

engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation and restoration of community in the Church and in the world. To prepare and assist United Methodists within an annual conference to engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation and restoration of community in the Church and in the world. To prepare and assist United Methodists within an annual conference to engage conflict constructively in ways that strive

**ESTABLISHING A
CONFLICT
TRANSFORMATION
TEAM**

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The mission of the Conflict Transformation Team is to engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation and restoration of community in and through the Annual Conference, The United Methodist Church and with the Church universal to the world in which we live.

Purpose of a Conflict Transformation Team

As Bishop or member of the Cabinet, you spend hours each week on conflict. You can and do play a role of being a mediating presence in conflicts, working to make conflicts constructive rather than destructive. Bishops and cabinets, however, often find it very helpful, even essential, to use professional mediators and facilitators, or a Conflict Transformation Team, when there is conflict in or among churches, boards, agencies, the conference, and staff.

A Conflict Transformation Team brings needed expertise and frees up valuable time. A team can work in situations where a bishop and cabinet are not seen as impartial, and in situations where a bishop and cabinet members are parties to the conflict. A Conflict Transformation team can be a great resource in training and helping to make conflicts constructive. Ultimately, a team saves valuable human and financial resources. Most importantly, a team can assist with engaging conflict in ways that are informed by our Biblical faith and the call to all Christians to be ministers of reconciliation.

Conflict Transformation Teams benefit local churches and agencies as well as bishops, cabinets and annual conferences. Few individuals within our connectional system have had training on how to engage conflict constructively. A Conflict Transformation Team can help with training, both to prevent destructive conflict and to help people engage conflict constructively. A Conflict Transformation Team, in the process of intervening in church conflicts, can teach congregations how to engage their present crisis and, in doing so, prepare them for the next conflict. A Conflict Transformation Team can also assist churches and other organizations in an annual conference to develop relational covenants that establish how each person is to be treated and respected. Creating a relational covenant helps people develop attitudes and behaviors that empower positive approaches to conflict.

In short, Conflict Transformation Team helps people to engage conflict well. Engaging conflict well transforms people and organizations. This guide is to be read in conjunction with *Engage Conflict Well: A Guide to Prepare Yourself and Engage Others in Conflict Transformation*, an overview of the theology, theory and practice of conflict transformation.

Section

2

Roles of a Conflict Transformation Team

Intervener in a Conflict

A Conflict Transformation Team offers a variety of methods for conflict transformation. These include:

Coaching - Coaching is a technique that allows a leader or leaders who are experiencing conflict to receive assistance in dealing with conflict. The *leader*, not the coach, works directly with the conflict. The leader tries to resolve the conflict without the involvement of a third party. A bishop, district superintendent, pastor, or even a key lay leader, might call on the services of a member of the Conflict Transformation Team for coaching. Coaching includes providing information, exploring options, spiritual discernment and personal preparation for engaging conflict well.

Mediation - In many conflicts, parties to a conflict do need the direct assistance of an impartial person or team to facilitate conflict transformation. Here members of the Conflict Transformation Team act as mediators. They create a reasonably safe space for those in conflict to come together, to share their stories, to listen and be heard, and to use their imaginations to reach agreements that meet the needs and interests of all the parties. The mediator assists the parties to resolve their own conflicts, to heal themselves and ideally to reconcile with each other.

Facilitation of Large Groups in Dialogue - In many churches, issues often involve a significant number of people who need to be included in a dialogue. These dialogues may be about issues such as those dealt with in the early Church around theology, ecclesiology or ethics. Often such conflicts have escalated from involving just a few individuals to a large group. Conflict Transformation Team members work with these large groups to design a process for the particular conflict or issue and to then facilitate that process.

Facilitation of Circles of Healing and Accountability - As the Church, we face complaints of wrongdoing and breaches of covenant, including the covenant of ordination. Adversarial and retributive processes that we find in our grievance and trial procedures are often long, painful and expensive. Members of a Conflict Transformation Team can help the parties design a collaborative, restorative approach which addresses the harm to victims, achieves real accountability, and brings healing to all the parties, including victims, offenders and the affected community.

Consultation - In some cases, churches or organizations may benefit from the consultation model, particularly those where the level of conflict is high and where bringing parties together for mediation, or other such collaborative process, is not possible. In this model, a Conflict Transformation Team serves as a consultant. Consultants collect data, interview the parties, examine written materials, and talk with others who may have relevant information. The consultants then analyze their findings and furnish a report listing the existing issues, potential resources, and recommendations for how to approach the issues. Here, all parties are given equal weight and opportunity to be heard. This process insures that all parties have the same information.

Educator in Conflict Transformation

Workshops for cabinets, agencies of the annual conference, local churches, church committees, and pastors allow for a greater understanding of conflict and the potential for positive change as a result of conflict. By providing training to engage conflict well, destructive conflict can be thwarted and healthy systems established.

Promoter of Relational Covenants

A *relational covenant* is the shared expectations and aspirations of a community or group as to how each member wants to be treated in the life of the community. A relational covenant becomes a set of shared promises to each other and to the community as a whole. These are more than rules about negative conduct and problems to be avoided. They are more than ways of bringing deviant conduct back into line. They are affirmations of the vision and values of the community and the positive conduct that expresses that vision and those values. This includes mission and vision statements. A Conflict Transformation Team can help cabinets, agencies and churches develop such covenants. This work might well be the most important work that can be done in making conflict constructive.

Trainer of Mediators

The Conflict Transformation Team can also periodically offer a training session for people who want to be facilitators and mediators, or who simply want to be a mediating presence in their work. These trainees may or may not ultimately be part of the conflict transformation team.

Section

3

Establishment of a Team: Critical Elements

Your Support as Bishop and Cabinet

For a Conflict Transformation Team to be effective, a strong, positive relationship between you and the team is essential. It is the Bishop who established the team, and the Bishop and Cabinet will refer most conflicts to the Conflict Transformation Team.

District Superintendents often identify local churches in serious conflict as they interact with churches in their annual business. Pastors and Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairpersons also consult the District Superintendent when there is a crisis. Early intervention offers the best possibility for constructive engagement. For a Conflict Transformation Team to have the most success, it is helpful for conflict situations to be identified when the majority of persons involved are still at an early stage of the conflict. Communication between the Conflict Transformation Team and the Bishop and Cabinet about the proposed process and the expectations also improves the possibility of engaging conflict well.

Training for the Bishop and Cabinet in the conflict transformation process can help them be more effective at identifying conflict and in supporting those in conflict.

Selection of a Coordinator

A Coordinator is selected to manage referrals and assign team members. Conflict Transformation Team users also call upon the Coordinator for clarification of the process and to schedule special workshops, retreats, and continuing education events for pastors, local churches, schools of religion, and district events. The Coordinator acts as the spokesperson for the Conflict Transformation Team and might meet periodically with the Bishop and Cabinet so that expectations are shared as well as lessons and trends. The Coordinator also gathers preliminary information from the District Superintendent, pastor, and/or contact person in a local church so that the best team may be assigned. The Coordinator may further select team members based on the needs of the local church for coaching, mediation, facilitation, consultation, or training.

Recruitment of the Team, Including Laity and Clergy

Careful consideration needs to be given to the makeup of a Conflict Transformation Team in order to have a well-trained and skilled team with a variety of gifts. Ideally teams will include diversity reflecting the conference. Teams may be recruited in several different ways.

One model uses five or six persons who have backgrounds in conflict transformation and who are hired for the open positions. These people are interviewed and resumes submitted. A salary based on the number of cases is agreed upon.

Another model uses clergy and laity, selected from the annual conference, who have an interest or training in conflict transformation. They receive compensation through the fees assessed from the church for the conflict transformation process. A team of a clergy and layperson are assigned together to work in a crisis situation. In a conference where traveling distance is an issue, it is helpful, to have personnel scattered geographically.

A third model uses one or two full time mediators who are hired as needed to work in conflict situations. The local church pays the fee.

Assessment of Conflict and Appropriate Intervention

Each bishop and cabinet will have different ideas of what needs to be done in each crisis situation. Careful conversation with a Conflict Transformation Team will bring about agreement on the type of intervention needed. Not all situations call for the same process. Each process must ultimately be tailored to the needs of the participants to the conflict, and they should be involved in designing the process.

Training of the Team

The effectiveness of the Conflict Transformation Team is directly related to the training of its members in all the roles described above. Conflict Transformation Team members must be well trained from a variety of disciplines and have a clear understanding of how they will work with one another, with the local churches, and with the bishop and cabinet.

Conflict transformers come from a variety of backgrounds and training. The team concept allows for the possibility of sharing a variety of gifts, interests, and training for the benefit of the local churches. The resources available to the Church are vast in dealing with conflict. It is important that any methodology develop from faith principles. This is what “Engage Conflict Well” attempts to do.

Continued training is critical for building skills and exploring new concepts in the field. Such training can also include opportunities for self-evaluation. Such training will give members of the team opportunities to learn more about different kinds of conflicts being experienced in churches.

Apprenticeship

As new people are recruited for a Conflict Transformation Team, they work as apprentices for a period determined by their level of training and expertise. In this way, they learn the process and methodology from those with previous experience.

Funding a Team

In the most common model, the annual conference establishes a budget for their Conflict Transformation Team, which includes a salary for the Coordinator and a budget for the team. The annual conference establishes standards for fees paid by churches or other parties. Team expenses should be fully funded. These include mailings, training expenses, brochures and flyers, travel for consultants, and long-distance telephone calls. Ultimately, the savings accumulated by avoiding litigation and destructive conflict more than pays for the annual budget needed for the team. The annual conference may consider, as one source of funding, allocating some of their budget for legal fees to the collaborative work of the Conflict Transformation Team.

Fees Assessed for Conflict Transformation Work

Local churches or other organizations may be charged a fee for services received based on their ability to pay and the complexity of the case. Organizations may negotiate a flat fee with the Conflict Transformation Team, while a sliding scale fee may be established for local churches based, for example, on average attendance. Additional monies may be available through district funds or through the budget of the Conflict Transformation Team to assist local churches/agencies. A Conflict Transformation Team should establish the fee in writing prior to commencement of the work.

Section

5

Relational Covenant of a Team

A Conflict Transformation Team models a relational covenant in its work together and builds on its effectiveness as the team works in local churches or with boards and agencies. The team will develop the covenant together. The relational covenant should include, at least, agreement on the following issues:

Impartiality

It is important for the team to agree on its role in a conflict. Previous history with a church or pastor, inside information that may distort one's work, cultural or ethnic bias, or other biases based on one's life experience must be addressed. Conflict Transformation Team members shall acknowledge these so that the most appropriate team member(s) can be assigned to work with a church or organization. Team members need to be impartial in any conflict to which they are assigned.

Empowerment

Another important issue is the role of the team member(s) in a local church. Often, pastors and church leaders feel threatened by the process and a Conflict Transformation Team member must be careful not to become the pastor or to take away authority from the parties. Instead, the team member(s) empowers the pastor and the congregation to resolve their own conflicts.

Conflict Transformation Team members must also be clear that a goal of the process is to create independence. Churches should learn skills so that they can engage conflict well in the future.

Accountability

A process of evaluation will ensure quality work and positive outcomes. Regular team evaluation allows members to learn from one another and gives everyone opportunity for additional analysis and sorting through issues.

Confidentiality

Team members agree to confidentiality so that pastors and local churches are comfortable working through the process. The team creates a space where people feel safe to tell their stories. Participants and the Conflict Transformation Team agree on what may be shared with the bishop and the cabinet.

Client-Team-Conference Relationship

Participants must understand that the Conflict Transformation Team works with them through the conference but does not represent the Bishop, the District Superintendent or the conference. The Conflict Transformation Team serves as an impartial and independent resource. In this way, the local church takes greater ownership and the Conflict Transformation Team is able to remain impartial and effective.

Special thanks to all who had a hand in putting together this guide, including JUSTPEACE board members, Richard Harrington and Karin Walker; members of the JUSTPEACE network, Bonnie McOmer and Evelyn Johnson Moore; and everyone else who contributed their thoughts.

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