

Dealing with Conflict

+ Members of the congregation complain that the organist insists on playing every hymn too fast. No one can keep up with him. He thinks the congregation falls asleep while they sing. *Conflict!*

+ Several people in the parking lot have a heated discussion over politics. Each person stomps away angry. *Conflict!*

+ The weekday pre-school class leaves craft supplies on the table and posters up on the walls. The children's Sunday school class feels like the pre-schoolers have taken over their class. They don't like it. *Conflict!*

+ One council member wants to reach out to the neighborhood, but others resist because it wasn't successful five years ago. *Conflict!*

Welcome to the world of the church, a body of Christ made up of sinners. Finding conflict in the church should not surprise us. The church is not a perfect place with perfect people. Instead, the church is made up of people in need of God's grace and guidance who come and gather in the name of Christ.

In the early church, Peter faced tough criticism for eating with "unclean" people. The bigger issue was Peter's scandalous baptism of non-Jews. Yet, Peter believed it was God who gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ Jesus. Who was he to hinder God? (Acts 11: 1-18)

The issue did not end there. In Acts 15, Peter appeared before the Council at Jerusalem. The debate was over salvation. Could uncircumcised people be saved? Peter stood and proclaimed, "We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (v.11) Paul also appeared at the Council in support of extending the gospel of Jesus Christ to Gentiles. He witnessed to God's actions in regions beyond Israel. (Acts 15:1-22)

Thanks be to God for these tenacious leaders like Peter and Paul who remained in the conflict long enough to convince others to extend the gospel to non-Jews.

What can we learn about conflict in the church?

- Some conflicts appear to be about minor concerns, but in reality involve deeper issues.
- Conflict helps us gain clarity.
- Certain conflicts are worth investing energy because they remind the church about its mission.
- Don't use all your creative energy on minor scrapes disguised as "crisis."
- The church is called to speak a prophetic word to the world, stirring up conflict on issues such as injustice, prejudice, and hatred.

God calls us into some conflicts well worth using every ounce of our energy. That was true of Peter and Paul as they struggled with the message of Jesus Christ and it is true for us today. We follow Jesus, one who dealt with conflict throughout his ministry.

What conflicts do you face?

Are these conflicts due to personal preference or God's nudging?

What conflict is God stirring in your life? How might that be a gift?

Writer: Robin McCullough-Bade

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