



The United Methodist Church
of Greater New Jersey

New Disciples • Vital Congregations • Transformed World

January 25-27, 2016

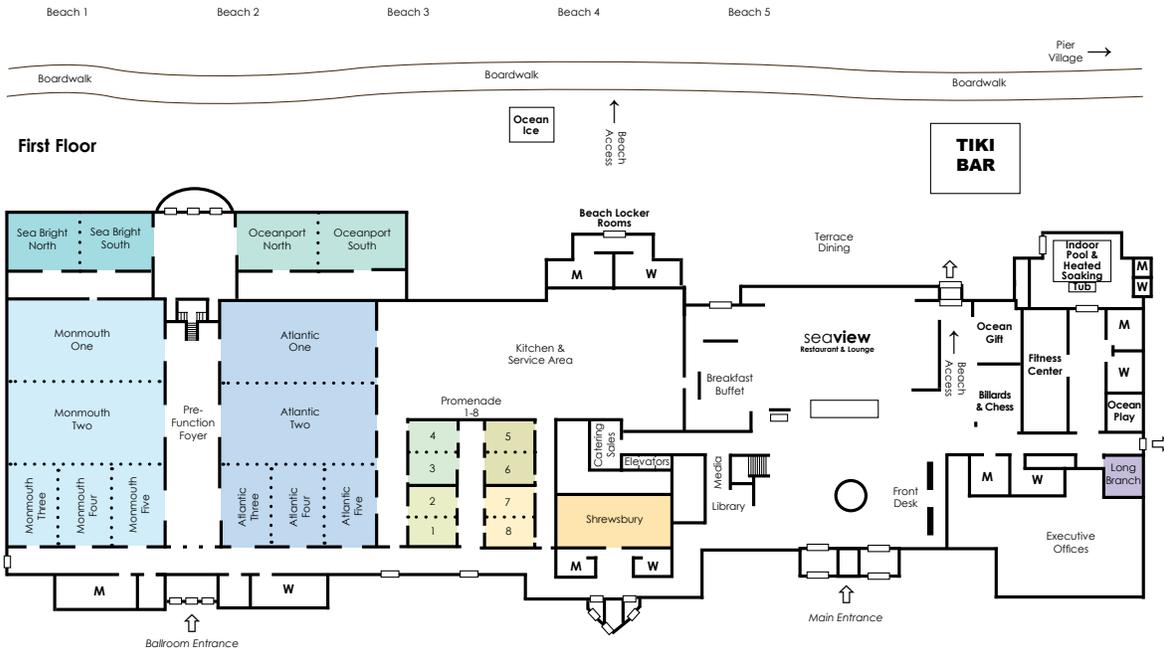
**SACRED SPACES FOR
CONTROVERSIAL CONVERSATIONS**

**BISHOP'S CLERGY
CONVOCAATION**

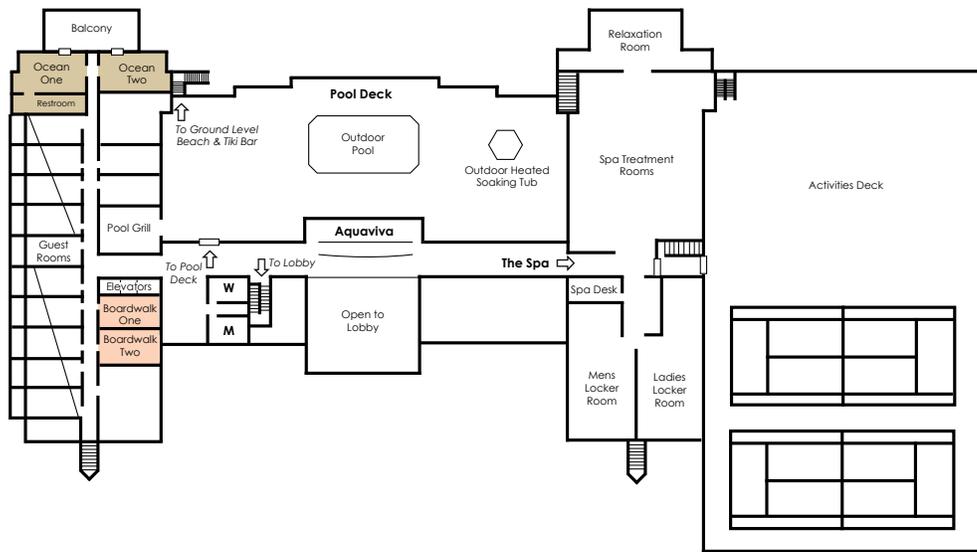
Ocean Place Spa and Resort
Long Branch, NJ



PROPERTY MAP



Mezzanine Level



SCHEDULE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

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11:30 a.m. - Registration Opens

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- Objectives of Our Time Together
- Worship Wall
- Characteristics of Controversial Conversations
- Connecting Exercise
- Our Sacred Space
- The Role of a Spiritual Leader in Controversial Conversations
- Connecting Exercise
- The Coaching Model Review
- Connecting Exercise

3:30-4:00 p.m. - Break

4:00-5:00 p.m. - Plenary 2: The Power of Circle, page 10

- Covenant
- Deep Listening and Powerful Questions
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- Investigate
- Expand Possibilities
- Action Steps and Commitments

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- Spectrum of Conversations
- Three Simple Rules
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- P.O.T.S.H.O.T.
- Transforming Controversial Comments
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- Boundary Setting
- Private vs. Public
- Circles of Resonance and the Stratification Game
- Structures

10:00-10:30 a.m. - Break

10:30-11:45 a.m. - Small Group 3: Practicing One on Ones, Circles of Resonance and the Stratification Game, page 27

11:45-12:15 p.m. - Plenary Session 6: The Big Picture for Healthy Outcomes, page 27

- Lencione's Triangle
- In Search of a Roundtable
- Reading List
- Q and A

12:15-1:00 p.m. - Closing Worship

MONDAY, JANUARY 25

2:00-3:30 p.m. - Plenary 1: The Prelude

Objectives of our Time Together

1. Create a sacred space for controversial conversations.
2. Develop skills that will enhance ministry and confidence for healthy dialogue.
3. Practice leading controversial conversations.
4. Learn a common language in a backdrop of Wesleyan tradition and theology for dealing with difficult conversations.
5. Identify colleagues to partner in the conversations.

Worship Wall

The worship wall has been designed as a place for reflection and introspection. As we engage in dialogue, you have an opportunity to use paper provided to post your learnings and thoughts about various conversations. In this way, we gain greater clarity and learn from each other. The intent is to honor the covenant of confidentiality and to share only from one's own perspective and insight from what has taken place through these conversations.

The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.
- Henry Kissinger

Characteristics of Controversial Conversations

1. People are often passionate about their opinions and perspective.
2. Moving forward with a decision often means not everyone is in full agreement.
3. People, especially Christians, do not like to disagree with each other.
4. Good process for dialogue requires time and often we attempt to short circuit the process and make quick decisions.
5. People often default to debate rather than dialogue because it is easier and it fulfills a competitive drive from within us.

Controversial conversations are difficult yet they can be highly motivational, spiritually empowering, and wholly in alignment with whom God wants us to be. We have the opportunity to make a difference in the world, to build bridges among people with different opinions, and to help the church offer an alternative to division and fear and violence.

Connecting Exercise: Sacred Space vs. Scared Space

In pairs with two minutes for each person, discuss:

Five spaces/places in the world you find sacred.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What makes those places “sacred” for you?

Notes:

Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. - Exodus 3: 5-6

Sacred Space is an encounter with God and a covenant.

In a sacred space, there is no need to:

Instead, we will:

| | |
|----------|--------|
| Convict | Listen |
| Convince | Learn |
| Convert | Lament |

Our Sacred Space

1. We want to be able to listen, to be fully present, and to be engaged. Limit distractions.
2. We are worthy of God's love and grace and have important contributions to make.
3. There is no need to convict, convince and convert.
4. We will listen, learn and lament.

The Role of a Spiritual Leader in Controversial Conversations

1. Be God's.
2. Discern God's call.
3. Share God's love.

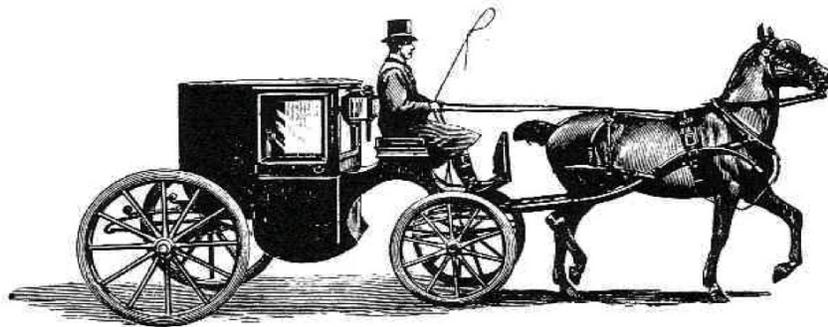
Connecting Exercise: Controversial Conversations

Share with one other person a recent controversial conversation in which you were the leader.

How comfortable were you?

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. - 1 John 4: 7-18





The Individual Coaching Model Review

Coaching Presence: The coach focuses on the person who is being coached and is fully present to and for the coachee.

Deep Listening: Listening deeply involves not contemplating a response or the next question until the coach has fully heard and understands what the individual intends. It is actively listening to the individual's hopes and challenges. It means listening to their words and emotions.

Powerful questions: A powerful question stops someone in their tracks and forces them to ponder and consider deeper implications, understandings and actions.

Expanding possibilities: Helping people to consider a perspective they hold and then to stretch the coachee to consider other possibilities.

Commitment: Coaching the individual to make a commitment of what he/she will do and by when.

The greatest and most powerful Christian distinctive is not the exercise of power; it is the offer of grace. Taken from Gerson and Peter Wehner, article, The Power of our Weakness



Group Coaching Principles and Activities

Covenant: Essential to any group conversation is a **relational covenant** that the group consents to use when they work together. The covenant is designed to assist people in engaging with one another respectfully as they talk and work together.

Deep Listening and Powerful Questions: As a group coach facilitates conversation, he/she must use deep listening and powerful questions to engage the group in **listening for understanding** and **speaking the truth in love**.

Keep the Work in the Center of the Room: Adaptive challenges and hard issues are not the sole responsibility of the leader. The work must be given back to the people. The group coach guides the group so the work stays in the center of the group. The **Circle Process** is a powerful method for keeping the work in the center of the group particularly when the group is discussing controversial issues.

Investigate: As the group coach facilitates the process, he/she models and helps the group to be **curious, learn** from one another and identify **resources** to assist the group with its challenge.

Mirror: “Holding up a mirror” for the group helps the group **see** a truer picture of themselves and understand their individual and group dynamics. Mirroring both positive and negative group behaviors helps the group see themselves, understand their behaviors, hold one another accountable and make appropriate changes.

Expand Possibilities: Assist the group to imagine more possibilities so that their focus, understanding and options are expanded rather than limited.

Action Steps and Commitments: All change and growth is achieved by developing action steps and making individual commitments to carry out the action steps.

REFLECTION:

Identify a learning for you from this modeling of conversation.

Connecting Exercise: Asking Powerful Questions

In pairs, talk about a time when you were involved in a controversial conversation as a leader. Take 5 minutes for each person. Ask each other powerful questions.

How was the experience different when asked powerful questions?

Notes:

3:30-4:00 p.m. - Break

4:00-5:00 p.m. - Plenary 2: The Power of Circle

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. - Ephesians 4: 15

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. - James 1:19

Covenant

Essential to any group conversation is a **relational covenant** that the group consents to use when they work together. The covenant is designed to assist people in engaging with one another respectfully as they talk and work together.

Guidelines for how the group will work together to establish trust for the sacred space:

1. Accountability is shared by the group.
2. Detrimental behaviors are to be ruled out.
3. The process establishes a team accomplishment.

Sample Covenant:

1. We will be prayerful in all of our work together and practice the spirit of hospitality in our language and body language.
2. We will be confidential in detail and transparent in process as necessary.
3. We will be respectful of one another and not rush to judgment.
4. We will agree to disagree but not stand in the way of the group moving forward when we don't agree.
5. We will be positive about our work and speak highly of one another.
6. We will be aware of how much we are speaking and encourage those quieter to give input.
7. We will inform the leader in advance when we know of a divisive issue.
8. We will begin and end on time.

Deep Listening and Powerful Questions

As a group coach facilitates conversation, he/she must use deep listening and powerful questions to engage the group in **listening for understanding** and **speaking the truth in love**.

The intentional format of a circle is to provide the opportunity for each person in the circle to speak and to listen. The process allows for equity in terms of speaking and equity about "place" in the circle. Just like sitting at a round table, there is no one at the head nor any one person farther away. All are equal in the circle process and everyone's voice is equally important. Not only does everyone have equal opportunity to speak, the listening is a critical part. Active listening is an intentional activity of the circle.

The leader of the circle provides three questions to which each person has the opportunity to respond. The questions allow participants to speak the truth in love and listen for understanding.

The three questions generally follow a pattern:

1. A person's big picture point of view.
2. A person's own involvement and its impact on them.
3. Any suggestions, thoughts or solutions the person has about moving forward.

Once these questions have been asked and responded to, the leader can determine if additional questions are needed.

Example #1:

The church disagrees about shifting its traditional worship to a blended one.

1. What about worship is important for your spiritual life?
2. How do you feel about the disagreements and how does it impact you?

3. What suggestions and solutions do you have for bringing the two sides together on this?

Example #2:

Two groups in the church disagree about immigration reform.

1. What are your key beliefs driving your opinions?
2. How are you impacted by current practice related to immigration?
3. Based on who we are as Christians (having the conversation from a faith-based perspective), what are your suggestions?

Keep the Work in the Center of the Room

Adaptive challenges and hard issues are not the sole responsibility of the leader. The work must be given back to the people. The group coach guides the group so the work stays in the center of the group. The **Circle Process** is a powerful method for keeping the work in the center of the group particularly when the group is discussing controversial issues.

Presence of the Holy Spirit

To make the space “sacred”, circles often include a centering space in the middle of the circle with a candle. This is to remind us that the space is intended to be sacred because we’ve invited God to the conversation. The candle reminds us of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Talking Piece

1. Use an object to pass around indicating who will talk and who will listen.
2. Select a symbol important to the group – a school board may choose a bell or a ruler; a church council may choose a Bible or wooden chalice; a choir may choose a hymnal.
3. Take care in selecting an object that is neutral -- the Bible at times may be the very book that is being fought over.
4. Speak when you are holding the talking piece.
5. Listen when you are not holding the talking piece.
6. Use mutual invitation -- the last speaker chooses the next person to speak rather than a leader choosing to equalize the power among all participants.

Right to Pass

Circle members may pass if they choose but still select the next speaker. If someone agrees to be in the circle, it can be detrimental to the group if they pass on all questions. Covenanting for active participation can help.

Roles

All are equally empowered to speak. Roles can be determined in the covenant.

1. The timekeeper is responsible for limiting everyone to a certain amount of speaking minutes.
2. The leader can either facilitate or participate.
3. The leader should seek the group’s permission to be an active participant.
4. Once the leader has established his or her opinion as a participant, the dynamics of the group change. A leader then has to carefully balance the movement toward action so that everyone feels the process is fair and not favoring the leader’s point of view.
5. Circles are most effective when one person facilitates without offering their perspective.

Investigate

As the group coach facilitates the process, he/she models and helps the group to be **curious, learn** from one another and identify **resources** to assist the group with its challenge.

Ask these three questions and let each person respond:

1. What don't we know?
2. What can we learn?
3. What did you appreciate in someone else's point of view?

These are generally asked in brainstorming fashion, inviting anyone to speak who chooses. The talking piece can be used as well. The group may determine that there is more information needed before moving on to the next phase.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. - John 15:15

Connecting Exercise: Curiosity About the Other

Choose a partner sitting close to you. For 30 seconds, observe the other person. Look at his or her clothing, hands, face, belongings, shoes. In one minute, write down as many questions as you can about the other. What are you curious about? What would you like to know more about if you were to embrace this person as your friend?

Share your questions with the other. What is it like for someone to want to know more about you?

Notes:

To speak well and to listen carefully is no easy task at times of high emotions and deep conflict. People's very identity is under threat. - John Paul Lederach, Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians

Expand Possibilities

Assist the group to imagine more possibilities so that their focus, understanding and options are expanded rather than limited.

When we decrease the level of tension, we:

1. think better,
2. think more creatively,
3. think more highly of each other,
4. think more collaboratively, and
5. give each other the benefit of the doubt.

See beyond either/or and winner/loser.

1. What do we have in common?
2. What do we appreciate about the other?
3. What can we each do to promote our own understanding?
4. Is there a collaborative approach which works for all?
5. Is there something that has not yet been thought about?
6. What would be the ideal outcome for everyone? (will be more about feelings than logistics)

Action Steps and Commitments

All change and growth is achieved by developing action steps and making individual commitments to carry out the action steps.

1. Summarize the outcomes of the circle beginning with statements of consensus. The facilitator invites input from the participants. Every circle will have at least one statement of consensus, even if it is "we agree to disagree." These are critical for community building.
2. Review the answers to the questions about curiosity/learning and imagination. Build summary statements and write them on a white board so everyone can see. Summary statements include what people learned about the topic and what people learned about each other. Depending on the purpose of the conversation, there are a variety of action steps the group can take:
 - a. meet regularly to learn from each other and keep each other grounded.
 - b. make a decision, each agreeing to move ahead as the majority determines.
 - c. determine a visioning process to be helpful and another process ensues.
 - d. imagine a whole new solution, collaborate and implement.

5:00 to 6:00 p.m. - Small Group 1: Practicing the Circle Process

Each small group will work together in confirming the covenant. The group leader will share the two topics selected from a bowl: one a local church issue, one a social issue. The whole group will identify three questions for each topic.

Break into two smaller groups, and practice the circle process with one participant volunteering to be the facilitator. In the smaller groups only answer one question in order to move through the rest of the circle process. After 20 minutes, the two small groupings switch topics and select new leaders.

REFLECTION:

Which part of the circle process am I most comfortable with?
What do I want to explore more?

Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.
- Stephen R. Covey

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

9:00-10:30 a.m. - Plenary 3: Swords to Plowshares

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. -Isaiah 2:4

Spectrum of Conversation



In the process of engaging in controversial conversations, we often encounter conflicts that have been boiling for some time. In order to achieve the best outcome for the conversation, we want to decrease the level of tension while honoring the authenticity of emotion of those involved.

The levels of tension that people begin the conversation with can determine how quickly an outcome can be reached. Lower levels of tension generally allow people more access to their imagination and to their “best.”

Easing Tension

Identify the persons needed for the conversation to be balanced and productive. The invitation itself will serve to lower the level of tension. By listening and inviting, a leader can begin to shape a person's perception about the intended purpose. People are more willing to express their opinion when they are listened to and they will do so in a reasoned way when there are guidelines (ie. Relational Covenant) for doing so.



The gift of listening is enough to resuscitate the deadness in one's spirit.

Three Simple Rules

1. Do no harm.
2. Do good.
3. Stay in love with God.

Dialogue vs. Debate

| Dialogue | Debate |
|--|--|
| Employs imagination to enlarge the view | Narrows the focus of one's own point of view |
| Encourages self-reflection and learning | Encourages critique of the other's point of view |
| Searches for statements of agreement | Seek to highlight the differences |
| Works toward collaboration and greater understanding | Works to prove the other wrong |
| Opens assumptions for clarification and rethinking | Defends the truth |
| Listens out of genuine curiosity | Listens to find flaws |
| Opens the possibility of collaboration and new ideas | Sees one's own solution as the best |
| Leaves room for future conversations | Leaves the room with a conclusion |
| Assumes multiple solutions are possible | Assumes others are wrong |
| Expresses care for the other (relationship) | Expresses concern for the position |

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Acknowledge Cultural/Gender Variables; High/Low Power

Eric Law identifies differences in conversation outcomes based on culture and gender. The nuances of power and authority influence groups of people differently.

Connecting Exercise: The Table Exercise

(Copyright Eric H.F. Law, 1995)

Draw the table shape at which you ate growing up.

Who was involved? What were they doing or saying?

What are your observations about power, authority, hospitality?

10:30-11:00 a.m. - Break

11:00-12:30 p.m. - Small Group 2: The Gift of the Question

First 30 minutes:

Powerful questions often change one's perspective about a situation. They encourage further reflection and options not even considered. This exercise is all about the questions.

You will work in triads. Each person will have 6 minutes to share while the other two people listen deeply. At the end of the sharing, one listener will ask questions while the other writes them down. The scribe can also add questions to the list. The questions are then given as a gift to the story teller to reflect upon later. After all 3 have shared and roles shifted, the larger small group will reflect on:

How did the questions resonate?

What was it like to be listened to?

What to share:

Describe a controversial conversation which made you uncomfortable or is currently unresolved. Take time to describe the level of tension, the number of people involved, cultural and power nuances. What scares you or is the most uncomfortable for you about it?

The next 45 minutes:

Break into two small groups. Practice the circle process using a topic the leader selects from the bowl. Allow someone to facilitate who has not yet done so. Invite two people who facilitated earlier to be the observers for this exercise. Create together the three questions then select one for participants to answer.

The facilitator moves the group through the next steps:

1. Curiosity, learning, resource
2. Imagination
3. Summary statements
4. Action steps

The last 15 minutes:

Reflect on the process. Listen to the observer.

Observers should respond to these questions:

1. What are the differences in the ways people responded?
2. Were there any patterns for male/female language?
3. What level of tension was built?
4. Was there more debate or dialogue?

All participants should answer: Were there cultural/gender variables?

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. - Romans 12:18

2:00-3:00 p.m. - Plenary 4: One on One Controversial Conversations

P.O.T.S.H.O.T.

Pastors often are faced with engaging in controversial conversations without warning, often in the form of a P.O.T.S.H.O.T.

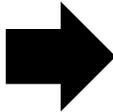
Pastors On The Spot: Hurting Opposition Testing

Because the level of tension presented by the other person is generally fairly high, it is hard to respond well. Caught off guard, it is easier to react rather than respond.

In this position, it is easy to:

1. Make negative assumptions about the intent of the other.
2. Dread encounters with controversial conversationalists and insulate with others who are like minded.
3. Ignore the person or situation.
4. Be visibly anxious about the issues.

Transforming Controversial Comments

| Four basic roles people choose instead of responding: | | | Focus on the other and transform to: |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Martyr | lies down, takes it |  | Caregiver |
| Warrior | engages in battle | | Peacebuilder |
| Avoider | defers, avoids | | Embracer |
| Worrier | creates anxiety by lining up others | | Non Anxious Presence |

REFLECTION:

Think about a time when you received a P.O.T.S.H.O.T. and you were not at your best. How did you react?

O.A.R.S.

Using elements of the circle process and a coach approach, we can greatly improve the outcomes of one on one controversial conversations. Curiosity about the other, learning the issue, speaking the truth in love, listening for understanding and using imagination provides a blueprint for a win-win conversation. OARS is a systematic framework that encompasses these tools and in high anxiety moments, gives the leader a blueprint for the conversation.

Open-ended questions elicit greater understanding
Affirm the other for sharing
Restate what is heard
Summarize the conversation

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. - Colossians 3: 13-15

Connecting Exercise: P.O.T.S.H.O.T. and O.A.R.S

In pairs, throw a P.O.T.S.H.O.T. and respond with O.A.R.S.

Here are examples of P.O.T.S.H.O.T.s:

- 1. You did not visit my mother in the hospital.**
- 2. Why are we supporting Haiti children when we aren't doing enough for our community?**
- 3. If you do not get your expense report done in time, I quit.**
- 4. If the UMC does not support same-sex marriage, I am leaving and taking about 10 others with me.**
- 5. I saw a car in your drive way overnight. Did you have a friend stay over? (single pastor)**
- 6. Our church does not do enough for youth. You need to do more.**
- 7. I do not support our denomination. I want my money (110K/year) to go to our Sunday School program.**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

8:30-10:00 a.m. - Plenary 5: Building Blocks for Healthy Conversations

Boundary Setting

Clergy may have to assess the need for boundaries if the controversial conversations are requiring significant time and energy. Some people consistently throw P.O.T.S.H.O.T.s or seek to engage in these conversations.

1. Limit time and exposure to the person who is consistently bringing controversy. Engage in the conversation at a designated time with an agreed-upon end time.
2. Guard against inaccuracies. If the facts are not accurate, invite others with additional information to enter the conversation.
3. Isolate behaviors that are causing concern through relational covenants.
4. Include others in solutions. Expand the conversation to include other people with interest in the topic.

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.
- 1 Thessalonians 5

Private vs. Public

As clergy leaders, controversial conversations can be minimized when consideration is given to what is being communicated, how, and to whom.

| | Private Connection | Public Connection |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Who</i> | Family and friends | Groups, organizations and congregations |
| <i>Communication</i> | Closed and confidential | Open and clear |
| <i>Language</i> | Intimate and informal | Formal and purposeful |
| <i>Engagement</i> | Self-giving | Agenda and boundaries |
| <i>Loyalty</i> | “Blood” | Authority |
| <i>Commitment</i> | Whatever it takes to be liked | Accountability |
| <i>Conflict</i> | Sincere | Tension that makes growth possible |
| <i>Relationship</i> | Love | Respect |

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan 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 that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. - Matthew 18: 15-19

Circles of Resonance and the Stratification Game

These two tools allow a group to understand the dynamics at play among its members. Using the circles of resonance allows people to be spread out along a scale as opposed to either/or. Circles of resonance help groups embrace their differences and see the big picture that portrays the variety of opinions.

Stratification Game Example:

What kind of worship music do you prefer?

1. I prefer organ and choirs.
2. I prefer praise band.
3. I love it all.
4. I like a combination of anything that is excellent.

(Group divided but not based on age)

The Stratification Game is a quick way to gauge the opinions in the room. Opinion statements are used and “players” are invited to stand at a place designated based on their opinions. The key is always to provide more than two options so that there are “shades” to an issue. You can then ask questions of the folks and note interesting patterns. Based on information, you can then ask a follow-up question.

Follow-Up Question: What is most important to you about worship?

1. The time of the service.
2. The style of music played.
3. Whatever my church offers works for me.
4. It's the incredibly, awesome sermons every week without fail!
5. It's my family.
6. None of the above.

Structures

In local congregations, there are structures that facilitate healthy conversations. Controversy is minimized with the following organizational components:

- 1. Clear organization structure.** Congregations that are downsizing or increasing in size often have not adjusted their structure to fit their current size.
Powerful Question: Has the church grown or decreased in size by 25% or more? Has a staff needs assessment been done within the last three years? Have the key roles of lay leadership been reviewed? Are there new options to consider?
- 2. Vision.** A congregation without a vision cannot reach its potential. The leadership team must claim the vision and be able to express the vision. The vision writing process should be clear and the product short, simple, memorable.
Powerful Questions: What is the vision? Can leaders say it from memory? Is it before the leaders and congregation often? Are decisions made based on the vision? Does it appear on all the publications of the congregation?
- 3. Accountability/formal evaluation.** Having an evaluation process for staff members allows for mid-year corrections and empowers employees/lay leadership to work toward goals. They stay focused and the results are measurable. Without goals or an evaluation process, behaviors don't change.
Powerful Questions: Is the evaluation process clear and transparent for the staff team? How does the leadership evaluate the congregation? Is there a clear set of expectations for the leadership team?
- 4. Familiarity with one another.** The leaders of a congregation work better as a team when they know each other. It is more difficult to disagree in unhealthy ways when there is rapport established.
Powerful Questions: How well does the team know each other? What exercises can be employed each time the group meets?
- 5. Leadership at the table.** Choose the chair of your leadership team carefully. The person running the meeting has to be personable, have the respect of the group and exercise restraint to let people express themselves but keep everyone on task (healthy conversation). They have to exude radical hospitality, but be in control of the meeting. They need to develop rapport with every person on their board, while keeping their eye on the target time to finish the meeting. When there is a controversial conversation, the leader can employ the circle process.
Powerful Questions: Can the leader be trained in the circle process? How else can the leader be empowered to do a good job?

10:00 a.m. - Break

10:30 -11:45 a.m. - Small Group 3: Practicing One on Ones, Circles of Resonance and the Stratification Game

Choose a topic to consider for a circle of resonance. Design the statements that will help delineate the shades of perspective, then use those to lead your full group.

45 minutes

Develop several P.O.T.S.H.O.T.s or use those from the previous list. Practice responding effectively, focusing on the other, and using O.A.R.S.

1. How comfortable was this exercise for you?
2. What can you do to get more “fluent” with O.A.R.S.?

30 minutes

As a group, talk about conversations where a circle of resonance would be effective. Design the statements that will help delineate the shades of perspective, then try one as an example.

11:45-12:15 p.m. - Plenary 6: The Big Picture for Healthy Outcomes

Lencione’s Triangle

(Based on The Five Dysfunctions of a Team)



Lencione's Triangle illustrates the five commitments a team or organization keeps before them as it seeks continual healthy conversations. Attention to these five dynamics promotes healthy outcomes even with controversial conversations. Lencione reasons that trust is the basic foundation for any healthy relationship, followed by the others as the building blocks to the most effective team possible. Each stage of development is critical in building for the best results.

Build Trust

Speak the truth in love; listen for understanding (Ephesians 4:15 and James 1:19)

Desire what is best for all

Admit weaknesses and mistakes

Assume the best about the other person's intentions

Appreciate each other and the gifts and opinions of others

Engage Conflict Well

Appreciate the opportunity for lively dialogue

Address issues in a timely manner

Talk face to face first (Matthew 18: 15-19)

Seek the best for the other

Keep core values before the whole group

Honor the ability of everyone to offer a voice

Commitment

Create clarity about values, vision and mission

Align the team around common objectives

Seek statements of consensus/agreement to celebrate

Acknowledges differing opinions while moving forward

Accountability

Encourage all to participate and abide by the covenant

Engage every person to celebrate the work effort

Respect all opinions even if the idea is not accepted

Results

Implement actions quickly to benefit the team

Focus on the good of the whole before own interests

Enjoy the accomplishment of "team" as an outcome of the process

Get done what is agreed to in a timely fashion

In Search of a Roundtable

Chuck Lathrop, in A Gentle Presence

Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry, one image keeps surfacing:
A table that is round.

It will take some sawing to be roundtabled,
some redefining and redesigning
Such redoing and rebirthing of narrowlong
Churching can painful be for people and
tables

But so was the cross,
a painful too table of giving and yes
And from such death comes life,
from such dying comes rising,
in search of roundtabling
And what would roundtable Churching
mean?

It would mean no diasing & throning,
for but one King is there,
He was a footwasher, at table no less...
For at narrowlong tables,
servant and mirror
became picture framed and centers of atten-
tion

And crosses became but gilded ornaments
on bare stone walls
in buildings used but once a week only
But the times and the tables are changing
and rearranging

And what of narrowlong table ministers,
when they confront a roundtable people,
after years of working up the table
(as in 'up the ladder')
to finally sit at its head,
only to discover
that the table has turned around???
Continued rarified air will only isolate
for there are no people there,
only roles

They must be loved into roundness,
where apart is spelled a part
and the call is to the gathering
For God has called a People,
not 'them and us'

"Them and us' are unable to gather around,
for at a roundtable, there are no sides
And ALL are invited to wholeness and to
food.

At one time
Our narrowing churches
Were built to resemble the Cross
But it does no good
For building to do so,
If lives do not.
Round tabling means
No preferred seating,
No first and last,
No better, and no corners
For the "least of these".

Roundtabling means no preferred seating,
no first & last, no better,
no corners for 'the least of these'
Roundtabling means being with,
a part of, together, and one
It means room for the Spirit and gifts
and disturbing profound peace for all.

And it is we in the present
who are mixing and kneading the dough
for the future.
We can no longer prepare for the past.
To be Church, And if He calls for other than a
round table
We are bound to follow.
Leaving the sawdust
And chips, designs and redesigns
Behind, in search of and in presence of
The Kingdom That is His and not ours.

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