

RESOLVING CONFLICT

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God in heaven,

We ask for your wisdom as we begin this meeting. We acknowledge that we need your wisdom and insights, and we welcome your presence among us. Guide us in our discussion, helping us to seek what is best for all involved. We trust in your perfect wisdom and ask that you direct our meeting according to your will. We pray that we do not add to anyone's hurt as we discuss conflict and that you can help us find comfort and peace following this difficult conversation. And, Father, if we do not find solutions here together today, guide us to those who can help us find the solutions.

In James 1:5 it says, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."** We claim this promise as we start our meeting and trust in your provision.

Thank you for being with us always.

Amen.

A. Overview of Conflict in Church

Conflict in Church is real. It's important to recognize, acknowledge and address.

If addressed appropriately, then ...” **on the other side of conflict is not more conflict, but greater closeness.**” Kaleel Jamison of Consulting Group, “The Pinch Theory: A Preventive Planned Problem Solving Model.”

DEFINITIONS for today's seminar:

Pinch – small conflict or beginning of conflict that must be addressed.

Pinches are inevitable but require productive ways of dealing with them. Examples of Pinches: not responding to an email or phone call. Not including everyone in a committee's discussion.

Disruption – A pinch that has not been addressed quickly enough and is now a larger problem or an action that immediately causes disagreement/offense between individuals or groups. Examples: Late to meetings, a command decision by clergy without input from parishioners, a vestry member who complains to parishioners later about a decision in the last vestry meeting that she disagrees with.

Crunch – A disagreement or hurt that has become very serious for an individual or group – may require outside intervention/mediation.

B. Recent examples of church conflict – challenges for Father Manny and others (today these are for perspective – not discussion starters)

Our church doesn't do enough about LGBTQIA+ issues*	Our church should not stand up for LGBTQIA+ issues at all
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Sermons should never be political	Sermons should be used to stand up for important political issues
Reject Racism sign made me very uncomfortable and made me want to leave Christ Church	Reject Racism sign didn't go far enough to stand up against systemic racism in the church and in society
WOCC and MOCC** are outdated organizations that do not include all members of our congregation	WOCC and MOCC have been a long part of our church history and provide fellowship, fundraising and support for Christ Church
Cameras on campus violate my right to privacy	We need more cameras and safety features

*LGBTQIA+ - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and more

**WOCC – Women of Christ Church, MOCC – Men of Christ Church

C. When Conflict occurs, a sensitive, caring approach to addressing it is paramount. The response to the pinch or disruption may come from fellow committee members, friends in the parish or clergy members but all need to recognize that they can make that matter worse or better at that stage, depending on their response.

- We must listen to the one raising the concern/problem.
- We must listen some more.
- We must respond with love and care for the person hurt and for the church. Sometimes we don't have a solution but can help by expressing our concern and prayers. And then checking in with the harmed person later.
- Sometimes our response needs to include bringing in Father Manny to the discussion or others in leadership positions.
- If it's become a deeper "crunch"-type conflict, wardens or Father Manny may need to seek diocesan help to mediate or address it.

D. Poor Responses to pinches or disruptions:

Leaving Christ Church – This should only be a solution if other efforts to find a caring solution have failed.

“Parking lot” discussions – This is a term that Father Earl Mullins taught me – Picture walking out of the meeting and talking with others near our cars about the “poor” decision . . . Once a decision is made by the Vestry or a committee, it's very damaging to the church community to complain about the decision.

Feeling a “pinch” from a fellow parishioner or clergy member and not saying anything about it to those who pinched you or others who can properly address it.

Learning about a “pinch” from another parishioner and spreading the news to others as a form of gossip rather than seeking help from Father Manny or others who can help address the hurt.

Forgetting that others we disagree with at church have a deep love and connection to Christ Church.

E. Prayers to help us in times of conflict:

Centering Prayer on Mondays at 7pm on Old Brick or on zoom teaches valuable tools for helping us reduce stress and connect to the peace and love of God.

From Book of Common Prayer (p. 818) PRAYER FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify Thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

From Clarence L. Haynes, Jr.:

Lord,

As you can see, there is conflict among us. We want to resolve this, but before we can do that, please show us what is in our own hearts. Reveal what the source of the conflict is so we can work toward a solution. Search our hearts and allow us to see what is within each one of us. Let us not back away from what you reveal, but help us address what you reveal so we can then move forward to overcome this conflict.

Amen.

A United Methodist Prayer after reading

Colossians 3:12-15 - As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Lord of our hearts,

Help us to be wise in our relationships, help us to forgive easily, to be mindful of our words and actions and to encourage one another. I pray for those seeking restoration of friendships and relationships that boundaries are honored and grace is shown. I pray for reconciliation and love. You reign in our hearts forevermore, Amen.