements?

Do any of the words or expressions used need to be changed so it sounds more natural for us to commit to?

Can I sign this?

You may need to have another meeting(s) to complete this process.

## A process for developing a covenant



When you have a final form of your covenant, plan a special service/meeting when it will be adopted.

Will this become part of your membership process? To do this an induction to the covenant will have to become part of baptismal and membership classes. From this point on, all members will be taken through the document and asked to sign it before coming into membership.

Alternatively, in churches where membership is becoming less common, new arrivals to the church need to be invited to Introduction to XY Baptist Church evenings, and taken through the covenant then. In some churches there are specific times when members renew their baptismal vows-this could be a time for an annual renewal/adaptation of the covenant. This helps to keep the promises made alive in people's minds and in their lives.

# Church A

## A Congregational Covenant



As members of this Baptist Church, at a time of unrest within the church community, we covenant together to work and pray together toward the restoring of the Lord's peace within our church and the renewed discovery of the mission for which God has called us together.

We acknowledge that God has entrusted us with the privilege and responsibility to serve God's church together with mutual respect, humility and faithfulness.

With God's grace, we commit ourselves to:

- Pray daily for one another, for God's wisdom, and for God's healing and renewing of our church community;
- Avoid any action, comment or implication that would undermine, discredit or disrespect the pastor or any deacon in conversation with any member of the church community;
- Listen respectfully and prayerfully to the concerns of anyone within the church community, always encouraging them to take any concerns about anyone else directly to the person concerned;
- Listen and speak respectfully when we meet together, so that we do not fight or overpower one another, but join together in our most important spiritual discipline of discerning the mind of Christ together;
- Avoid the arrogance of assuming that we know the mind of Christ without reference to the perspectives of other members;
- Discourage the forming of factions or lobby groups as these are always about the desire to exert power, rather than the desire to attend to God's voice together;
- Invite and empower the church to share in the constructive seeking of God's will for the church, and to reject the immature insistence on individuals or groups getting their own way.
- An open, honest and constructive engagement with the issues that have been causing concern within the church.

In the grace of God, we make this covenant together for the next 12 months.

Our signatures:

# Church B

## A Congregational Covenant



Recognising that-

we are all individuals at different stages in our life and Christian journey,  
that we have different needs and desires,  
that we possess different talents and gifts,  
but that we are all members of one Church serving the one risen Lord,  
and that we are united by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit,  
we now make this covenant with one another before God:

1. We will pursue honesty, openness and grace in our relationships with one another
2. We will ensure that hurts, offences and differences are reconciled quickly with one another
3. We will honour and respect one another in word and action, and forgive one another as we have been forgiven
4. We will not entertain accusations against one another, nor will we pass on or receive gossip or anonymous letters about one another
5. We will one another's opinions, honour one another's differences, hold love supreme and wholeheartedly embrace our collective decisions
6. We will pray regularly for one another, care for one another, worship with one another and encourage one another
7. We will support one another in our Christian ministries to share the love of Jesus

# Church C - Covenant and Procedure for Disagreements



## Covenant

1. I accept that people are different and will have differences with one another.
2. I accept that conflict will be an experience of life and that conflict can be healthy and useful.
3. I will seek to be Godly in my responses.
4. I recognise that avoiding issues or relationships solely for the reason that there may be conflict is not good.
5. I will seek to have conflict dealt with quickly.
6. Towards the other person, I will show love, respect and self-control, seeking to do so in a Christ-like way.
7. I will focus the discussion on issues, relationships, or descriptions of feelings. I will not resort to inappropriate behaviour including, but not limited to:
  - name calling
  - mind reading (attributing evil motives)
  - guilt making (“look how you’ve made me feel”)
  - rejecting, disparaging, or discrediting another person (rather than the person’s ideas or behaviour)
8. I will listen well and not over-ride or interrupt.
9. My attitude will be one of patience, forgiveness and humility.
10. I recognise that I will need to change for progress to be made.
11. I commit myself to honesty, openness, confession and seeking to understand.
12. I will seek to be positive, sensitive and to seek God’s help.
13. I will work towards resolution and reconciliation, accepting differences where appropriate.
14. I will not gossip to others and will seek to move on in God, rebuilding trust.

## Church C - Covenant and Procedure for Disagreements



15. I will use threats only where I fully intend to act immediately on the threat, should the conditions for fulfilling the threat be met. (eg If you continue ... I will ask the Diaconate to discuss it.)

16. I will not use information from confidential sources, nor indicate that such information exists. (eg Some people have said, . . . but I cannot tell you who they are.). I will always allow a person charged with inappropriate behaviour:

- to know who his/her accusers are
- to learn in detail what her/his accusers' concerns are
- to respond to those accusers.

17. I will pray for myself as well as the other person.

18. In seeking to be biblical, it may be appropriate to seek the involvement of a third party.

### A Procedure for Discussing Interpersonal Disagreement

Before a face-to-face meeting of persons:

1. Reduce my own internal conflict first. A proposed procedure is:
  - a) Remember who Jesus is and what He has done (historically, biblically).
  - b) Reaffirm who I am in Christ. Take time to consider that I am a child of the Lord.
  - c) Repent of my attitudes towards the other person, sin (commissions or omissions), the need to be right, not allowing the Lord to live through me etc.
  - d) Remind myself that I am going to meet with a fellow Christian. We have common ground in Christ.
2. Commit myself to Scriptural principles. Check Matthew 18:15-17 and 5:23-24, where I am responsible to approach the other if I am aware of an issue. Approach with humility, gentleness and respect (Galatians 6:3).

## Church C - Covenant and Procedure for Disagreements

3. Seek outside help from a mediator if for some reason I find it difficult to approach the other person.
4. Decide to be a good listener, honest and to adhere to the Covenant of Values in Conflict.
5. Pray.

### **Procedure when meeting face-to-face**

1. Build common ground: brothers/sisters in Christ, members of the same church, both desiring to live for God, humbly admit own shortcomings related to the problem etc.
2. List one or several things you wish to clarify or disagree on. Give opportunity to each other.
3. Agree on the order in which issues will be addressed.
4. Review the procedure for discussion. Make sure each of you understands the next steps.

a. Person A begins by stating his/her views in a brief statement while B listens. Before responding, B must summarise in his/her own words what A has said. (If B has not heard A correctly, A clarifies and B again tries to restate it in his/her own words).

After summarising A's statement accurately, B makes his/her own statement and A must summarise.

Continue like this, back and forth until you feel that you understand each other's views and can proceed with the next steps.

b. What can you agree on? List it on paper in a few words.

c. What are the main interests or main underlying concerns of each? That is, what does each really desire, not so much focusing on the positions that each is taking. List these on paper in a few words.

d. Search for several ways to meet the "main concerns" of each person. Find at least two for each and preferably more. That is, begin with person A and try to think of several different things that B could do or say that would satisfy A's main concern. Then do this for person B. List these on paper.

## Church C - Covenant and Procedure for Disagreements



e. It may be helpful for each person to state:

Her/his ideal solution

What he/she can live with

What he/she can not live with

f. Pick out the best ideas from (4b) & (4e) and put together a solution or plan of action that both of you are comfortable with. State this in precise form. Who will do what when and where? Writing it out helps to get it clear and precise.

### **What if I hear of two other persons in conflict?**

1. Encourage them to approach each other within a week. If not then 2:
2. Offer to accompany one to see the other (within a week). If not then 3:
3. Ask the person to talk with a Pastor, Deacon or recognised mediator within a week. You will check that they have. If not then 4:
4. Remind the person that they are not to talk or gossip about this if they choose not to act on any of the steps above.

### **What if resolution between the two parties alone is not reached?**

1. Agree to involve a mediator. (This person needs to be equipped for this ministry.) Remember that agreeing to disagree and going separate ways can be a resolution.
2. Go to the Pastors/Deacons for accountability. \*
3. Rarely, it may be taken to the members (by the Diaconate) under prescribed conditions.

### **Realise**

1. Possibly other people are affected.
2. Support often will be needed in the healing phase.
  - When a conflict reaches the stage of “Go to the Pastors/Deacons for accountability” the Diaconate may choose to ask a ministry participant, or a ministry leader, or both, to take time off from the ministry while a conflict to which they are a party is being resolved.

## Church C - Covenant and Procedure for Disagreements



In such a situation, the church membership will be advised of such a request to take time out three (3) weeks after it has been made if:

- there is no clear progress toward resolution within two (2) weeks and/or
- a party who has been asked to take time off as above request that the members be advised.

# Church D

## A Leadership Covenant



For the health and growth of the congregation and its ministry, and in order to facilitate their individual and collective ministries, the leaders (deacons and pastoral team) make the following covenant or statement of understanding:

1. We will love God and encourage and pray for one another in our faith and Christian maturity.
2. We will try to live balanced lives; working responsibly and hard as leaders; caring for and nurturing family relationships; and not neglecting playfulness, humour and rest.
3. Before any action we will think how it will appear to God, our congregation and to our fellow leaders.
4. We will view ourselves as trusted supporters of each other, brothers and sisters in God's family, and colleagues in the work of ministry.
5. We will carry out our responsibilities and tasks with diligence and close collaboration with each another, communicating regularly, sharing both the joys and stresses of our ministries.
6. We welcome open communication, constructive criticism and courteous disagreement as part of healthy decision-making.
7. We will view as sacred, all confidences shared with us or discussed in meetings.
8. We will refrain from criticizing another leader to someone else, and will seek to put the best construction on what other leaders do (i.e. believe the best of each other.)
9. We will refrain from commiserating with persons who complain about another leader. Instead we will encourage the person(s) to go to the other leader with the complaint. In either case, we will share the information with the other leader.

Church D  
A Leadership Covenant



10. As members and leaders of XBC we will actively and enthusiastically attend and participate in:

- a. Leadership team meetings
- b. A small group
- c. Sunday worship
- d. Other important meetings especially Catch-Up meetings

11. At least twice each year we will discuss what we like about our teamwork and what we would like changed. At least once each year we will review this covenant, changing and renewing it as we mutually agree.

# Covenanting for healthy teams



**Aim:** To develop a public covenant for the way a leadership team will work with each other

**Time:** This is an informal exercise to be explored with the leadership team, during a team meeting. However to develop the work, the team might require a day out, or to tackle it during a retreat time.

Our teams need to be healthy, because a dysfunctional leadership team will inevitably grow a dysfunctional congregation. It is crucial that teams work well together and model healthy ways of working for the congregation.

Sadly, teams often come apart because lines of responsibility are unclear, and ways of working are not agreed or communicated well. Congregations that are unhealthy will try to set leaders against each other, or implicitly undermine one of the team. This is usually disguised by sharing something “in confidence”.

Lets look at a common situation:

Someone complains to you about a colleague, “in confidence”

What are some of the options?

1. What might you do that will make things worse?

- Sympathise with the plaintiff and keep the info to yourself – what does this do?
- Agree with the plaintiff and share the info with the teammate – what happens here?
- Agree with the plaintiff and share the info with others but not the teammate – what are the results of this?

2. What are some of the alternative options that promote health?

- Have a clear and published policy on this issue, which outlines how the team has covenanted to act when a colleague is criticized.



## Covenanting for healthy teams

This would mean that:

- Outside of counseling situations, everything that occurs in the professional setting and has to do with professional performance, will be shared with the professional members of the team with names attached.

So if someone comes and says can they talk to you confidentially about some concerns they have with x, you can reply

“I’m interested in hearing what you have to say about my colleague, but remember that we have a covenant to share all concerns that are raised about the other person with names attached”.

What might be the result of this?  
What are we training people to do?  
What are we protecting?

We might also have a policy that directs people to

- Talk to person concerned directly

This would involve exploring what are the issues and feelings preventing this from happening

Thinking about the best time and approach to take with the person  
Offering to go with the plaintiff to see the person.

- What else might be helpful?

### **Further thinking:**

Can you think of other issues that affect teams?  
How would you frame a covenant to overcome these?

E.g. In team meetings some people always get the rump of the time because they are less confident in demanding time. Others get to dominate the agenda.

Should we therefore encourage some kind of covenant that each team member gets an equal time to talk?

- Could you use this work to develop a covenant for a healthy team, that can evolve as we grow together, but which makes our ways of operating transparent, and that models a healthy approach for the congregation.

# Acknowledgements



Much of this material has been gathered from our collective memory and experience. Where possible we seek to acknowledge the original work, but we recognize that we may have unwittingly absorbed the work of others, and use it here without formal acknowledgement. For this we are sincerely sorry.

## Chapter 2

Dynamics of Good communication – Gottman diagrams (pages 32 – 33) adapted from *A Couple's Guide to Communication*, John Gottman, Cliff Notarius, Jonni Gonson, Howard Markman, Research Press, 1979

Exercises in Listening and Paraphrasing (pages 35 – 40) and the section on using language (pages 41 – 44) draw on material produced by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre, from their Mediation Skills Training Institute.

## Chapter 3

The cartoon by Michael Leunig (page 58) – permission has been sought from the artist.

The teaching component of Understanding the Nature of Conflict (pages 71 – 73 ) is based on an article by John Paul Lederach published in the MCS Conciliation Quarterly/Summer 1987.

The diagrams (pages 71 – 73) are based on some in *Healthy Congregations – a systems approach*, by Peter L Steinke, published by the Alban Institute 1996

The conflict booklet (pages 77 – 78) comes from work originally produced by Ian Adams of Reachout for Kids.

Separating out the causes of conflict (pages 79 – 81) – draws on the verbal communication of Richard Blackburn at a Bridgebuilders Mediation Training workshop held in Leeds in 2001

Mapping Conflicts (pages 82 – 84) is based on material from *Everybody Can Win*, by Helena Cornelius, Shoshana Faire, Simon & Schuster, 1999

Identifying Levels of Disagreement (pages 85 – 90) is adapted from work by Speed Lees, originally produced in 1986 by the Presbyterian Church USA. It has been updated by Geoff Cramb of Intercare for the Consultancy Team of Queensland Baptists 1998

## Acknowledgements



Useful Collaborative Skills handout (page 101) is based on material produced by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre.

### **Chapter 4**

The De Bono Thinking Hats material (pages 133 – 136) is taken from several articles freely available on the internet.

### **Chapter 5**

How to be Your Pastor's Friend (pages 163 – 165) is written by Robert P. Fry Jr. an attorney in Irvine, California, and is taken off the internet.

Material on the Role of Deacons (pages 158 – 160) adapted from a booklet by Paul Beasley-Murray – The Ministry of Deacons – Baptist Union of Great Britain and from an article by Malcolm Goodspeed, Baptist Basics – Leadership in the local Church - Baptist Union of NSW Ltd 2002.

Job Description for Ministry Volunteers (page 167) adapted from an Institute for Contemporary Christian Leadership training course.

## Further Reading



Advanced training resources are available from the Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre: [www.LMPeaceCenter.org](http://www.LMPeaceCenter.org)  
Churches throughout the US and UK have found this material very helpful.

Helena Cornelius, *Shoshana Faire Everybody Can Win*, Simon & Schuster, 1999

Ron Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church*, Abingdon Press 1995

Ronald S. Kraybill, *Peace Skills – a manual for Community Mediators*, Jossey-Bass, California, 2001

Speed Lees, *Leadership & Conflict*, Abingdon Press, 1982

Hugh Mackay, *Why Don't People Listen? Solving the Communication Problem*, Pan Macmillan Publishers, 1994

Gaylord Noyce, *Church Meetings that Work*, The Alban Institute, 1994

Gilbert R Rendle, *Behavioural Covenants in Congregations - A Handbook for Honouring Differences*, Alban Institute, 1999

Ronald W Richardson – *Creating a Healthier Church – Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*, Fortress Press, 1996

Carolyn Schrock-Shenk & Lawrence Ressler (ed) – *Making Peace with Conflict – Practical skills for Conflict Transformation*, Herald Press, 1999

Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development – A guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, Direction Ministry Resources, 1996

Peter Steinke – *Healthy Congregations – a systems approach*, The Alban Institute, 1996  
– *How your Church Family Works – Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, The Alban Institute, 1993

C. Jeff Woods, *We've never done it like this before – 10 Creative approaches to the same old church tasks*, The Alban Institute, 1994



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