

Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Managing Conflict

How to use the Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Share this document with the Council members prior to the Council meeting and add 15 minutes to the beginning of the agenda for shared reflection. Prior to the meeting, invite one member of the Council to lead the discussion. Here's a simple outline for how the shared reflection might go.

First, the reflection leader reads the scripture passage aloud. Second, the reflection leader highlights one idea from the reflection that the reflection leader found meaningful or challenging. Third, the reflection leader uses one or more of the reflection questions below to encourage discussion. When the discussion draws to a close, the reflection leader closes the time with the prayer using the prayer below or another prayer they create.

Scripture Reading

John 13:34-35 - "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Acts 2: 42-47 - "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

1 Corinthians 12.4 (NRSV) - "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Managing Conflict

In the movie 'Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby', Will Ferrell's character lives by the creed, "If you ain't first, you're last."

It's obvious in the movie that Ricky Bobby's obsession with winning at all costs is unhealthy, but unfortunately many parts of our society today operate with a similar guiding principle.

Whether it is in sports or politics or business or social media or decisions at churches, we seem to want to declare a winner and a loser. The approach seems to be "If the other person, team, or party gets anything they want, then you've lost."

This all-or-nothing, Ricky Bobby approach to life creates conflict. It is not healthy and it is certainly not faithful to the teachings of Jesus or the witness of the early church.

So how do we move from "If you ain't first, your last" to thinking about the 'common good?' The following six possibilities offer a few clues for how to move forward and manage conflict in a healthy way.

1. **Prayer and Study** – The "Win or Lose" culture in our society is strong, so to begin to counteract that mindset, create time in your meetings to focus on scripture passages that remind us that we are all members of the body of Christ called to support and care for one another. Focusing on who God is

calling us to be prior to a conflict will help set the stage for more fruitful discussion when a conflict arises.

2. **Trial periods** – In many cases, we can diffuse conflict and open the door to possibilities by suggesting a limited trial period for an idea. For this to work, you have to establish a point where the idea will be evaluated and you have to be willing to stop the idea if it doesn't work, but in many cases the trial period allows people time to adjust to a new idea and reduces potential opposition.
3. **Addition by Addition, not Addition by Subtraction** – There are certainly times when we must stop one ministry or activity to start another, but in many cases the most helpful way forward is to simply begin a new ministry and allow an existing ministry to continue. In time, the existing ministry will either evolve or come to an end, but we open the door to more possibilities when we don't connect the beginning of one ministry with the end of another ministry.
4. **Create "Win/Win" Scenarios** – Compromise and cooperation allow everyone to feel like they had a hand in a decision. While it is not always possible or practical, a decision that allows all parties to feel like they were successful is preferable to creating a scenario where there are clear winners and losers on an issue.
5. **Only take a Vote when you Absolutely Need to take a Vote** – Some people want to vote on everything and to be sure there are times when a vote is required, but a healthier way forward in most congregations is consensus building. Share the idea widely. Listen to feedback. Answer questions. Adjust and develop the idea. Build support. Taking the time to build consensus reduces potential conflict and allows even those who don't fully support an idea to feel heard.
6. **Be at peace with the fact that some people live in a land of unhappiness.** – Some people live in a land of unhappiness. They see the problem in every idea. They always find a reason to complain. If you say the weather is nice, they will tell you it is too hot. Nothing you can do will make these people happy, so do not allow them to set the mood or the make the decisions for the group. If they chose not to participate any more, that is their choice, but if we constantly allow those people to set the tone and make the decisions, it will become harder and harder to proclaim the good news about Jesus in the congregation and in the community.

Reflection by Pastor John Wertz, Jr.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How do you react emotionally when conflict arises?
2. How does your congregation typically respond when conflict is a possibility?
3. Which of the six possibilities have you used in your congregation to manage conflict or potential conflict? How has it worked?
4. How might you use one of the six possibilities in the future to manage conflict or potential conflict?

Prayer:

Holy God, out of your great love for the world, your Word became flesh to live among us and to reconcile us to you and to one another. Rekindle among us the gift of your Spirit so that we seek to live in unity with all people, breaking down the walls that divide, ending the hostility among us, and proclaiming peace to those who are near and to those who are far away; through Christ Jesus, in whom we all have access in the one Spirit to you, both now and forever. Amen.