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# **Presbytery of Grand Canyon: Reconciliation Team Manual of Operations**

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## PURPOSE

29 The Presbytery of Grand Canyon Reconciliation Team was created in March 2015 by approval  
30 of the Leadership Team and the Commission on Ministry. Funds were authorized by the Resources  
31 Committee and the Leadership Team from a restricted fund for missional initiatives to send six  
32 persons to the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center's (LMPC) week-long Mediation Skills Training  
33 Institute. Subsequent training was received by Reconciliation Team leaders through the LMPC's  
34 Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process and Healthy Congregation's Facilitator Training, both  
35 of which are family systems theory-based training regimens. Reconciliation Team members meet  
36 monthly for continuing education in applying family systems theory to understanding  
37 congregational dynamics as they apply to their work of promoting health and facilitating  
38 reconciliation in the presbytery's congregations.

39 The purpose of the Reconciliation Team is,

40 *to promote health and facilitate reconciliation within congregations and the presbytery as a whole.*

41 This purpose statement needs to be unpacked. Because good relations are built upon spiritual and  
42 emotional well-being, the Reconciliation Team's first focus is to promote health in the presbytery  
43 and its congregations. The Team approaches the promotion of health through the lens of family  
44 systems theory. While family systems theory is not the only modality ecclesiastical governing  
45 bodies can use to promote health and facilitate reconciliation, it has proven to be a successful  
46 approach in varied and complex situations and is our chosen modality. To promote health in  
47 congregations the Team will provide a variety of training workshops in various settings throughout  
48 the presbytery. An illustrative, though not exhaustive, list of such workshops and settings includes  
49 the following:

### 50 *Workshops*

- 51 • Conflict and Communication in the Bible
- 52 • Developing Interpersonal Conflict Transformation Skills
- 53 • Understanding Congregations as a System to Promote Health
- 54 • Cultivating Congregational Conflict Transformation Skills

55

### 56 *Settings*

57

- 58 • As a congregational retreat or adult education offering,
- 59 • as an educational offering at the Presbytery's annual "Big Event," or
- 60 • as part of a congregation's reconciliation process.

61 The RT's second focus is the facilitation of reconciliation in congregations that have experienced  
62 or are experiencing conflict. Congregational conflict can exist at varying levels of intensity. As  
63 such, the RT has a variety of approaches depending on the extent of the divisions within the church  
64 setting, ranging from workshops to coaching church leaders to full-scale mediation – approaches

65 outlined in the LMPC Mediation Skills Training Institute workbook or originating from the  
66 Healthy Congregations Inc.

67 The approach outlined in this Manual represents a full-scale mediation, which in practice will be  
68 rare. It is included in its totality to communicate the full complement of tools at the RT's disposal.  
69 More common will be scaled down interventions. An illustrative, though not exhaustive, list of  
70 such limited interventions include the following:

- 71 • educational workshops,
- 72 • guided conversations for the purpose of healing between parties experiencing intense  
73 conflict,
- 74 • coaching of pastors, elders or others in leadership in non-anxious, self-differentiated  
75 communication, and/or
- 76 • the creation of mutually agreed upon covenants among members.

77 The RT will discuss with each congregation and its leadership the possibilities available and their  
78 recommendations for RT engagement. Caution is encouraged both for RT facilitators and for  
79 congregational leadership to avoid the temptation of moving too soon to seek a solution. Family  
80 systems theory coaches those in conflict that unless and until the group anxiety is calmed, no real  
81 conversation will take place, and therefore no solution found. Therefore, though full interventions  
82 will be rare, true engagement will still require significant investment of time, effort, energy, prayer,  
83 and goodwill from all concerned.

84 It should be noted that the Team facilitates reconciliation by invitation only. The Team's  
85 "conversation partners" in the reconciliation process are a congregation's Session, the Commission  
86 on Ministry, and the congregation. The Team will only pursue the reconciliation process (1) upon  
87 an invitation from a Session, (2) with prior authorization from the Commission on Ministry, and  
88 (3) following a subsequent vote of the congregation to participate in the reconciliation process.  
89 There may be circumstances in which (1) and (2) above are re-ordered; that is, COM may authorize  
90 the Team to contact the Session to initiate a dialogue prior to the Session's affirmation of their  
91 participation. However, in no circumstance shall the process move forward without approval of all  
92 three conversation partners: Session, COM, and the congregation. The Reconciliation Team  
93 operates at the discretion of COM (see: Oversight, page 9, for additional information).

94

95

**MEMBERSHIP\***

96 Mediating congregational conflicts can involve facilitating highly charged emotional exchanges,  
97 participating in confidential conversations, as well as listening to sensitive and personal  
98 reflections. Therefore, members of the RT should embody qualities that enable them to manage  
99 themselves in stressful situations as well as recognize opportunities for their own personal growth.  
100 To ensure success, appointment to the RT will proceed through a collaborative process of  
101 discernment by both the current RT members and the COM rather than through the ordinary  
102 Presbytery nominating process. The unique needs required of members for the RT to function  
103 effectively include the following:

- 104 1. specialized training in conflict transformation and family systems theory,
- 105 2. personal aptitude and ministry-specific gifts for conflict transformation, and
- 106 3. the ability to function well as a member of a cohesive unit “through demonstration of the  
107 following characteristics:
  - 108 1) they will be members in good standing of churches or the Presbytery,
  - 109 2) they will be people who refrain from assigning blame during conflict,
  - 110 3) they will have a history of exercising emotional control under stressful situations, and
  - 111 4) they will have a history of demonstrating well developed listening skills.

112 To be approved for participation on the Reconciliation Team, all members shall fulfill the  
113 following requirements:

- 114 1. Attend the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center Mediation Skills Training Institute or its  
115 equivalent.
- 116 2. Commit to regular participation in the RT’s monthly training in family systems theory and  
117 conflict transformation exercises.
- 118 3. Submit a written application to COM and the RT, to include the following:
  - 119 • name, church, contact information, church role (teaching elder, ruling elder, etc.),
  - 120 • a description of a congregational conflict and your role in the conflict – what happened?
  - 121 • your analysis of the congregational conflict – how and why the conflict unfolded the  
122 way it did?
  - 123 • a statement on your sense of call to the ministry of reconciliation, and
  - 124 • a statement on the gifts, skills and training you bring to the ministry of reconciliation.

125 Both the RT and the COM shall review the application. Approval of both groups is required for  
126 membership on the RT. The RT chairperson shall communicate the decision to approve or decline  
127 membership to the applicant in writing followed by an in-person meeting to review the decision.  
128 Applicants may appeal the decision to decline membership through a written request and  
129 subsequent in-person meeting with either the RT or the COM, depending on the declining party.

130 The Reconciliation Team shall consist of at least seven members whenever a sufficient number of  
131 trained, willing, and appropriate candidates present themselves for service. The number of  
132 Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders should be in approximately equal number to the extent possible  
133 given the need for all team members to have received training. Every effort should be made to  
134 recruit Ruling Elders to the RT. All RT members serve as volunteers of the Presbytery and are  
135 unpaid. Any remuneration or gifts offered by a congregation to a member or members of the RT  
136 shall be directed to the presbytery's finance manager for deposit in a restricted fund account for  
137 the training new members.

138 Appointment to the RT is for a three-year term renewable by affirmation of the RT and the  
139 Commission on Ministry. A one year sabbatical is required of all RT members after two-terms,  
140 (six continuous years) of service. All decisions to approve or decline the renewal of a term shall  
141 be communicated in writing to the team member and a subsequent in-person meeting to review  
142 the decision. RT members may appeal the decision to decline the renewal of term through a written  
143 request and subsequent in-person meeting with either the RT or the COM, depending on the  
144 declining party. The RT chairperson shall be elected annually by the team. To the extent possible  
145 based on the need for additional training to be held by the chairperson, the RT should seek to  
146 balance leadership between Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders.

147 The Presbytery Pastor shall serve on the RT as an ex-officio member but shall not serve as a  
148 reconciliation facilitator. This boundary is in accord with the standards of the International  
149 Federation of Ombudsman<sup>1</sup> and protects both the Presbytery Pastor, the pastor of a local  
150 congregation, and the congregation from having someone serve in a dual-role capacity. The  
151 Presbytery Pastor can best serve the Presbytery, its congregations and pastors by avoiding the  
152 inherent conflicts of interest and triangled relationships a dual-role creates. Rather, the Presbytery  
153 Pastor will function on the RT in the following ways:

- 154 • As a consultant in the decision to recommend reconciliation and in the development of  
155 the reconciliation approach.
- 156 • As a coach and support to pastors of churches in the reconciliation process.
- 157 • As an encouraging, supportive voice to the congregation for their participation in the  
158 reconciliation process.
- 159 • As an advisor to the RT regarding the dynamics of specific conflicts and the dynamics  
160 of conflict in general.

161 If it is discerned that an RT member may need to be removed from service on the team, the RT  
162 chairperson and the Presbytery Pastor shall convey in writing and in face-to-face conversation  
163 their concerns. The concerns should point to specific behaviors such as regular absences and/or  
164 relate to the same characteristics identified as important for membership:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ombudsmanassociation.org](http://www.ombudsmanassociation.org). See also, Dues, Michael, *The Art of Conflict Management*. The Teaching Company: Chantilly, VA, 2017.

- 165           1) they will be people who refrain from assigning blame during conflict,
- 166           2) they will have a history of exercising emotional control under stressful situations, and
- 167           3) they will have a history of demonstrating well developed listening skills.

168   The RT chairperson and the Presbytery Pastor shall consult with the RT member regarding their  
169   continued participation on the team and any modifications to one’s behavior requested.

170   Removal from the RT shall be at the recommendation of the RT chairperson and Presbytery Pastor  
171   and with the concurrence of the COM. The RT member may request an appeal of the  
172   recommendation to the COM and maintains the right to speak on her or his behalf before the COM  
173   meeting in plenary.

174   \*Current RT members as of the initial approval of this Manual by the COM shall be “grandfathered  
175   / grandmothered in” as members of the RT.

176

177

## TRAINING

178 All Reconciliation Team members are required to attend the Lombard-Mennonite Peace  
179 Center's Mediation Skill Training Institute workshop or its equivalent. Applicants who have  
180 attended an equivalent training event shall submit the course curriculum to the Team and to the  
181 COM for review. While all training in conflict resolution, conflict transformation, mediation,  
182 reconciliation, communication, and various forms of family systems training are to be commended  
183 and can prove beneficial to the Team's effectiveness, the LMPC Mediation Skills Training  
184 Institute forms the basis of the modality used by the Presbytery's Reconciliation Team and all  
185 Team members are asked to adopt and utilize the LMPC process as described in this manual of  
186 operations. While affirming the existence of multiple effective strategies for facilitating  
187 reconciliation, the Team must operate from the same "playbook."

188 All Reconciliation Team members are asked to participate regularly in a monthly cohort  
189 that will be guided by the Team chairperson and whose subject matter may include,

- 190 1. Review and discussion of family systems theory as it relates to congregational dynamics;  
191
- 192 2. Voluntary discussion of team members' own family system, including diagram and  
193 discussion of one's genogram;  
194
- 195 3. Role plays of various conflicted situation requiring mediation;  
196
- 197 4. Review of Reconciliation Team procedures and "best practices"; and  
198
- 199 5. Other topics as necessary.

200 The scope of the above required training extends beyond technique and encourages  
201 meaningful and transformative reflection on one's own relationships and relationship skills. One  
202 of the core convictions of family systems theory is that who we are is more important than what  
203 we know, so the training of reconciliation facilitators prioritizes personal capability over  
204 professional competencies, or at least balances these training values.

205 While successful participation in the process of conflict mediation does not require  
206 academic expertise, all team members may find it helpful to participate in personal or professional  
207 training events, provided it does not distract from the hard work of honest self-examination. Should  
208 a Team member wish to explore current materials on conflict transformation a list of books,  
209 trainings, and workshops recommended for on-going training and development of conflict  
210 transformation skills can be found in Appendix I on page 77.

211



212

## OVERSIGHT

213 The Reconciliation Team serves upon authorization by – and at the request of – the  
214 Commission on Ministry. The RT’s work is guided by the third primary purpose set forth for the  
215 COM: “to settle difficulties on behalf of the presbytery” (COM Handbook, page 7). It is understood  
216 the COM has the capability and responsibility among its members “to settle difficulties” in the  
217 majority of circumstances. The Reconciliation Team may be invited to function in this capacity  
218 when it is discerned that a congregation’s conflict is at a level three or level four on the Speed Leas  
219 Conflict Scale.<sup>2</sup>

220 Although the COM has the capacity to authorize the Reconciliation Team to act as  
221 facilitators in a congregational reconciliation, this does not suggest that they should seek to direct  
222 the work of the Reconciliation Team, whose particular function, specialized training, and  
223 engagement in the complexities of a congregation’s social, emotional, and leadership dynamics  
224 require a certain amount of latitude to perform its work; simply put, micro-managing is not  
225 appropriate. The latitude offered the Reconciliation Team by COM recognizes the Team’s need to  
226 serve in a “neutral and impartial” manner and have “independence in structure, function, and  
227 appearance,” according to recognized standards of practice as expressed in the literature on conflict  
228 transformation.<sup>3</sup>

229 However, accountability from the Reconciliation Team to the Commission on Ministry is both  
230 appropriate and necessary. All RT members shall comply with the COM’s Code of Ethics and all  
231 RT actions shall comply with COM policies and procedures as stated in the COM Handbook. If  
232 RT facilitators discern the need to utilize an intervention, they suspect may contravene COM  
233 policies and procedures, they will seek approval of the COM before taking action. Reconciliation  
234 Team accountability may be further affirmed through one or more of the following means, upon  
235 request of the COM:

- 236 1. A quarterly report from the Team to the COM regarding interactions taken with  
237 congregations.
  - 238 a. Each quarterly report shall be written and submitted to the COM for distribution to  
239 its full membership.  
240  
241

---

<sup>2</sup> The five levels of conflict as identified by Speed Leas of the Alban Institute are: (1) **Problem to Solve** – specific issues, open and honest conversation, and sharing of ideas; (2) **Disagreement** – self-protections, seeking to look good, some holding back of ideas as well as joking with a hard edge; (3) **Contest** – make sure your side wins, factions emerge, language tends toward assuming things about, over-generalizing and magnifying other’s faults and one’s own strengths; (4) **Fight or Flight** – seeking to break the relationship with a strong desire to punish or detach as well as question others’ integrity; and (5) **Intractable** – goal becomes to destroy the other; take their job, their reputation, and their well-being, and the ends justify the means.

<sup>3</sup> [www.ombudsmanassociation.org](http://www.ombudsmanassociation.org). See also, Dues, Michael, *The Art of Conflict Management*. The Teaching Company: Chantilly, VA, 2017.

- 242           b. Any particular report shall be accompanied by an in-person conversation upon the  
243           request of either the Team or the COM.  
244
- 245           c. All reports shall be considered confidential information not to be shared with  
246           anyone outside of the COM or the Reconciliation Team without express consent by  
247           vote of the COM.  
248
- 249           d. It is understood that the Team will be as forthcoming as is reasonably possible in  
250           each report but that certain, confidential information may be withheld.  
251
- 252           e. It is understood that the COM is free to ask questions, seek clarification, and make  
253           comments, and that the Team will respond to all requests for information to the best  
254           of their ability.  
255
- 256           2. Response(s) to specific question(s) or issue(s), using the criteria in number 1 above.  
257
- 258           3. During the period of time in which the RT is engaged with a congregation, the COM liaison  
259           will be invited to attend the monthly RT meetings for the portion of the meeting in which  
260           their congregation's issues will be addressed. In addition, the RT facilitators will  
261           communicate to the COM liaison all substantive activities and communications.  
262
- 263           4. Written copies of the Reconciliation Team's Final Report to the Congregation shall also be  
264           submitted to the Commission on Ministry. This report will be filed in the Presbytery office  
265           and communicated, as appropriate, during pastoral transitions. All pastoral candidates  
266           within five years of the reconciliation process shall be informed of the report and have  
267           access to it upon request.
- 268           5. An Annual Report of RT actions shall be submitted to the COM, with a subsequent review  
269           of the report at a stated meeting of COM to which the RT chair shall be invited.

270           In addition to the COM's supervision of the Reconciliation Team as a whole, Team  
271           members will be supervised in their work by the Team's chairperson and each other. The Team's  
272           work is highly collaborative in nature; therefore, it is appropriate and necessary for the supervision  
273           of its members to be primarily through mutual, collegial support and encouragement yet also  
274           through the direct communication of respectful challenge and constructive critique. The Team's  
275           chairperson has the responsibility to moderate group discussions, feedback dialogues, and the  
276           evaluation of Team member's facilitation of the reconciliation process with a congregation.

277

278

**STAGE ONE: COVENANTING TO ONE’S CONVICTIONS**

279

**INITIAL CONTACT AND DISCERNMENT**

280

281 The initial contact alerting members of presbytery to the perception of – or potential for –  
282 congregational conflict may come from a variety of sources: the pastor of a particular  
283 congregation, an elder, a congregational member, a pastor from a neighboring church, or some  
284 other concerned person. It is less important *from whom a report comes but rather that the report*  
285 *is taken seriously and responded to in an appropriate manner.* Ordinarily, the initial contact is  
286 responded to by either the Commission on Ministry liaison or a member of Presbytery staff,  
287 typically the Presbytery Pastor. All such responses should be considered as having the potential to  
288 set an appropriate tone for any reconciliation process that might follow, and, therefore, should be  
289 handled with care and sensitivity.

289

290 As it is determined by COM and congregational leadership that the situation may be  
291 appropriate for Reconciliation Team involvement, the Team chairperson should be contacted and  
292 initial conversations explored with appropriate persons in the congregation, including, but not  
293 limited to the pastor, the clerk of Session, and any complainant(s) willing to speak with a  
294 Presbytery representative. The Team chairperson will assign the Team member(s) to conduct these  
295 initial conversations.

295

296 Given that even these initial conversations are already a part of any reconciliation process  
297 that may emerge, it is necessary to remain cognizant of the following needs and temptations:

297

- the *need* to listen respectfully, attentively, and with humility, while avoiding the *temptation*

298

- to take a side;

299

- the *need* to keep this initial conversation circle small; that is, speak to enough persons to  
301 confirm that some conflict exists while avoiding the *temptation* of beginning to function as  
302 the reconciliation facilitator on an ad hoc basis.

303

- the *need* to answer questions and provide information about the reconciliation process in  
305 as simple and direct a manner possible while avoiding the *temptation* to try to convince,  
306 compel, or coerce someone into participating in the process<sup>4</sup>; and

307

- the *need* for clear agreement with all parties on the rules for confidentiality thereby  
309 avoiding the *temptation* to be triangled by keeping secrets. (See below, ages 14-16: “A  
310 Note on Confidentiality.”)

311

312 During these initial conversations, the Team member(s) should seek to evaluate the  
313 situation so as to be able to answer the question, “Is this situation appropriate for the Reconciliation

---

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from MSTI, “Getting People to Mediation, #4,” page D3.

313 Team?” The following lists may be used as a template as one sorts through the information,  
314 perceptions and emotions of those one is interviewing.<sup>5</sup>

315 **The reconciliation process is NOT appropriate:**

316 1. *As a substitute for counseling or therapy* – “When one or several parties to the conflict are  
317 emotionally ill, or under so much stress that rational discussion would be impossible, mediation  
318 should be avoided or delayed...This does not preclude mediation *in addition to* professional  
319 counseling or therapy.”<sup>6</sup>

320  
321 2. *When physical, sexual, or emotional abuse is alleged* – these circumstances require a referral  
322 to law enforcement and/or the Stated Clerk for ecclesiastical discipline.

323  
324 3. *When power should not be balanced* – particular care and sensitivity must be shown to cultural  
325 factors that influence the way reconciliation is invited, communicated, and embraced in our  
326 Native American, Hispanic, Korean, and African-American congregations; simply put, there  
327 are times when it is inappropriate to impose the majority (Anglo) culture’s values on our sister  
328 congregations.

329  
330 4. *When it appears reconciliation is being coerced or used as a power-play* – When “the goal of  
331 the dominant group is repression or the goal of the subordinate group is revolution,”<sup>7</sup> one must  
332 ensure the process is not hijacked for the purpose of being used as a weapon in a congregational  
333 dispute.

334  
335 5. *When the conflict level is at level one (Problem to Solve), two (Disagreement) or five*  
336 *(Intractable)*<sup>8</sup> – Generally speaking, level one and level two conflicts remain within the  
337 congregation, while level five conflicts are most appropriately adjudicated by the COM and,  
338 as necessary, a Permanent Judicial Commission, as such conflicts are generally about  
339 severance negotiations or judicial proceedings. Following closure of said negotiations or PJC  
340 proceedings, the reconciliation process may resume.

341

342 **The Reconciliation Process IS Appropriate:**

343 1. *When level three conflict (Contest) is already present and moving forward* – Indicators of level  
344 three conflict include participants making sure his/her side wins, factions emerge, language  
345 tends toward assuming things about others, over-generalizing, and magnifying others’ faults  
346 and one’s own strengths.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pages D27-D30, adapted slightly.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., page D27.

<sup>7</sup> James Laue, *MCS Conciliation Quarterly*, Fall, 1986, and *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For a description of Speed Leas’ five levels of conflict, see footnote on page 9.

- 347 2. *When level four conflict (Fight or Flight) is present or beginning to emerge* – Indicators of  
348 level four conflict include seeking to break the relationship with a strong desire to punish or  
349 detach as well as questioning others’ integrity.  
350
- 351 3. *When disputes are about behaviors* – How people treat each other; sharing space; respecting  
352 boundaries; communicating about problems; or following through on promises and  
353 responsibilities.  
354
- 355 4. *When disputes are about things* – Property, repairs, maintenance, loans, reimbursements,  
356 arranging payments, budgeting, or use of restricted funds.  
357
- 358 5. *When disputes are about structures and systems* – How decisions are made, rules and  
359 regulations, procedures, schedules, or job responsibilities.  
360
- 361 6. *When disputes are about leadership values and practices* – Core principles, ministry values,  
362 personal style, or management style.  
363
- 364 7. *When disputes are about subjective topics that can be discussed if not adjudicated* – Emotions  
365 (anger, hurt feelings, trust, blame, fault); and/or perceptions (what “really” happened,  
366 interpretations of what “really” happened, and/or right from wrong).  
367

368 Following initial contact with the small circle of conversation partners, Team member(s) shall  
369 make a recommendation to the Team and to COM seeking to answer the question, “Is this situation  
370 appropriate for the Reconciliation Team?” Team member(s)’ recommendation should provide a  
371 brief overview of why the situation seems amenable to the reconciliation process. At a minimum,  
372 the overview, while protecting the confidentiality of participants in the initial contact, should  
373 include responses to the following:<sup>9</sup>

- 374 1. This dispute is about:  
375
- 376 2. One perspective is:  
377
- 378 3. A differing perspective is:  
379
- 380 4. What attempts to resolve the dispute have been made to date:  
381
- 382 5. How may this dispute be resolved if the reconciliation process is not used?

---

<sup>9</sup> MSTI, page D4. Note: participants names shall remain confidential in this report.

383

384 6. Are the interested parties open to the reconciliation process?

385 COM shall take action on the Team's initial report, either to approve or deny the reconciliation  
386 process, or to defer action in order to gather more information.387 *A Note on Confidentiality and Triangles*388 The proper use of information is one of the greatest needs in the reconciliation process, and  
389 reconciliation facilitators are susceptible to temptation in this regard: to withhold information that  
390 should be shared, to share information that should remain confidential, to manipulate information  
391 for reasons of gaining power, or to distort information for reasons of avoiding risk are common  
392 temptations. Diligence and discernment are the reconciliation facilitator's necessary companions.393 A further difficulty for reconciliation facilitators is the way customary rules for  
394 confidentiality in the ordinary pastor-parishioner or therapist-client type relationship are  
395 understood. These rules for confidentiality are broadly known throughout our culture and carry the  
396 expectation that all care professionals will strictly adhere to a policy of absolute confidentiality.  
397 However, these rules may conflict with the facilitator's purpose of encouraging healthy  
398 communication through the free flow of information throughout a congregation.399 It is common for people under stress to co-opt care professionals by using confidentiality  
400 rules to share information in a manner that reinforces personal and congregational dysfunction.  
401 Often such people will be unaware of the patterns and consequences of their behavior in this  
402 regard. At times, a facilitator will find him or herself in the position of needing to keep information  
403 confidential, while at other times a facilitator's work will be compromised by strict adherence to  
404 these same rules. Family systems theory describes this position as triangulation. Facilitators who  
405 find themselves in this position can actually use it to advance reconciliation if they respond  
406 appropriately. In these situations, calm discernment and input from fellow Reconciliation Team  
407 members can help determine the most effective approach.408 The following guidelines suggest ways to employ the aforementioned companions of  
409 diligence and discernment:410 1. Information about imminent danger of harm to self or other is NEVER confidential; therefore,  
411 it is always appropriate for facilitators to share such information with others who may provide  
412 safety and health.

413

414 2. Specific and personal information about another person such as their feelings, medical history,  
415 and emotional well-being is ALWAYS confidential; therefore, it is never appropriate for  
416 facilitators to share such information with another without express permission.

417

- 418 3. Secret keeping, the withholding of information from congregational leadership and other  
419 members, and the unwillingness to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) are the greatest  
420 blocks to reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, at each phase of the reconciliation process, certain best  
421 practices should guide facilitators:  
422
- 423 a. **Encourage direct communication** – say what needs to be said, to whom it needs to be  
424 said, in the manner it needs to be said. The reconciliation process is an exercise in (a)  
425 encouraging each person to take responsibility for oneself - i.e., self-differentiation, (b)  
426 encouraging the community to inculcate practices of direct, open, and respectful dialogue,  
427 and (c) building both capacity and competency toward (a) and (b) through teaching,  
428 modelling and practice. Facilitators are encouraged to coach individuals on ways to  
429 communicate directly, including through the use of role play with the individual.  
430
  - 431 b. **Request permission to share the information *with the person’s name attached to the***  
432 ***information***. Explain to the person sharing the information that a request will be made for  
433 an appropriate leader to respond to the individual and to the facilitator. Such a  
434 “communication circle” or completion of the “feedback loop” will provide a level of  
435 accountability for the leader to respond to the individual in an appropriate manner.  
436
  - 437 c. **Refuse to “accept” information shared anonymously or without attribution.**  
438 Obviously, once information has been communicated, one cannot “un-hear” the  
439 information. However, it is appropriate for a facilitator to communicate to another their  
440 unwillingness to communicate to a third party or act upon anonymous information. In  
441 such a circumstance, it is appropriate for the facilitator to seek the other person’s verbal  
442 acknowledgement that they understand no action will be taken on the anonymous  
443 information.  
444
- 445 4. Having noted the need to balance confidentiality with the need to encourage the free flow of  
446 congregational communication, it is appropriate to clarify the “rules of engagement” for  
447 confidentiality at each phase of the reconciliation process. It is often necessary during early  
448 phases of the reconciliation process to promise confidentiality until sufficient trust develops  
449 among the congregation that open dialogue and direct communication can be requested.  
450 Therefore, at different times in the reconciliation process, confidentiality may be negotiated  
451 according to the phase in the process:  
452
- 453 a. *Initial Contact* – it is appropriate to promise confidentiality in order to gather a sense of  
454 people’s *perceptions of a situation*, recognizing one person’s perception and another  
455 person’s may differ.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., page F14.

- 456
- 457       b. *Pre-Reconciliation Survey* – it is appropriate to promise confidentiality in order to gather
- 458           a wider sense of the congregation’s *perceptions* of their situation and to demonstrate to
- 459           the congregation the reconciliation facilitators can be trusted with sensitive information
- 460           (c.f. Appendix A, page 67).<sup>11</sup>
- 461
- 462       c. *One-to-One Interview* – it is not appropriate to promise confidentiality; the people invited
- 463           to the interviews are core members of the community and should be invited to lead by
- 464           their example through speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- 465
- 466       d. *Small Group Structured Dialogues* – it is appropriate to promise confidentiality outside
- 467           of the small group context and to ask group members to honor the group’s confidentiality.
- 468           Participants will share within the limited circle of their small group but are not to
- 469           communicate others’ information outside of the group.
- 470
- 471       e. *Large Group Dialogues* – it is not appropriate to promise confidentiality as the large group
- 472           dialogues are public gatherings.
- 473

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pages F9-10. Used with permission from LMPC for the Presbytery of Grand Canyon use only. May not be reproduced. For information on obtaining copies, contact LMPC.



474

**STAGE ONE: COVENANT TO ONE'S CONVICTIONS**

475

**SESSION AND CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT**

476

477 Reconciliation Team facilitators will meet with the Session of a congregation with whom COM  
478 has approved interaction in the reconciliation process. The purposes of this meeting are the  
following:<sup>12</sup>

479

1. articulate the purposes of the reconciliation process,

480

481

2. clarify the facilitator's role and purpose,

482

483

3. review the expected timeline,

484

485

4. clarify the Session's minimal and maximal goals for the process,

486

487

5. clarify the Session's role in the process, including the appointment of a Logistics  
Committee, and

488

489

6. clarify the terms of the covenant to enter the reconciliation process.

490

*Articulate the Purpose of the Reconciliation Process*

491

The purposes for the reconciliation process are as follows:<sup>13</sup>

492

1. to discern accurately the exact nature of the disagreement;

493

494

2. to give all of those involved in the conflict, or even all members of the congregation, a  
chance to voice their views on the disagreement;

495

496

3. to reduce tension in the congregation and facilitate healing of relationship;

497

498

4. to resolve underlying interests behind people's differing positions, arriving at a solution  
everyone can at least live with, even if it is not their preferred choice;

499

500

5. to illustrate and teach conflict transformation techniques, to equip parties for the future;

501

502

6. to offer recommendations for improving the way the congregational system functions; and

503

504

7. to do all of this in a way that glorifies God and strengthens the church.

505

506

507

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., page F2, quoted with slight modifications.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim.

508 *Clarify the Facilitator's Role and Purpose*<sup>14</sup>

509 It is necessary to discuss the different roles the reconciliation facilitator's can adopt. While each  
510 of the roles listed below are appropriate for reconciliation facilitators, the purposes and  
511 appropriateness of each role should be discussed with the Session in order to hear their counsel.  
512 However, it is the facilitator's decision regarding which role they will adopt for the different phases  
513 of the reconciliation process.

- 514 1. **Fact-Finder:** identify issues and parties involved, separate rumors from facts, etc.; identify  
515 destructive patterns within the congregational system.  
516
- 517 2. **Educator:** trainer for congregational leaders and/or members in conflict transformation skills  
518 and strategies, as well as introducing basic concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory.  
519
- 520 3. **Process Consultant:** recommend processes for collaborative decision-making; identify  
521 destructive patterns within the congregational system.  
522
- 523 4. **Facilitator:** manage structured dialogues that create a safe environment for respectful, honest  
524 dialogue, especially for the sharing of feelings and experiences; manage discussions that invite  
525 healing, brainstorming of solutions, evaluation of ideas, and seek agreement regarding forward  
526 action. *This role is always a primary role for Reconciliation Team facilitators*  
527

528 In addition to the above roles facilitators customarily adopt, there are roles common to the  
529 work of reconciliation and mediation but not appropriate to Reconciliation Team work. They are:

- 530 1. **Pastor to Clergy:** counselor, coach, and supportive colleague. This role should be reserved for  
531 the Presbytery Pastor or her/his designee. It is inappropriate for one of the reconciliation  
532 facilitators to serve in such a dual-role capacity.  
533
- 534 2. **Arbitrator:** when the conflict becomes unmanageable for the congregation, an arbitrator may  
535 make a decision for disputants after thoroughly hearing all views. This role may be appropriate  
536 for the entire COM, and is certainly the role of the Permanent Judicial Commission; however,  
537 it is not a role Reconciliation Team facilitators shall adopt.  
538

539 *Review the Expected Timeline*

540 The reconciliation process is not crisis management. This truth cannot be overstated because it  
541 is ordinary and to be expected that congregational leaders will feel a sense of urgency to "solve  
542 the problem" when conflict erupts. While the Reconciliation Team is sympathetic to the urgency  
543 congregational leaders may feel, it is necessary to take a longer view of church conflict in order to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., page F4, quoted verbatim.

544 make an impact that leads to authentic healing, appropriate systemic change, and the prospect of  
545 covenantal agreements a majority of congregants will embrace. Therefore, facilitators must gently  
546 lead congregational leaders toward acceptance that just as the underlying issues, ingrained habits,  
547 and root causes that created the conflict took time to develop, so will the process of identifying  
548 issues, unraveling unhelpful practices, and reordering patterns of thought, attitude and structure  
549 take time to evolve. Simply put: the reconciliation process is defined in months rather than weeks.  
550 Reconciliation Team facilitators will communicate to the Session, and, as appropriate, the  
551 congregation, that there are distinct stages to the reconciliation process and each stage has its own  
552 “work” to do and “purpose” to accomplish.

553 1. Stage One: Covenant to One’s Convictions

- 554 a. Meet with Session:
- 555 i. Expectations
  - 556 ii. Timeline
  - 557 iii. Roles Session and Facilitators
  - 558 iv. Minimal and Maximal Goals
- 559 b. Meet with Congregation
- 560 i. Covenant as a Community

561 **Stage One Purpose: to communicate the clear path and covenant to the process.**

562

563 2. Stage Two: Lower the Temperature, Begin to Build

- 564 a. Review of Documents
- 565 b. Pre-Reconciliation Survey
- 566 c. Educational Workshop(s)
- 567 d. One-to-One interviews
- 568 e. Small Group, Structured Dialogues
- 569 f. Reconciliation Facilitator’s Interim Report

570 **Stage Two Purpose: to calm the congregational anxiety by encouraging, teaching, and**  
571 **modelling clear, calm and connected communication.**

572

573 3. Stage Three: Engage Creatively, Connect Constructively

- 574 a. Large Group Healing Circles
- 575 i. Neutralizing History
  - 576 ii. Interpersonal Mediation as Needed
- 577 b. Large Group Problem-Solving
- 578 i. Brainstorming, Evaluating Ideas
  - 579 ii. Building Consensus and Writing Covenantal Agreements
- 580 c. Closing Worship of Reconciliation and Final Team Report

581           **Stage Three Purpose: to build creative, constructive agreements that address sources**  
582           **of congregational conflict, especially foundational sources of repeating patterns of**  
583           **conflict.**

584           Stages One and Two are *preparation* phases, by which is meant the work and purpose of  
585 these phases is to prepare congregants as individuals and as a community to enter into the latter  
586 phases in which the work of reconciliation happens. It is in these preparation phases the community  
587 lowers its corporate anxiety as it learns to speak with clarity and kindness, discovers the gift of  
588 hearing and being heard, and begins to practice the initial steps of direct communication, open  
589 dialogue, and interest-based collaboration. The preparation phases are necessary precursors to  
590 conducting the community's work of reconciliation and cannot be skipped, bypassed or truncated  
591 if the reconciliation process is to fulfill the congregational leadership's desired outcomes. The  
592 estimated time to work through the preparation phases is six to eight weeks but can be as much as  
593 ten to twelve weeks depending on a congregation's schedule and the complexity of the conflict.

594           Stage Three is the *reconciliation* phase, in which the congregation as a faith community  
595 gathers to speak the truth in love to one another, listening with respect and humility, seeking to  
596 discover the places of shared interests and mutual agreements that can form the basis for healthier  
597 congregational life. It is in the reconciliation phase that the actual work of community  
598 reconciliation takes place as relationships find healing, creative ways to be the church together are  
599 brainstormed, and covenantal agreements are formed. The reconciliation phases are the intended  
600 expression and fulfillment of the reconciliation process. The estimated time to work through the  
601 reconciliation phases is four to six weeks but can be as much as eight to twelve weeks depending  
602 on a congregation's schedule and the complexity of the conflict.<sup>15</sup>

603           The *preparation* phases in a bit more detail are described as follows:

604           1. **Covenanting Phase:** this phase includes the conversation with the Session, (which may  
605 require multiple meetings before the Session is prepared to affirm the reconciliation  
606 process), and the congregation in a called meeting.

607           **Purpose: to seek commitment to the process through core convictions that unity in**  
608           **the Body of Christ is a primary value (c.f. self-differentiation).**

610           2. **Education Phase:** this phase comprises the appropriate training workshops, including  
611           a. Conflict and Communication in the Bible  
612           b. Developing Interpersonal Conflict Transformation Skills  
613           c. Understanding the Congregation as a System  
614  
615

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<sup>15</sup> A natural question regarding these times is, "Why do the early stages take longer?" The brief answer is that much of the work of the preparation phases is done in one-to-one and small group settings, requiring a larger quantity of scheduled activities and work for the reconciliation facilitators. The reconciliation phases are primarily large group activities, for which a fewer number of scheduled events are necessary.

616 d. Cultivating Congregational Conflict Transformation Skills  
617

618 **Purpose: to introduce concepts of personal growth in responsibility: listening,**  
619 **speaking and acting from a place of core convictions (c.f. self-differentiation);**  
620 **recognizing the importance of calming oneself in order to communicate (c.f. non-**  
621 **anxious presence); learning to recognize and respond to common group dynamics**  
622 **that discourage unity, openness, and participation (c.f. managing triangles).**

623 Reconciliation facilitators will provide an outline for each of these workshops. Upon receiving  
624 the results of the pre-reconciliation survey (See Appendix A, page 67), the Session and  
625 facilitators will discuss what workshops are most appropriate to offer.

626 3. **Information Gathering Phase:** this phase incorporates four steps for gathering  
627 information on the congregation, its history and current situation. These four actions do not  
628 need to be sequential but can be scheduled more or less simultaneously as facilitator and  
629 congregational schedules allow. The Information Gathering Phase concludes with an  
630 interim assessment report, which is the fifth step. The four acts of gathering information  
631 are:

- 632
- 633 1. a review of relevant documents, including the church by-laws, manuals of operation,  
634 past minutes, and/or other pertinent documents;<sup>16</sup>
  - 635
  - 636 2. a pre-reconciliation survey sent to all church members and “congregational friends”;
  - 637
  - 638 3. telephone interviews of a representative number of core members who can speak to  
639 the congregation’s history and/or current situation, and who represent different  
640 perspectives; and
  - 641
  - 642 4. small group structured dialogues of 7-12 persons to document interests.
  - 643

644 **Purpose: to teach, encourage, model, and practice clear, calm, and connected**  
645 **communication that improves active listening, respectful seeking, awareness of**  
646 **congregational patterns (both healthy and otherwise), and invites taking personal**  
647 **responsibility for one’s part in conflict.**

648 The *reconciliation* phases are:  
649

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<sup>16</sup> Most congregations have people who are long-time participants who have not officially joined into membership. It is appropriate for the Session to decide to whom the survey will be sent, but facilitators should encourage a wide distribution of the survey to all who are *relationally involved in the social networks, life and ministry of the congregation.*

650 4. **Healing Phase:** The healing phase always incorporates a large group, structured dialogue  
651 to which the entire congregation is invited. This large group, structured dialogue is intended  
652 for the purpose of “neutralizing history” of the distant or more recent past. Small group  
653 dialogues for interpersonal mediation between specific individuals may occur during this  
654 phase as needed and as congregants are willing to confront ruptures in their relationships  
655 with one another.

656  
657 **Purpose: to allow for the opportunity to let go of the past, its hurts, grief and sadness.**  
658

659 5. **Problem Solving Phase:** this phase is a large group, structured dialogue whose purpose is  
660 to discuss solution oriented ideas to which the congregation can covenant. Included in this  
661 phase are the following: reflection on interests, brainstorming ideas, evaluating ideas,  
662 building agreements for the future, and taking official action to endorse the agreements.

663  
664 **Purpose: to allow for the safe expression of people’s core convictions in an atmosphere**  
665 **where ideas can be evaluated, negotiated, and for which covenantal agreement can be**  
666 **found that meets a wide variety of congregational interests.**  
667

668 6. **Closure Phase:** this phase concludes the reconciliation process with a written report to the  
669 congregation and a concluding worship service of reconciliation. The Session will be asked  
670 to affirm the report for inclusion into its minutes, and the worship service will be led by  
671 the Reconciliation Team facilitators. Team facilitators will check-in with congregational  
672 leaders at least twice during the six-month period after the concluding worship service.

673 **Purpose: to affirm and confirm the commitments the congregation has made**  
674 **together, to support their shared efforts in moving toward healthier unity, and to**  
675 **celebrate that all this was done in a manner that glorified God.**

676 *Clarify the Session’s Minimal and Maximal Goals for the Process*

677 The initial meeting with the Session is already an opportunity for the reconciliation process  
678 to begin. Even without formal approval of the process, reconciliation facilitators should model and  
679 encourage the skills of active listening, direct communication, open dialogue, and interests based  
680 decision-making. To this end, facilitators will ask the Session to list their *minimal* and *maximal*  
681 goals for the reconciliation process. Both the minimal and maximal goals are those results Session  
682 would like to see occur through the process. This exercise has value as a diagnostic tool to help  
683 facilitators begin to evaluate the communication dynamics of the Session, and has value as a  
684 proscriptive tool to help facilitators encourage healthy communication.

685

686

687 *Clarify the Session's Role in the Process, including the Appointment of a Logistics Committee*

688           The Session is instrumental in the success of the reconciliation process. Resistance or  
689 passivity from the Session is difficult for even the most accomplished facilitators to overcome.  
690 Simply put: the reconciliation process is a team sport.

691           Therefore, facilitators will communicate the Session responsibilities as follows:

- 692 1. Approve participation in the reconciliation process and call a congregational meeting for the  
693 purpose of seeking congregational approval of the process (see below).  
694
- 695 2. Participate in the reconciliation process to the best of one's ability, including attending the  
696 training workshops and both the small and large group structured dialogues.  
697
- 698 3. Seek to lead by example by participating in the process as a more neutral observer; that is,  
699 rather than "taking a side," Session members individually and the Session acting as a whole,  
700 should invite all perspectives to be communicated and addressed in appropriate ways. (This  
701 may be difficult if Session members have already taken a side, but each elder should endeavor  
702 to open one's heart and mind to the possibilities of God's healing grace that may create a "new  
703 thing" one cannot currently imagine.)  
704
- 705 4. Encourage the congregation to participate in the reconciliation process. Such encouragement  
706 includes both the more general work of playing "cheerleader" for the process but also the more  
707 specific and difficult work of playing "emissary" to members, some of whom may be close  
708 friends, who are so alienated or angry that they have dropped out. Session members can play  
709 a vital role in the reconciliation process by extending themselves personally and relationally to  
710 invite their friends to engage in the process.  
711
- 712 5. Create a logistics committee. The logistics committee will be responsible for organizing and  
713 implementing recruitment, marketing, and set-up for the various events in the reconciliation  
714 process, including the provision of meals and snacks when appropriate (e.g. at the training  
715 workshops).

717 *Clarify the Terms of the Covenant to Enter the Reconciliation Process*

718           The Session shall both approve the *Agreement to Enlist Reconciliation Services* (See  
719 Appendix C, page 70) and the *Reconciliation Waiver and Consent Form* (See Appendix B, page  
720 69). Both documents require the signature of the reconciliation facilitators and the clerk of Session.  
721 It is necessary to determine the date by which the Session and congregation will sign the  
722 documents. Upon approval of the Session to enter into the reconciliation process, the Session shall  
723 call a congregational meeting for the exclusive purpose of seeking congregational approval of the

724 process. Reconciliation facilitators shall be present at this meeting to provide an overview of the  
725 process and answer questions. Care should be taken to avoid trying to convince the congregation  
726 to participate; rather, the congregation should be encouraged to choose their participation because  
727 they see its benefits and the ways the process expresses Christian values of forgiveness,  
728 reconciliation and healthy community.

729 *Clarify the Cost and Budget for the Reconciliation Process*

730 RT facilitators serve as volunteers of the Presbytery and are unpaid. However, certain, limited  
731 program expenses will be incurred by the congregation for such items as curriculum, testing, or  
732 supplies. The congregation shall be asked to cover these costs during this initial covenanting phase.  
733 In addition, a sliding scale “honorarium” shall be requested from the congregation, with all  
734 proceeds directed to the presbytery’s finance manager for deposit in a restricted fund account for  
735 the training new members.

736



737                    **STAGE TWO: LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, BEGIN TO BUILD**  
738                    **PRE-RECONCILIATION SURVEY**

739                    The purposes of the information gathering phase are:<sup>17</sup>

- 740                    1.    To gather **complete information**.  
741  
742                    2.    To ‘complexify’ the problems, rather than simplify them – search for the **multiple**  
743                    **sources** of conflict.  
744  
745                    3.    To hear from the broad range of **perspectives** in the congregation; document varying  
746                    interests.  
747  
748                    4.    To model **open communication** and begin the process of healing.  
749  
750                    5.    To assess the **levels** and **types of conflict** involved in the dispute.

751                    The key information gathered is:<sup>18</sup>

- 752                    1.    The current conflict **issues**, people’s **basic interests**, and their **ideas** for resolution.  
753  
754                    2.    The **current dynamics, behaviors, and relationship patterns** in the congregation.  
755  
756                    3.    Trends over the past five years: **membership, worship attendance, financial giving**.  
757  
758                    4.    History of **pastoral leadership** over the past 30 to 40 years.  
759  
760                    5.    **Major changes** occurring in the church recently.

761                    The information gathering phase consists of three steps: (1) the pre-reconciliation survey,  
762                    (2) one-to-one interviews, and (3) small group, structured dialogues. The first step is the pre-  
763                    reconciliation survey, and the Reconciliation Team uses the survey found in the MSTI workbook  
764                    that can be found in reproducible format in Appendix G on page 75.<sup>19</sup> The survey asks for the  
765                    following information:

- 766                    1.    Demographic information on survey respondent,  
767  
768                    2.    The five current strengths of the church,  
769

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., page F7, quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., page F9-10.

- 770           3.    The five current challenges being faced by the church,  
771
- 772           4.    A Likert Scale that represents the level of stress and intensity of the existing situation,  
773
- 774           5.    The historical factors, secrets or repeating patterns that might shed light on recent  
775           tensions,  
776
- 777           6.    Previous times in the past when the congregation experienced intense conflict, and,  
778           if so, the issues, approximate dates, and how well each situation was resolved,  
779
- 780           7.    Whether there are any persons in the church with whom the respondent thinks there  
781           may be a broken or injured relationship, and, if yes, would they like the opportunity  
782           to be reconciled to that person or those persons,  
783
- 784           8.    An invitation for respondents to reflect upon their ability to move beyond blame, to do  
785           serious self-examination, and to be open to mutual confession and exploring ways they  
786           may have contributed to congregational anxiety either knowingly or unknowingly.

787           The pre-reconciliation survey is sent to all congregational members and “friends.” It is not  
788           strictly necessary to distinguish between “members” and “non-members,” as defined in the Book  
789           of Order. Rather it is appropriate for the Session to define the scope of survey participants. The  
790           criteria suggested by the Reconciliation Team is that surveys can be sent to all of the following  
791           persons for whom at least one affirmative response can be given:

- 792           1.    Is the person on the active church membership role?  
793
- 794           2.    Does the person regularly participate in the congregation, even though they are not a  
795           member of the congregation (e.g. “snowbirds,” or “Winter visitors”)?  
796
- 797           3.    Is the person employed by the church?  
798

799           There are several functions the pre-reconciliation survey performs. First, it *protects against*  
800           *confirmation bias* and *recency bias* by seeking the broadest possible, congregational input. Such a  
801           broad spectrum of input helps the reconciliation facilitators and congregational leadership avoid  
802           confirmation bias through not listening only to the loudest voices. Second, the survey *helps*  
803           *participants begin to “think systems”* through the type of questions it asks. Questions regarding  
804           both congregational strengths as well as challenges, and questions about repeating patterns, secrets,  
805           and historical factors point beyond the current eruption of conflict to the wider, potentially multi-  
806           generational nature of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> Third, the survey *invites participants to move toward self-*

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Lederach distinguishes between an “episode” (the most recent eruption of conflict) and the “epicenter” (a source of conflict possible rooted in a prior event that has not been adequately processed by the congregation, (e.g.

807 awareness, responsibility for one’s own role, personal confession, the willingness to forgive, and  
808 the desire to be reconciled. The last two questions in the survey invite such a critical step by  
809 reframing participants’ perspective away from an “it’s not my fault,” and “someone else is to  
810 blame” focus, and instead frames the reconciliation process as a journey of the entire faith  
811 community that requires each one to accept their own role in the work of building healthy  
812 community.

813           As a reminder regarding appropriate expectations of confidentiality at this stage (c.f. page  
814 16):

815 *Pre-Reconciliation Survey* – it is appropriate to promise confidentiality in order to gather a wider  
816 sense of the congregation’s *perceptions* of their situation and to demonstrate to the congregation  
817 the reconciliation facilitators can be trusted with sensitive information.

818

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era of a particular leadership style, or a pattern of response cultivated over years). C.f. Lederach, Paul, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. Good Books: Intercourse, PA, 2003. pp. 34-39.

819                    **STAGE TWO: LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, BEGIN TO BUILD**  
820                    **EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS AND WORSHIP**

821                    The purposes and benefits of the educational phase are:<sup>21</sup>

822                    *Purposes*

- 823                    1. To equip people in **caring communication skills**: to introduce **interest-based**  
824                    **bargaining**.
- 825                    2. To introduce **structured dialogue** techniques.
- 826                    2. To introduce **structured dialogue** techniques.
- 827                    3. To help parties gain insight into some of the **root causes** of the conflict.
- 828                    3. To help parties gain insight into some of the **root causes** of the conflict.
- 829                    4. To provide a common learning experience which serves to **enrich** and **empower** all  
830                    parties.
- 831                    4. To provide a common learning experience which serves to **enrich** and **empower** all  
832                    parties.
- 833                    5. To build **rapport** and **credibility**; to model **non-anxious presence** (sic).

834                    *Benefits*

- 835                    1. **Skills for caring communication** are introduced which will be used by all  
836                    participants throughout the process; for example, active listening is covered and will  
837                    be the norm during the mediation process.
- 838                    2. Each participant gains an **understanding of the negotiation principles** to be used  
839                    later during the problem-solving phase.
- 840                    2. Each participant gains an **understanding of the negotiation principles** to be used  
841                    later during the problem-solving phase.
- 842                    3. **Feelings of powerlessness decrease** as participants feel genuinely informed about  
843                    the process.
- 844                    4. People emerge from the training with a **new sense of hope** for the future.
- 845                    4. People emerge from the training with a **new sense of hope** for the future.
- 846                    5. People **enjoy themselves** and are more **likely to attend** the upcoming intervention  
847                    sessions.
- 848                    5. People **enjoy themselves** and are more **likely to attend** the upcoming intervention  
849                    sessions.
- 850                    6. **Begins** the process of healing.

851                    *Workshops*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., page F5, quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

852 The training workshops provide an overview of the material for skills-development offered to  
853 congregations. Workshop outlines are found in the appendices as noted next to each workshop  
854 title. Reconciliation facilitators should be guided by these outlines and are welcome to modify  
855 them according to their own teaching style without substantively changing the content.

- 856 1. Conflict and Communication in the Bible
- 857
- 858 2. Developing Interpersonal Conflict Transformation Skills
- 859
- 860 3. Understanding Congregations as a System
- 861
- 862 4. Cultivating Congregational Conflict Transformation Skills

863 Upon receiving the results of the pre-reconciliation survey, the Session and facilitators will  
864 discuss what workshops are most appropriate to offer. It is likely that two or more of these  
865 workshops can be combined into a single, congregational training event. For example, the *Conflict*  
866 *and Communication in the Bible* workshop pairs well with *Developing Interpersonal Conflict*  
867 *Transformation*. Other combinations are possible and can be tailored to address specific concerns  
868 and developmental needs of the congregation.

869 In addition to the training workshops, reconciliation facilitators will preach appropriate  
870 messages at key, nodal points in the process: process beginning, during the transition from the  
871 small group structured dialogues and the beginning of the large group healing phase, and at the  
872 closing worship service of reconciliation. The purpose of these sermons, as well as the liturgies  
873 with which they will be surrounded, is to ground the reconciliation process as an act of faith by  
874 God's Beloved Community, to remind all that the reconciliation process is both a spiritual journey,  
875 a faith commitment, and an ethical choice of God's Church.

#### 876 *Sermons*

877 In addition to the educational workshops for congregational skill building, reconciliation  
878 team facilitators will be invited to preach at three, key, nodal points in the reconciliation process:  
879 at the beginning of the information gathering stage, at the beginning of the large group, healing  
880 stage, and at the closing worship of reconciliation. Please note: it is *not a good idea* for  
881 reconciliation facilitators to preach prior to a congregation's covenanting to participate in the  
882 reconciliation process. Sermons preached prior to a congregation's making a covenantal  
883 commitment risk framing the question of their participation in moralistic terms of "should," "ought  
884 to," and "I suppose if we love Jesus we have to say yes." Sermons, by their nature, invite an  
885 amplification of a community's response, and it is in the best interest of the congregation to invite  
886 their response without amplification when asking them to commit to the kind of serious, extensive  
887 work of the reconciliation process. In family systems theory terms, reconciliation facilitators want  
888 first to lower congregational anxiety through calm presentation of factual material, measured  
889 dialogue, and open communication; actions more appropriate for presentation at a congregational

890 meeting. Then, from the place of lower anxiety, reconciliation facilitators want to invite  
891 congregational self-differentiation (i.e., have them choose reconciliation).

892 While it would be contrary to our Reformed understanding of preaching for this manual to  
893 direct a particular form for the reconciliation facilitators' sermons, it is appropriate to suggest that  
894 those who would preach during the reconciliation process consider carefully (a) the sermon's  
895 purpose at each stage of the process, (b) themes appropriate for this purpose,[1] (c) how the sermon  
896 may be best crafted to accomplish a given purpose, and (d) common pitfalls one may want to  
897 avoid.

898 1. *At the beginning of the information gathering stage –*  
899

900 a. *Purpose:* The sermon's purpose at this stage is to invite the congregation to enter into  
901 the reconciliation process with confidence that God's love precedes them, Jesus' call  
902 to reconciliation is upon them, and the Spirit's courage and guidance will accompany  
903 them. One's choice of text, sermon structure, thematic development, choice of  
904 illustrations, and tone in delivery should align with the above stated purpose.  
905

906 b. *Themes:* Themes appropriate to this purpose will focus on identity issues: the nature  
907 of the church as God's Beloved Community (John 17:21) or the nature of the church  
908 as having a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17ff.); the nature of the God  
909 who loves us (Psalm 139, I John 4, et. al.) or the reality of our baptismal identity in  
910 Christ (Romans 6); or the reality that God's people often find themselves on a journey  
911 and that such journeys are often taken by the community rather than individuals  
912 (Exodus 16 ff.).<sup>22</sup>  
913

914 c. *Crafting the Sermon:* Sermons crafted at this stage may want to focus on *descriptive*  
915 attributes of God and the Church as the Christian community (i.e., this is who God is  
916 and who we are in Christ) rather than *proscriptive* lists of behaviors, which may come  
917 across as judgmental or shaming. The sub-text for both theme and tone of the sermon  
918 is one of hope. Illustrations focusing on the reality that conflict is a part of life but  
919 that God is our companion are most appropriate.  
920

921 d. *Pitfalls:* As alluded to above, the sermon must avoid coming across as judgmental:  
922 guilt and shame will be counter-productive, or even possibly destructive, at this stage.  
923 Unless much care is given it is easy to convey a sub-text of "real Christians don't  
924 have conflict," "good churches don't have to get help like this," or "if you didn't have  
925 such problem people/pastors in your midst, you wouldn't be in this situation."  
926

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<sup>22</sup> For each section, these themes are illustrative, not exhaustive, and the preacher of the day must discern the Spirit's call upon text and pulpit; that is, the Reformed sense of freedom in conviction should be observed.

- 927           2. *At the beginning of the large group, healing stage –*  
928
- 929           a. *Purpose:* The sermon’s purpose at this stage is to invite the congregation to move  
930 forward boldly, immersing themselves in the reconciliation process, trusting that the  
931 God who has accompanied them to this point will continue with them on their  
932 journey. It is helpful to remember the congregation has already invested a significant  
933 amount of time and energy: the pre-reconciliation survey, one-to-one interviews, and  
934 small group dialogues all precede this stage. Moreover, due to holidays or, in  
935 Arizona, delays to accommodate the exodus of members during the summer months,  
936 it may have been several months since the initial congregational meeting to covenant  
937 to the process and even longer since the initial episode that led to the reconciliation  
938 team being called. Therefore, the sermon may need to “re-launch” or “re-ignite” the  
939 process and the congregation’s enthusiasm for it.  
940
- 941           b. *Themes:* Themes appropriate to this purpose include reminders that reconciliation is,  
942 by definition, both relational work and community work, and therefore not one  
943 person’s work to do but the entire family’s work. It is appropriate to remind the  
944 congregation that reconciliation is about more than solving a single problem or  
945 getting beyond a particular issue but rather about healing fractured relationships  
946 among the people of God, the Body of Christ, the community of faith. Helpful  
947 Scriptures for preachers to consider include 1 Corinthians 13 (written to a community  
948 in conflict), Ephesians 4 (with its imagery of unity, oneness and being tossed about  
949 as on waves), or Joshua 3 (the culmination of Israel’s exodus wanderings still require  
950 the people to move forward, together, into the Promised Land).  
951
- 952           c. *Crafting the Sermon:* Sermons crafted at this stage may still want to remain  
953 descriptive, focusing on the identity of God and the congregation as God’s people.  
954 However, it is also appropriate to move in the direction of being *aspirational* in both  
955 tone and content. That is, it is appropriate to point people toward the *goal and*  
956 *expectation* that the reconciliation process is intended to facilitate healthier  
957 community functioning. While preachers will want to continue their care and caution  
958 to avoid conveying guilt and shame through an unintended judgmentalism, it is  
959 appropriate, even necessary, to call forth “My Utmost for His Highest” (to borrow a  
960 phrase made famous by Oswald Chambers).  
961
- 962           d. *Pitfalls:* While judgmentalism should once again be avoided, it is also the case that  
963 preachers at this stage must not have a failure of nerve and undersell the potential for  
964 healing. It is an easy mistake for a preacher not to want to “over-promise” regarding  
965 the results of the reconciliation process. However, it is during this coming large group  
966 process that reconciliation facilitators will ask congregants to trust them, to speak the

967 truth in love to one another, to listen with respect and humility, to embrace the  
968 possibilities for their own need to confess or forgive sin. These things are a big deal,  
969 and they require a concomitant boldness from those who will lead them.  
970

971 3. *At the closing reconciliation worship* –  
972

- 973 a. *Purpose:* The sermon’s purpose at this stage is to celebrate the gift and healing of  
974 God, to remind the congregation of the covenantal commitments they have made  
975 before God and to themselves and one another, and to call forth a commitment to  
976 persevere in the commitments they have made.  
977
- 978 b. *Themes:* Themes appropriate to this purpose include many of the identity based  
979 themes from previous stages, though framing them as promise fulfilled rather than  
980 promise hoped for. In addition, it is appropriate also to point toward the need for  
981 reconciliation to be practiced as a continuing commitment of God’s people.  
982 Scriptures appropriate to this theme include Matthew 5:9, 5:23-24, or Acts 9:10-19).  
983 It is also appropriate to point toward the reality that reconciliation is difficult but  
984 blessed work. Among the myriad of examples that could be cited, we recommend  
985 mining the stories of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25 - 36), Saul and David (1 Samuel  
986 18:7-9 ff.), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37 ff.), or Philemon and Onesimus  
987 (Philemon).  
988
- 989 c. *Crafting the Sermon:* Sermons crafted at this stage will want to affirm the risk and  
990 courage of the congregation’s faith in taking the journey toward reconciliation as well  
991 as expressing thanksgiving for any healing that has occurred. It is necessary that any  
992 and all allusions to individuals seek permission from the individual before their story  
993 is told. It is at this closing worship that the preacher may choose to tread into the  
994 world of ethical exhortation. While such ethical exhortation at earlier stages of the  
995 reconciliation process risked conveying judgmentalism, at this stage exhortations  
996 may serve as a reminder of the high calling to which we are called as individuals in  
997 Christ and as God’s Beloved Community.  
998
- 999 d. *Pitfalls:* Two dangers present for the preacher at this stage are (1) claiming premature  
1000 victory, and (2) violating confidentiality. While it is appropriate to celebrate a  
1001 congregation’s success, the preacher should avoid conveying the meta-message of  
1002 “your work is over, go ahead and resume your normal behavior.” Instead of such  
1003 premature closure to the work of reconciliation, it is more appropriate to remind  
1004 congregants and their leadership that the work of reconciliation continues, that  
1005 community is shaped and formed daily by the choices we continue to make. Also,



1006  
1007

while it is understandable for preachers to want to name successes, it is never appropriate to tell someone else's story without their permission.

1008                    **STAGE TWO: LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, BEGIN TO BUILD**1009                    **ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS**1010                    Once again, the purposes of the information gathering phase are:<sup>23</sup>

- 1011                    1. To gather **complete information**.
- 1012
- 1013                    2. To ‘complexify’ the problems, rather than simplify them – search for the **multiple**
- 1014                    **sources** of conflict.
- 1015
- 1016                    3. To hear from the broad range of **perspectives** in the congregation; document varying
- 1017                    interests.
- 1018
- 1019                    4. To model **open communication** and begin the process of healing.
- 1020
- 1021                    5. To assess the **levels** and **types of conflict** involved in the dispute.

1022                    Also, the key information gathered is:<sup>24</sup>

- 1023                    1. The current conflict **issues**, people’s **basic interests**, and their **ideas** for resolution.
- 1024
- 1025                    2. The **current dynamics, behaviors, and relationship patterns** in the congregation.
- 1026
- 1027                    3. Trends over the past five years: **membership, worship attendance, financial giving**.
- 1028
- 1029                    5. History of **pastoral leadership** over the past 30 to 40 years.
- 1030
- 1031                    5. **Major changes** occurring in the church recently.

1032                    Once again, the information gathering phase consists of three steps: (1) the pre-  
1033 reconciliation survey, (2) one-to-one interviews, and (3) small group, structured dialogues. The  
1034 second step is to conduct personal interviews with twelve members of the congregation. To prepare  
1035 for this step, the Session will be asked to produce a list of twelve persons to be interviewed, using  
1036 similar criteria as defined above regarding to whom the pre-reconciliation survey should be sent  
1037 (c.f. page 29). It is not necessary to draw a strict distinction between active members, “church  
1038 friends,” and staff. The interest of the reconciliation facilitators is for this list of twelve persons to  
1039 cover the *full range of interests reflected in the congregation*. Therefore, it is appropriate to  
1040 consider longer-term members and newcomers, active members and staff, people of differing ages  
1041 or involved in a variety of activities in the church’s life, as well as official leaders, unofficial  
1042 leaders, and just, plain members. The key is that these persons, as a collective, be able to convey

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<sup>23</sup> MSTI, page F7, quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

1043 the breadth of perspectives represented in the congregation regarding the current conflict and  
1044 congregational dynamics

1045 The content of the phone interview is:<sup>25</sup>

- 1046 1. Introduce yourself and create a connection that sets the interviewee at ease: the tone  
1047 one is going for is friendly, informal, and caring.
- 1048
- 1049 2. Begin with a purpose statement regarding the interview.
- 1050
- 1051 3. Invite interviewees to share their perspective on the key issues; listen for their hurts:  
1052 Appropriate questions include, “How do you personally view these issues?” or,  
1053 “Tell me what’s been happening here from your perspective?”
- 1054
- 1055 4. Probe for information about historical background and any recurring patterns they  
1056 may have noticed.
- 1057
- 1058 5. Ask what their hopes are for the mediation process, especially positive ideas they  
1059 have for resolution.
- 1060
- 1061 6. Answer further questions about the reconciliation process.
- 1062

1063 There are at least three benefits to the one-to-one interview process.<sup>26</sup>

- 1064
- 1065 1. The interviews clearly signal the consultant’s **neutrality**. Neutrality is conveyed  
1066 both through the Session’s selection of members able to document the full range of  
1067 diversity within the conflict – the congregation will know if the list of interviewees  
1068 is “stacked” in a particular direction – and through the reconciliation facilitators’  
1069 active, empathic listening to all parties.
- 1070
- 1071 2. The interviews help the reconciliation facilitators both to begin to understand the  
1072 **history** of the conflict within the congregation and also begin to develop a **family**  
1073 **systems theory perspective** on the current conflict and wider congregational  
1074 dynamics.
- 1075
- 1076 3. Through their active, empathic listening, reconciliation facilitators **model** for key  
1077 members of the congregation the skills they seek to develop throughout the  
1078 community.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pages F7 and F9, modified slightly.

<sup>26</sup> The first two benefits are taken from MSTI, F7, quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

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4. Through their participation at this early stage, interviewees are more likely to have **commitment** to a wider participation in the entire reconciliation process.

As a reminder regarding appropriate expectations of confidentiality at the stage (c.f. page 16):

*One-to-One Interview* – it is not appropriate to promise confidentiality; the people invited to the interviews are core members of the community and should be invited to lead by their example.

1089                    **STAGE TWO: LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, BEGIN TO BUILD**  
1090                    **SMALL GROUP, STRUCTURED DIALOGUES**

1091                    Once again, the purposes of the information gathering phase are:<sup>27</sup>

- 1092                    1. To gather **complete information**.  
1093  
1094                    2. To ‘complexify’ the problems, rather than simplify them – search for the **multiple**  
1095                    **sources** of conflict.  
1096  
1097                    3. To hear from the broad range of **perspectives** in the congregation; document varying  
1098                    interests.  
1099  
1100                    4. To model **open communication** and begin the process of healing.  
1101  
1102                    5. To assess the **levels** and **types of conflict** involved in the dispute.  
1103

1104                    Also, the key information gathered is:<sup>28</sup>

- 1105                    1. The current conflict **issues**, people’s **basic interests**, and their **ideas** for resolution.  
1106  
1107                    2. The **current dynamics, behaviors, and relationship patterns** in the congregation.  
1108  
1109                    3. Trends over the past five years: **membership, worship attendance, financial giving**.  
1110  
1111                    4. History of **pastoral leadership** over the past 30 to 40 years.  
1112  
1113                    5. **Major changes** occurring in the church recently.

1114                    Once again, the information gathering phase consists of three steps: (1) the pre-  
1115 reconciliation survey, (2) one-to-one interviews, and (3) small group, structured dialogues. *The*  
1116 *third step is to conduct a series of small group, structured dialogues.* These small groups,  
1117 consisting of seven to 12 persons, will last approximately 90 minutes and should be scheduled by  
1118 the Logistics Committee (c.f., page 22, #5), who are to market the gatherings, enlist participants,  
1119 reserve the room(s) to be used, and provide adequate chairs, markers, butcher paper and tape for  
1120 the exercise.

1121                    The primary purposes of the small group, structured dialogues are:

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<sup>27</sup> MSTI, page F7, quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., emphasis included in the original.

- 1122 1. To **document people’s varying interests**.<sup>29</sup>  
 1123  
 1124 2. To create a safe space and structured process wherein participants are **invited to**  
 1125 **speak** of their personal perception and experience.  
 1126  
 1127 3. To invite participants, through the creation of the aforementioned safe space, to  
 1128 **begin to listen** to one another with empathy and respect.  
 1129  
 1130 4. To be seen documenting people’s interests in order to reinforce the message of the  
 1131 **reconciliation facilitators’s neutrality** and the reality that because everyone’s  
 1132 voice is important everyone’s voice is heard.  
 1133

1134 These purposes listed above provide concomitant benefits for the reconciliation process:<sup>30</sup>

- 1135 1. Reinforces the **interest-based dialogue** introduced in the educational workshops through  
 1136 documentation of participants’ needs.  
 1137  
 1138 2. Invites the practice of **self-differentiation** by asking participants to use measured, non-  
 1139 polarizing language that articulates one’s values, beliefs, perceptions, and experience.  
 1140  
 1141 3. **“Lowers the temperature”** within the congregation as congregants become less anxious  
 1142 as they both hear others and are heard by them.  
 1143  
 1144 4. Starts people on the **road to communicating** on at least a hearing level with each other,  
 1145 setting the stage for more complete communication later.  
 1146  
 1147 5. Further, it provides a **safe setting** for people to share who do not like large groups.  
 1148

1149 The agenda<sup>31</sup> for the small group, structured dialogues is:

- 1150 1. Open with a *brief* devotion that frames the dialogue as a response of faith.  
 1151  
 1152 2. Ask each participant to say *briefly* their level of participation at the church and something  
 1153 they like about the church. Document their commonalities and sources of appreciation.  
 1154  
 1155 a. Documenting commonalities highlights people’s connectedness and begins  
 1156 to fracture previously impermeable walls. Often in the midst of conflict, other

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., page F7, #1 quoted verbatim, emphasis included in the original, #2 - #4 added.

<sup>30</sup> The first two benefits are found in MSTI, page F8, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

1157 members are seen as belonging to “the other side.” It is necessary to convey the  
1158 message there is only one side: those who belong to God’s Beloved Community.

1159  
1160 b. Documenting participants’ sources of congregational appreciation<sup>32</sup> once  
1161 again highlights people’s connectedness. However, it also functions to highlight the  
1162 strengths present in the congregation. Often in the midst of conflict, the negative  
1163 effects of conflict hide the inherent strength and goodness of the congregation.  
1164 Naming a congregation’s strengths can be a source from which healing can  
1165 emerge.<sup>33</sup>

1166  
1167 3. Using the themes and statements below, and noting the perspective from which participants  
1168 are to respond to the theme (perspective noted in bold), do a series of spectrum exercises  
1169 based on a one to nine-point scale. One facilitator should lead the exercise while the other  
1170 facilitator documents the numerical range of the responses. Participants do not speak during  
1171 this spectrum time, in the interests of time; the structured-dialogue to follow will allow  
1172 them an opportunity to explain their choices.

1173  
1174 4. The themes are:

1175  
1176 a. *Mission and purpose*: (1) **We** lack a shared sense of purpose and most cannot state  
1177 our mission statement versus (9) we know, affirm and can repeat our mission and  
1178 purpose as a congregation.

1179  
1180 b. *Worship and spirituality*: (1) **I** feel spiritually stuck and do not experience our  
1181 worship and spirituality as giving me strength or vitality versus (9) I routinely feel  
1182 spiritually nurtured and challenged in appropriate ways.

1183  
1184 c. *Caring for one another*: (1) **We** allow many people’s needs go unknown and, if  
1185 known, untended versus (9) we know and respond to one another’s needs as a  
1186 matter of habit.

1187  
1188 d. *Caring for the pastor*: (1) **We** care for our pastor by respecting her/his Sabbath and  
1189 providing clear, reasonable expectations versus (9) we routinely violate the pastor’s  
1190 Sabbath, expect her/him to work on their vacation or day off, and do not provide  
1191 either clear or reasonable job expectations.

1192

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<sup>32</sup> This activity functions as a mini-Appreciative Inquiry exercise and has similar benefits of naming strengths, vision, and vitality.

<sup>33</sup> Friedman, Edwin, *A Failure of Nerve*, (Seabury Books: New York), 2007, pages 132-186.

- 1193 e. *Caring from the pastor*: (1) I do not experience the pastor as a caring person versus  
1194 (9) I have experienced care from the pastor to me and/or my family.  
1195
- 1196 f. *Caring conflict transformation*: (1) We easily take sides, stop discussing with one  
1197 another, and tend to compete over whose opinion will “win.” Versus (9) we are able  
1198 to speak directly, openly and respectfully with one another when we disagree.  
1199
- 1200 g. *Communication and decision-making*: (1) I often wonder who made a particular  
1201 decision and am often left to guess why a decision was made versus (9) I experience  
1202 the congregation as having strong systems for communicating how and why  
1203 decisions are made.  
1204
- 1205 h. *Structures and leadership*: (1) I am often unclear how one gets appointed to a  
1206 committee or how one might be able to serve versus (9) I experience the  
1207 congregation as having a clearly defined committee structure, clearly defined  
1208 procedures and a well-known and understood process for nomination and election  
1209 to service versus.  
1210
- 1211 i. Other topics that may be relevant to the particular church.  
1212
- 1213 5. Have people take their seats and **debrief**, giving each person one opportunity for  
1214 uninterrupted time.  
1215
- 1216 6. Depending on the size of the group, there may not be time for each participant to explain  
1217 why they stood where they stood for each question on the spectrum exercise.  
1218
- 1219 7. Facilitators may choose to frame people’s responses according to their level of interest by  
1220 saying something like, “Which of your responses do you most want to speak about?” or,  
1221 “What are two or three of your responses you feel strongest about?”  
1222
- 1223 8. The facilitator who leads will engage each person in conversation, modelling active  
1224 listening skills. The second facilitator will document people’s interests by writing on the  
1225 butcher paper either a “need for” or “need to” statement. For example, if someone says, “I  
1226 answered how I did on worship because I find pastor’s preaching simplistic,” the facilitator  
1227 may write, “need to challenge in worship,” or, “need for more complex preaching.” If  
1228 someone says, “I often don’t know people need help or prayer until weeks later,” the  
1229 facilitator may write, “need to share prayer concerns,” or, “need for clarity regarding how  
1230 prayer concerns get shared.”  
1231
- 1232 9. Documenting these “need for” and “need to” statements will inform the facilitators’ interim  
1233 report in the next step as well as the topics to cover during the large group, healing phase.



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1242

10. Thank participants for their time, effort and energy. Close in prayer.

As a reminder regarding appropriate expectations of confidentiality at this stage (c.f. page 11ff.):

*Small Group Structured Dialogues* – it is appropriate to promise confidentiality outside of the small group context and to ask group members to honor the group’s confidentiality. Participants will share within the limited circle of their small group but are not to communicate others’ information outside of the group.

1243                    **STAGE TWO: LOWER THE TEMPERATURE, BEGIN TO BUILD**  
1244                    **RECONCILIATION TEAM INTERIM REPORT**

1245                    The end of the small group, structured dialogues marks a nodal point in the reconciliation  
1246 process. The congregation will have done much work to get to the point: reaching out to the  
1247 presbytery, agreeing to meet as a Session and congregation to discuss the reconciliation process,  
1248 covenanting to their participation, completing a congregational survey, having twelve of their  
1249 members interviewed personally, and participating in the small group dialogues. It is normal for  
1250 congregants to wonder, “Are we there yet?” or, “When will we be done with this?”

1251                    To mark the end of the information gathering phase and to frame the work to be done in the  
1252 large group phases, the reconciliation facilitators will craft an interim assessment report to the  
1253 Session, for the Session to distribute to the congregation through their customary channels (e.g.,  
1254 newsletter, email, copies in the Narthex, etc.). The interim report will include the following:<sup>34</sup>

- 1255                    1. A description of the **steps** of the reconciliation process to date.  
1256                    2. A summary of the pre-reconciliation **survey results** and **other information** gathered.  
1257                    3. Report observations on the **congregational system** using specific and concrete  
1258 descriptions of behavior, highlighting sources of **chronic anxiety**.  
1259                    4. The **interests documented** at previous small group structured dialogue sessions,  
1260 categorized under **workable problem areas**.

1261                    The interim report is an opportunity to teach, to highlight, and to focus for the congregation the  
1262 foundational sources of their conflict, the hidden expressions of it, and potential pathways for  
1263 moving toward new patterns of health and wholeness.

1264                    The interim report is an opportunity to teach. As the report will be read generally by a broad  
1265 swath of the congregation and in detail by the leadership, it is an opportunity to help congregants  
1266 deepen their ability to “think systems.” While caution must be exercised in the use of technical  
1267 terms from family systems’ literature that are unfamiliar to lay readers,<sup>35</sup> reconciliation facilitators  
1268 may be well served to *describe the phenomenon* directly preceding the use of family system’s  
1269 vocabulary. For example, rather than “the congregation is mired in triangles,” one may choose to  
1270 say, “We note that a common complaint is that friends do not speak directly to one another but  
1271 speak to an intermediary. This is called a triangle or triangling, which is counter-productive to the  
1272 communication goals of direct communication, open dialogue, and interest-based decision-  
1273 making.”

1274                    The interim report is an opportunity to highlight. Many if not most congregants will have  
1275 notions regarding some sources of their conflict. Often these notions will be expressed through

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<sup>34</sup> MSTI, page F8, emphasis included in the original.

<sup>35</sup> The authors have commented to one another that some presentations of family systems theory are “overly wonky,” an imprecise term to be certain yet indicative of the dilemma: if one does not know the vocabulary, it is difficult to learn the concepts undergirding family systems theory.

1276 blaming others and a lack of personal responsibility, as in, “If the pastor and elders would just  
1277 listen to former elders and former deacons, like me, we would be fine.” The psychological concepts  
1278 of confirmation bias<sup>36</sup> and the fundamental attribution error<sup>37</sup> facilitate blame shifting and are an  
1279 ordinary part of congregational life. However, that blaming others is common in churches does  
1280 not imply it should not be confronted! Instead of the common phenomenon of blame, congregants  
1281 should be invited to accept and acknowledge personal responsibility.

1282 Reconciliation facilitators can use highlighting to act as a mirror to the congregation.  
1283 Reconciliation facilitators should pay particular attention to observe the family systems dynamics  
1284 that create anxiety and which are expressions of health or dysfunction.<sup>38</sup>

1285 1. Intense triangling: this may be marked by an over-focus on a particular person or  
1286 issue; patterns of communicating to others rather than directly; and blaming others is a  
1287 form of triangling and instances of it should be noted.

1288 2. Cut-off or emotional distancing: does the congregation have a tendency for members  
1289 to respond to conflict by leaving physically or emotionally? Are there patterns of cut-off  
1290 and/or current expressions of it?

1291 3. Under-functioning or over-functioning: who in the system is carrying more  
1292 responsibility than is appropriate and who is not carrying enough responsibility?

1293 It is likely that congregations in conflict will express some of the above patterns. Acting as a mirror  
1294 to the congregation by naming their patterns invites people to do serious self-examination, and to  
1295 be open to mutual confession and exploring ways they may have contributed to congregational  
1296 anxiety either knowingly or unknowingly. The key to highlighting is found in step three  
1297 above: observations on the congregational system that highlight sources of chronic anxiety. As  
1298 the reconciliation facilitators report their observations using specific, concrete descriptions of  
1299 behavior, as if they are a researcher in a lab coat,<sup>39</sup> the congregation is encouraged<sup>40</sup> to look in the  
1300 mirror at their own sins rather than out the window at other’s sins. A final word of caution when  
1301 observing patterns is in order: highlight the *process* that occurs between people more than the  
1302 *substance* of an issue. Highlighting an issue’s substance or specifics is a subtle form of framing a  
1303 binary choice of “Who is right and who is wrong?” However, a focus on process frames an issue  
1304 in terms of relational patterns of health.

1305 The interim report is an opportunity to focus. By highlighting documented interests, the  
1306 reconciliation facilitators help the congregation focus on key issues for discussion, discernment,  
1307 and covenantal action. By also categorizing these issues as workable problem areas, the

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<sup>36</sup> Confirmation bias is defined as focusing more attention and giving more weight to what is most noticeable.

<sup>37</sup> The fundamental attribution error posits we are more likely to see other’s sins and excuse ourselves than to notice our own responsibility and forgive others (c.f. Matthew 7:3-5).

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert, Roberta, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, chapter one.

<sup>39</sup> Friedman, *ibid.*, pages 187-200, posits this image as helpful for probing the dissonance between what one observes and what an individual or group would like to believe.

<sup>40</sup> It is tempting to say that observations “force” members to look at their own behavior; alas, some folk cannot be forced to gaze inward and appear immune to self-awareness.

1308 reconciliation facilitators provide hope and further focus the congregation's attention toward  
 1309 concrete steps in the direction of the possible, doable, and helpful. Focusing the congregation and  
 1310 their leadership's attention through framing the issues and naming workable problems areas to be  
 1311 discussed, churches will be encouraged to move in the direction of healthy functioning.

1312 It is common for participants in a complex system, like a church, to resist efforts for them  
 1313 to confront sources of chronic anxiety, some of which may have been hidden yet operating in the  
 1314 congregation for decades. Common reactions to being asked to confront these sources of chronic  
 1315 anxiety are sabotage and resistance.<sup>41</sup> The strongest immunization against sabotage and resistance  
 1316 is the facilitator's own self-differentiation. As facilitators maintain their own focus and act  
 1317 according to their own values, principles, and integrity, responding to what they discern to be the  
 1318 key issues within the congregation, they are more likely rather than less likely to be able to help  
 1319 the congregation engage issues in a healthy manner. The same immune response is necessary to  
 1320 cultivate in the congregation's leadership, especially the pastor. Therefore, it is appropriate for the  
 1321 reconciliation facilitators to focus attention on the moments when leaders, be they clerical or lay  
 1322 leaders, responded to anxiety in a calm, clear and connected manner.

1323 *A Word of Caution regarding "Consultancy"*

1324 A final word of caution regarding the writing of the interim report is in order. Reconciliation  
 1325 facilitators should avoid serving as a church consultant when drafting the report. The role of church  
 1326 consultant differs from the role of reconciliation process facilitator:

1327	<u>Church Consultant</u>	<u>Reconciliation Process Facilitator</u>
1328	Focus is on knowledge, potential actions	Focus is on process for communicating and relating
1329	Listens in order to give answers	Listens to facilitate discovery of answers
1330	Suggests the way forward	Facilitates the congregation's way forward

1331 Standing as they do with one foot in the congregation (so they are intimately aware of its  
 1332 inner workings) and with one foot not in the congregation (as outsiders, reconciliation facilitators  
 1333 will have a measure of objectivity), reconciliation facilitators may be able to see potential paths  
 1334 for the congregation's future that are hidden from congregational leadership. It may even be that  
 1335 several of these paths are good ideas! However, reconciliation facilitators must avoid the role of  
 1336 church consultant, for their purpose is *to help the congregation discover its best path*, and this  
 1337 purpose can only be accomplished if *the congregation does its own work of communication,*  
 1338 *discernment, repentance, and restoration.* A primary goal of the reconciliation facilitators is to  
 1339 help the leadership to lead; consultancy is, by design, a form of over-functioning that does  
 1340 leadership's work for them. Consultancy is the enemy of self-differentiation.

1341

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<sup>41</sup> Friedman, *ibid.*, pages 229-247.

1342           **STAGE THREE: ENGAGE CREATIVELY, CONNECT CONSTRUCTIVELY**1343                           **LARGE GROUP HEALING CIRCLES**

1344           The congregation's work to this point in the reconciliation process has been preparatory to  
1345 the healing phase and its tasks. The congregation is likely developing the self-understanding and  
1346 interpersonal skills to move toward healing. Among the strengths gained during the earlier stages  
1347 in the reconciliation process are:

- 1348           1.    *A focus on self*: personal responsibility for one's feelings, choices, and how one  
1349 chooses to express her or his opinions (self-differentiation).  
1350
- 1351           2.    *Systems thinking*: a congregation consists of many individuals, but the way they relate  
1352 to one another shapes and forms the church's unique identity (family emotional processes).  
1353
- 1354           3.    *Lowering the emotional temperature*: an understanding of the importance of noticing  
1355 one's own emotions and not reacting to other's emotions in order to be empowered to speak  
1356 clearly and respectfully as well as listen with empathy and openness (effects of chronic  
1357 anxiety).  
1358
- 1359           4.    *Communication skills*: a general understanding of – including limited practice with –  
1360 using foundational skills: direct communication, open dialogue, and interest-based  
1361 decision-making (avoidance of triangles).  
1362
- 1363           5.    *Trust of the reconciliation facilitators*: the key word is “facilitators,” as their focus is  
1364 on the process by which to communicate rather than the content of what is decided.

1365           The purposes<sup>42</sup> of the healing phase include:

- 1366           1.    To **reduce tension** in the congregational system by creating an opportunity to **model**  
1367 **healthy dialogue**.  
1368
- 1369           2.    To facilitate **direct dialogue** and to **coach listening**.  
1370
- 1371           3.    To give each person the opportunity to **confront** inwardly and openly the events or  
1372 actions of others which they have experienced as painful, especially in cases where a  
1373 relationship is burdened by a **hoarding a past hurts** that need to be released.  
1374
- 1375           4.    To invite parties to **let go** of past grievances and **hurts**.

---

<sup>42</sup> MSTI, pages F17 and D25, emphasis included in the original, quoted verbatim.

1376 5. To facilitate a form of group **catharsis**; to **clear away the past** so that people can  
1377 focus on problem-solving for the future.

1378 The work of the healing phase is foundational Christian faith: the work of repentance and  
1379 forgiveness, the work of letting go and letting God bring healing among the Body of Christ. The  
1380 healing circle invites the entire congregation to gather to speak the truth in love to one another in  
1381 a spirit of humility, mercy and grace. As such, the healing circle should be treated as the spiritual  
1382 ministry it is.

1383 The agenda for conducting a healing circle is as follows:

1384 1. *Prayer*: Begin the meeting in prayer, recognizing that a time of prayer, including  
1385 silence, may better serve the congregation than a perfunctory opening prayer common  
1386 to some congregational gatherings. Be authentic, make it real, and invite both the  
1387 Spirit's work and each person's active participation.

1388  
1389 2. *Overview*: Review the reconciliation process to date:

1390  
1391 a. The congregation's covenant to take a journey of reconciliation.

1392  
1393 b. Highlights of workshop material that connect with the congregation.<sup>43</sup>

1394  
1395 c. Highlights of the most significant themes heard in the pre-reconciliation  
1396 survey, personal interviews and small group as discussed in the reconciliation  
1397 facilitator's interim report.

1398  
1399 d. The faithfulness members are showing through their presence and  
1400 participation.

1401  
1402 3. *Goals*: Articulate the following goals for the activity, understanding that not everyone  
1403 may share these goals but that they summarize the purpose of the healing circle:<sup>44</sup>

1404  
1405 a. That people may express themselves clearly, fully, and appropriately and **feel**  
1406 **heard**. A group does not need to agree on "what really happened" in order to respect  
1407 that another has a different perspective and to honor the other as a brother or sister  
1408 even in the midst of the disagreement.

---

<sup>43</sup> Each congregation will bear reminding of some portions of the teaching material more than other portions, and reconciliation facilitators will use their wisdom in highlighting what is most pertinent to a particular congregation. One reminded to note is to distinguish between internal identity versus external ability: between what we must learn about ourselves and our need to grow toward maturity (and all that maturity implies) versus the concepts or skills the reconciliation facilitators have taught, which are a form of tools existing outside oneself. Our identity (who we are and are becoming) is always more important than our ability (what skills we possess and are learning to use).

<sup>44</sup> MSTI, pages D25-26.

1409           b.     That people may begin to express the way they **take personal responsibility**  
1410           for their part in past or current situations, including being able to express regrets or  
1411           ways they would have liked to have done something differently.

1412  
1413           c.     That the group will share a consensus that, even if they do not agree on  
1414           everything, there is sufficient good will and commitment that they **can work**  
1415           **together** moving forward as they seek to brainstorm and evaluate solutions in the  
1416           problem-solving phase.

1417  
1418           Ask participants if there are any questions about the event’s goals and respond as  
1419           appropriate. These goals should be summarized on large print paper or a white board  
1420           so everyone can see them.

1421  
1422           4. *Rules of Engagement:* (Before the healing phase, reconciliation facilitators will choose  
1423           the primary modality for engaging the congregation in healing conversation. These  
1424           modalities are listed below, c.f., “Tools in the Tool Chest.”) Reconciliation facilitators  
1425           will explain the process to be used for the healing circle, as described below.

1426  
1427           5. *Devotional:* Offer a devotional focused on the Biblical themes of repentance,  
1428           forgiveness, mercy, grace, reconciliation, or healing. Reconciliation facilitators should  
1429           feel at liberty to tailor their message to the particular group’s needs, yet be cognizant  
1430           the devotional is the launching point or invitation into the congregation’s sharing. As  
1431           such, the devotional is more inspirational than informational; this is the time to remind  
1432           people of their baptismal identity in Christ not the time to teach new skills.

1433  
1434           6. *Start with an Example:* Begin with a low-level, easier to deal with situation that involves  
1435           someone with the skills to model the work of reconciliation: non-defensive mirroring,  
1436           able to take personal responsibility for one’s role in a situation of another’s concern,  
1437           able to express regret. *This situation and person should be invited prior to the event*  
1438           *and prepared to serve in this capacity!*

1439  
1440           7. *Thanksgiving:* At the conclusion of the healing circle, it is appropriate to remind the  
1441           group of the original goals:

1442  
1443           a.     That people may express themselves clearly, fully, and appropriately and **feel**  
1444           **heard**. A group does not need to agree on “what really happened” in order to respect  
1445           that another has a different perspective and to honor the other as a brother or sister  
1446           even in the midst of the disagreement.

1447           b.     That people may begin to express the way they **take personal responsibility**  
1448           for their part in past or current situations, including being able to express regrets or  
1449           ways they would have liked to have done something differently.

1450  
1451           c.     That the group will share a consensus that, even if they do not agree on  
1452           everything, there is sufficient good will and commitment that they **can work**  
1453           **together** moving forward as they seek to brainstorm and evaluate solutions in the  
1454           problem-solving phase.

1455  
1456           Facilitator’s should point to signs that the group has progressed toward fulfilling these  
1457           goals, even if there is more work that can be done toward them in the future. A healing  
1458           circle exercise is ordinarily an emotionally draining event, and facilitators should both  
1459           thank participants for their faithfulness and encourage them to continue their journey  
1460           together. Though it is likely that the healing circle will have been experienced as sacred  
1461           ground, participants may be encouraged to keep their shoes on as they leave. Close in  
1462           prayer.

1463

#### 1464 *Tools in the Tool Chest*

1465           The following processes are each appropriate for large-group use as a healing circle.<sup>45</sup>

##### 1466           1.     Samoan Circle:<sup>46</sup>

1467  
1468           a.     Have the group sit in an outer circle of chairs. Place four to seven chairs  
1469           within an inner circle. Select a few people to represent each of the various  
1470           perspectives. These people come forward, sit in the inner circle, and discuss  
1471           the issues at hand. Anyone in the larger group who wishes to participate  
1472           may do so by coming forward and taking one of the empty chairs. If those  
1473           chairs are filled, others who come forward may stand until one of the chairs  
1474           becomes available. If the issues are volatile, one chair can be designated as  
1475           the listening chair. Stress that *all communication must occur in the inner*  
1476           *circle*, but all are welcome to participate.

1477  
1478           b.     Have each individual prepare a stack of 3 x 5 cards listing events, one on  
1479           each card, that they can recall which were insulting, hurtful, or hard to  
1480           forgive. No one but the reconciliation facilitator will see these cards.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pages E9-10 and F18.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pages E10 and D25-26. This description of the Samoan Circle blends the description found in “Structuring Dialogue” (E10) with the process description for “Neutralizing History” (D25-26) and will be familiar to those who have attended the MSTI training as it mirrors the Samoan Circle exercise done on the fifth day of the training (usually held on Friday).



1481 Nothing is too trivial to include – if the person has feelings about a  
1482 remembered incident, encourage them to include it.<sup>47</sup> On the card,  
1483 individuals should write the following:

- 1484
- 1485 i. Their **feelings** related to the event.
  - 1486
  - 1487 ii. Their **own role and responsibility** in the event.
  - 1488
  - 1489 iii. Express any **appreciation** of the other one may feel.
  - 1490
  - 1491 iv. Any **regrets** they may have about their role or something they would
  - 1492 have liked to have done differently.
  - 1493

1494 Reconciliation facilitators should give people time to write cards at the  
1495 appropriate time.

- 1496
- 1497 c. The reconciliation facilitator will invite people forward to the inner circle of  
1498 chairs of the Samoan Circle by topic: chronologically, topically, easiest to  
1499 hardest, etc., but seeking to avoid starting with the most emotionally laden  
1500 topics.<sup>48</sup>

- 1501
- 1502 d. Person A is invited to speak and encouraged to follow this model:
  - 1503
  - 1504 i. Address an **individual or individuals (Person B) personally and a**  
1505 **topic specifically** rather than generally. That is, “I would like to  
1506 express concern to Jennifer about the way I was treated when leading  
1507 the stewardship campaign,” rather than, “I want to talk about our  
1508 stewardship.”
  - 1509
  - 1510 ii. Person A tells Person B something she or he **appreciates** about them.  
1511 For example, “I appreciate your desire that our stewardship campaign  
1512 be successful.”
  - 1513
  - 1514 iii. **Using I- language**, especially I-Statements, Impact Statements, and  
1515 Preference Statements, Person A expresses any hurt she or he may  
1516 feel, any impact Person B’s behavior had on him or her, and/or any  
1517 preference for action in the future.
  - 1518

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., page D25.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

- 1519                   iv.       **Using mirroring language**, Person B reflects back to Person A that  
1520 they have been heard deeply. The ability to mirror back to another  
1521 does not imply that one agrees with what the first person said and only  
1522 that they have been heard. Therefore, there is no discussion, no back  
1523 and forth, no defensive response but only a mirroring that indicates  
1524 deep, active, empathic listening.
- 1525
- 1526                   v.       Person A is invited to express their **own role** in causing harm or  
1527 difficulty related to the event and asked if she or he has **any regrets**  
1528 or if there is something he or she would have liked to have done  
1529 differently.
- 1530
- 1531                   vi.       Person B is invited to express their **own role** in causing harm or  
1532 difficulty related to the event and asked if she or he has **any regrets**  
1533 or if there is something he or she would have liked to have done  
1534 differently.
- 1535

1536                   A summary of these rules of engagement should be written on large-print paper or  
1537 a whiteboard so that everyone can see them. In addition, the reconciliations  
1538 facilitator should convey to the group they reserve the right to interrupt people  
1539 (occasionally and politely) as needed to redirect them toward I-language or away  
1540 from defensive justifications of one’s own behavior. The reconciliation facilitator  
1541 should teach the group the signal they will use to interrupt them, such as a time-out  
1542 signal with one’s hands. (Such interruptions will help facilitators guide, direct and  
1543 encourage strong communication.)

1544

- 1545                   2.       *Interviews:*<sup>49</sup> Select and interview 1 to 3 individuals from each perspective in the  
1546 presence of the entire group. The tone of the interview is friendly, informal  
1547 conversation with careful listening by the interviewer, lots of paraphrasing.  
1548 Interviewers should be prepared to “launder the language” as necessary.[7] Begin  
1549 on a personal note; start slowly to ease into the interview to establish comfort and  
1550 rapport before asking about the issues at hand: “How do personally view these  
1551 issues?” (Encourage people to speak only for themselves.) “Tell me what’s been  
1552 happening from your own perspective? In what ways have you personally felt  
1553 misunderstood? What regrets do you have, if any? Is there anything you would have  
1554 liked to have done differently?”
- 1555

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., page D26.

- 1556 3. *Role Reversal Interviews*:<sup>50</sup> Same as above but each person is asked to pretend they  
1557 are another person with a different perspective or view. Acknowledge how difficult  
1558 it is to adopt someone else’s perspective, and coach the interviewee before getting  
1559 started: “I want to ask you to do something that’s quite difficult; I really appreciate  
1560 your willingness to come up here and do this. Mr. Miller, I’m going to ask you to  
1561 pretend for a little that you’re Mr. Smith over here and to speak in the first person  
1562 as though you were him as I ask you questions. Are you ready to try it? Well, now  
1563 that you have your Mr. Smith hat on, tell me a little about yourself, where are you  
1564 from and what do you do, Mr. Smith?” (The interviewer should always begin with  
1565 a few personal questions to help people get into the role.) “Now tell me a little about  
1566 your views on the issue. Tell me what’s been happening from your own  
1567 perspective? In what ways have you personally felt misunderstood? What regrets  
1568 do you have, if any? Is there anything you would have liked to have done  
1569 differently?”  
1570
- 1571 4. *Role Reversal Presentations*:<sup>51</sup> Someone from each perspective is asked to spend  
1572 time with people from another perspective and then give a presentation  
1573 summarizing the views of the other perspective, in first or third person. Be sure to  
1574 give all perspectives an opportunity to respond to what is spoken: was the  
1575 presentation of their view an accurate one? Would they like to round it out in some  
1576 way?  
1577
- 1578 5. *Conflict Spectrum*:<sup>52</sup> Identify one end of the room for people strongly convinced  
1579 about one idea and the other end of the room for those strongly convinced of the  
1580 opposite. Ask everyone to take a position somewhere between these two points.  
1581 Then invite individuals to share why they chose the spot in which they are standing.  
1582 This can be taken further by then dividing the spectrum into multiple groups, the  
1583 two ends plus one or more middle groups. Give each group 15-20 minutes to do the  
1584 following:  
1585
- 1586 (1) to prepare a list of strengths and weaknesses of their perspective,
  - 1587
  - 1588 (2) to identify their core interests, and
  - 1589
  - 1590 (3) to identify the strengths of other perspectives.
  - 1591

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

1592 Have each group report to the whole group. [Facilitator’s note: If people are timid  
1593 to speak out in front of the group, the spectrum is good for disclosing viewpoints  
1594 *en masse*, and is often a good icebreaker because it reduces anxiety about what  
1595 others are thinking. Sometimes it can show that what people felt to be a highly  
1596 polarized situation with binary choices actually finds many, if not most, people  
1597 somewhere in the middle.]

1598  
1599 6. *Small Group Discussion*:<sup>53</sup> Assign people randomly to small groups with diverse  
1600 members. Give them 15-20 minutes to list the three to five most important issues  
1601 facing the group. Have each group select a spokesperson to report to the larger  
1602 group – document the interests. This kind of exercise is helpful when the issues and  
1603 factions are not well-defined.

1604  
1605 7. *Alternative Small Group Procedure*:<sup>54</sup> Assign people to small groups following a  
1606 conflict spectrum exercise with the goal of creating diverse groups. Stress the goal  
1607 is not consensus but for each group (1) to identify the diversity of views, (2) to  
1608 document core interests, and (3) to identify areas of potential regret members are  
1609 prepared to share with one another. If tension is high, ask each person in a group to  
1610 share their views with **no discussion** until all have spoken.

1611  
1612 8. *Interpersonal Mediation*: During the small group structured dialogues or one of the  
1613 large group exercises, it may become evident that one or more persons need to  
1614 reconcile on a more personal level. If this situation arises in the midst of the group  
1615 exercises, reconciliation facilitator’s may choose to request a time-out in order to  
1616 confer with one another and then with the individuals involved. Facilitators may  
1617 want to use the following tools to suggest a way forward to the individuals:

1618  
1619 a. *Bracketing*:<sup>55</sup> set aside one’s personal feelings for a time in order to  
1620 participate in the exercise. Promise individuals that they are welcome to embrace  
1621 their personal feelings again later, if they choose.

1622  
1623 b. *Neutralizing History*:<sup>56</sup> schedule an appointment with the individuals separate  
1624 from the group dialogues. Use the steps described above under the Samoan Circle,  
1625 sections 1b – 1d.iv.

1626

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., quoted verbatim.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., page C1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., c.f. also pages D25-26.

1627 **STAGE THREE: ENGAGE CREATIVELY, CONNECT CONSTRUCTIVELY**1628 **LARGE GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING**

1629 The congregation is now prepared to address specific issues, having “lowered the heat” of  
1630 chronic anxiety through the educational and information gathering phases, especially the process  
1631 of small group, structured dialogues in which people were heard and were invited to hear one  
1632 another, and having begun the process of healing past hurts, sadness, and anger, even if such work  
1633 will be a continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit at work through the Body of Christ living into its  
1634 call to love one another. In recognition that the above sentence is Pauline in nature, simply put: it  
1635 is now time to solve problems.

1636 One of the reasons for reminding the reconciliation process facilitators of the rhythm and  
1637 flow of the reconciliation process is that virtually every congregation with whom the  
1638 Reconciliation Team works will want to leap too quickly toward problem-solving. Indeed, it is a  
1639 common, natural, and instinctive urge of *reconciliation facilitators* to desire to move toward  
1640 problem-solving sooner rather than later. However, the desire to do so must be resisted, for if the  
1641 congregation has not built a strong foundation of personal awareness, respect for one another, and  
1642 affirmation – or at least willingness – of healthy communication and a commitment to practice  
1643 healthy decision-making processes, no problem can be solved. Fortunately, the next phase will  
1644 facilitate congregational problem-solving.

1645 The purposes of the problem-solving phase are:<sup>57</sup>

- 1646 1. To build agreements on the various workable problem areas.
- 1647
- 1648 2. To find solutions to the most pressing issues.
- 1649
- 1650 3. To agree on a process for addressing those issues requiring a more long-term effort  
1651 at problem-solving.
- 1652
- 1653 4. To model collaborative problem-solving strategies.

1654 The process begins with the reconciliation facilitators distributing a problem-solving worksheet  
1655 that lists the workable problem areas that arise out of the interests identified during the small-  
1656 group, structured dialogues.<sup>58</sup> Before discussing further the process for this problem-solving phase,  
1657 it will be helpful to remind ourselves of the distinction between the kind of problems that can  
1658 versus cannot be discussed:<sup>59</sup>

1659 **Common Types of Negotiable Issues**

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., page F19, quoted verbatim.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., page D30, quoted verbatim.

- 1660 1. Behaviors
- 1661 a. How people treat each other.
- 1662 b. Sharing space.
- 1663 c. Respecting boundaries.
- 1664 d. Communicating about problems.
- 1665 e. Noise.
- 1666 f. Following through on promises and responsibilities.
- 1667
- 1668 2. Things
- 1669 a. Property.
- 1670 b. Repairs, maintenance.
- 1671 c. Loans.
- 1672 d. Reimbursement.
- 1673 e. Arranging payments.
- 1674
- 1675 3. Structure and systems
- 1676 a. How decisions are made.
- 1677 b. Rules and regulations.
- 1678 c. Procedures.
- 1679 d. Schedules.
- 1680 e. Job responsibilities.

1681 **Concerns that Can Be Discussed but not Typically Negotiated**

- 1682 1. Beliefs
- 1683 a. Principles, values.
- 1684 b. Child-raising philosophy.
- 1685 c. Prejudices.
- 1686
- 1687 2. Personalities
- 1688 a. Personal style.
- 1689 b. Management style.
- 1690 c. Attitudes.
- 1691
- 1692 3. Emotions
- 1693 a. Anger.
- 1694 b. Hurt feelings.
- 1695 c. Trust.
- 1696 d. Blame, fault.
- 1697
- 1698 4. Perceptions

- 1699                   a.    What “really” happened.  
1700                   b.    Interpretations.  
1701                   c.    Right from wrong.

1702           **Issues that Cannot Be Mediated**

- 1703                   1.    Addictive behaviors.  
1704  
1705                   2.    Pathological or abusive behaviors.  
1706  
1707                   3.    Wide gap in power between the parties.  
1708  
1709                   4.    Issues where the real decision-maker is not present – or where people whose  
1710                        cooperation is needed or who may be significantly impacted by a decision are not  
1711                        represented.  
1712  
1713                   5.    Issues requiring investigation and disclosure before fair negotiation can take place.  
1714

1715                   Aware of the above list of concerns that can be negotiated, discussed but not typically  
1716                   negotiated, and not able to be negotiated, the reconciliation facilitators will use the list of interests  
1717                   generated during the small group, structured dialogues to generate a list of workable problem areas.  
1718                   The problems identified on this list should be defined as clearly and specifically as possible, as a  
1719                   lack of clarity will create confusion. It is essential to identify each problem separately and not to  
1720                   confuse or blend problems together, as this will befuddle the dialogue and decision-making  
1721                   process. If there is not clarity and agreement on the problem, there cannot be agreement on the  
1722                   solution.

1723                   One way to think about whether the problem has been defined clearly is this: if one were  
1724                   to create a Venn Diagram of the questions that seek to address the workable problem areas, how  
1725                   much overlap would exist in the diagram? It may be impossible or impracticable to address  
1726                   questions or define problems such that one’s Venn Diagram is two or more, completely distinct  
1727                   circles. However, if the Venn Diagram has the circles display a significant amount of shared space,  
1728                   this will lead to people confusing issues, which will muddy the waters of conversation.

1729                   After the reconciliation facilitators have defined the workable problem areas, this list is  
1730                   distributed to the congregation, along with an overview of the process to be used and an invitation  
1731                   for congregants to jot down their ideas. The problem-solving phase then develops using five  
1732                   steps:<sup>60</sup>

- 1733                   1.    Clarify the process to be used to address the problem.  
1734

---

<sup>60</sup> The material that follows is adapted from MSTI, page C10, D15-24, E5-6, E11-17, and F19-20.

- 1735           2.    Brainstorm ideas for solving the problem.  
1736  
1737           3.    Evaluate the ideas generated using interest-based criteria.  
1738  
1739           4.    Negotiate specific, actionable proposals using interest-based decision-making.  
1740  
1741           5.    Decide and agree on a plan.

1742           A description of the five steps in the problem-solving process are described below in prose  
1743 form. However, aware of the difficulty of keeping in mind several pages of verbiage, reconciliation  
1744 facilitators may find the five steps described below in bullet form in Appendix E: Problem-Solving  
1745 Process Step-By-Step on pages 72. The authors strongly encourage reconciliation facilitators to  
1746 bring a copy of these pages with them the day of the event.

1747 *Step One: Clarify the process to be used to address the problem*

1748           It is necessary for the reconciliation facilitators to communicate the problem-solving  
1749 process to the congregation both in advance of the problem-solving activity (e.g. in a newsletter  
1750 or through a Sunday morning announcement) and at the beginning of the activity.

1751           Before the first problem-solving event, a letter should be sent to the congregation  
1752 explaining the process. An example of such an announcement can be found in Appendix D: Sample  
1753 Problem-Solving Letter on page 71.

1754           On the day of the problem-solving event, at the beginning of the activity, reconciliation  
1755 facilitators should provide an overview of the process to be used, which may look something like  
1756 this:

- 1757           1. **Brainstorm** ideas  
1758           2. **Evaluate** ideas  
1759           3. **Build Consensus / Negotiate** ideas  
1760           4. Write a **Covenantal Agreement**.

1761 *Step Two: Brainstorm Ideas for Solving the Problem*

1762           Idea generation is a multi-step process that begins *before* the day of the problem-solving  
1763 activity and *continues* on the day of the event. The letter reconciliation facilitators send to the  
1764 congregation that clarifies the process to be used, should also include the following:

- 1765           1. A description of the workable problem areas. These workable problem areas should be  
1766           posed as questions to be addressed.  
1767  
1768           2. An invitation for congregants to jot down their ideas for each problem  
1769



- 1770 3. A request that congregants evaluate their own ideas from an interest-based perspective.<sup>61</sup>  
1771 A description of the differences between position-based bargaining and interest-based  
1772 bargaining is found in Appendix H, page 76. This or another description of the differences  
1773 between position-based and interest-based decision-making should be included in any  
1774 announcement to the congregation as possible and practicable.  
1775
- 1776 4. A reminder that problem-solving is a collaborative exercise. Even at this early stage in the  
1777 problem-solving process, it is helpful for reconciliation facilitators to frame the  
1778 forthcoming dialogue as collaboration. Such collaboration can be invited both  
1779
- 1780 a. By a specific request that those who participate understand that their ideas will be  
1781 one of many, and that all ideas will be honored, affirmed, and heard, and  
1782
- 1783 b. By specifically requesting people to write an accompanying list of concerns or  
1784 interests their idea addresses; that is, ask people to create a list of ways their idea  
1785 will lead to health and wellness for the congregation.

1786 On the day of the problem-solving event, at the beginning of the brainstorming ideas step,  
1787 reconciliation facilitators should provide a brief overview of the above requests, especially an  
1788 overview of the difference between position-based and interest-based decision-making. Following  
1789 this brief overview, participants can be invited to jot down their ideas on large pieces of paper  
1790 scattered throughout the room, connecting their idea to a specific problem. (Each sheet of paper  
1791 should have the workable problem area identified in some form.) This is an individual activity,  
1792 with each participant writing their own ideas.

1793 Once all participants have written their ideas on the large paper, reconciliation facilitators  
1794 should choose the first topic to be discussed in more detail. The reconciliation facilitators may  
1795 have a decent idea of the order in which they want to discuss the workable problem areas but often  
1796 starting with an easier problem is best as it gives the group an early, easy “win.” From the easy  
1797 win, reconciliation facilitators may choose to address workable problem areas according to their  
1798 importance or by distinguishing between what problem, if it is solved first, will lead to more easily  
1799 solving other problems.<sup>62</sup>

1800 After all ideas have been written on the papers and a topic chosen, the reconciliation  
1801 facilitators should review the ideas with the entire group. It is inappropriate at this point in the  
1802 process for the reconciliation facilitators to offer their opinion on the relative merits of the ideas  
1803 generated; this is work to be done by the congregants during the evaluation step! However, it is

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<sup>61</sup> Again, c.f. Appendix \_\_, page \_\_ for appropriate verbiage.

<sup>62</sup> For a brief discussion of the issue, c.f. *ibid.*, p. D17.II.A.1-3.

1804 appropriate for reconciliation facilitators to comment on any diversity of viewpoints, ideas or  
1805 interests being expressed, yet without judgment or assessment, merely with interest and curiosity.<sup>63</sup>

1806         Once reconciliation facilitators have read all the written ideas, give the gathered large  
1807 group an opportunity to brainstorm additional ideas; write these additional ideas on the paper.  
1808 Again, encourage participants to withhold the urge to express their opinion on the relative merits  
1809 of the ideas – essentially, the reconciliation facilitators are asking participants to “bracket” their  
1810 conversation; one step at a time! Yet, reconciliation facilitators are encouraged to document the  
1811 diversity being expressed.

1812         Following the brainstorming of ideas, it is necessary to give the group a break in order to  
1813 allow time for the reconciliation facilitators to sort the ideas into categories. Generally speaking,  
1814 groups may generate 15 – 20 ideas, yet many of these ideas use different verbiage to convey the  
1815 same concept. Time will not allow a group to evaluate 20 distinct ideas! However, these 15 – 20  
1816 ideas will usually express only 4 – 5 basic concepts; that is, even if different verbiage is used,  
1817 several ideas can be lumped together as they share significant similarities. It is necessary to allow  
1818 reconciliation facilitators sufficient time to sort through all of the ideas to gather the 4 – 5 basic  
1819 concepts the group is expressing; it is these 4 – 5 that will be evaluated in the next step.

### 1820 *Step Three: Evaluate the Ideas Generated Using Interest-Based Criteria*

1821         Several issues present themselves for facilitators’ awareness during the evaluation of ideas  
1822 step, including the following:

- 1823         1.       The tendency in American *institutions* to want to vote: the idea that gets the most  
1824 votes is not necessarily the healthiest choice; therefore, the evaluation process will  
1825 discuss issues not merely tally the idea with the most “likes.”  
1826
- 1827         2.       The tendency in American *churches* to want to vote in order to avoid discussion:  
1828 voting is an excellent way to avoid conflict and the difficult work of respectful  
1829 speaking, humble listening, and collaborative decision-making; therefore, the  
1830 evaluation process will encourage people to speak and listen using all the skills  
1831 taught and practiced to this point in the reconciliation process.  
1832
- 1833         3.       The tendency in both American institutions generally and American churches  
1834 specifically to *form coalitions*: coalition building is a necessary function of the  
1835 voting process but limits the creative, other-affirming, Spirit-seeking openness  
1836 required for spiritual discernment by the Body of Christ; therefore, the evaluation  
1837 process will create groups that include people from differing perspectives in  
1838 conversation with one another.

---

<sup>63</sup> For a helpful discussion on documenting the diversity, c.f. *ibid.*, page E5.II.A.

1839 4. The tendency in both American institutions generally and American churches  
1840 specifically to *tolerate demagoguery*: hopefully, by this point in the reconciliation  
1841 process, individuals in the congregation are self-aware and the congregation has  
1842 developed sufficient group norms to discourage the practice of “the loudest, most  
1843 insistent voice gets her or his way,” which is common in some churches; therefore,  
1844 the reconciliation facilitators will monitor the small group dialogues to encourage  
1845 healthy communication!  
1846

1847 To counter these above tendencies, and to provide a healthy forum to evaluate the ideas,  
1848 the evaluation step will divide the whole group into smaller groups that express a diversity of  
1849 opinion. The smaller groups may be chosen in one of several ways, two of which are described  
1850 below:<sup>64</sup>

1851 1. *Conflict spectrum exercise*: describe the two most polarized ideas and have people  
1852 line up along the spectrum. Divide participants into groups that include individuals  
1853 from the entire length of the spectrum.  
1854

1855 2. *“Four” corners exercise*: ask individuals to choose their favorite idea and stand  
1856 together. (It may be there are more or less than four ideas; adjust accordingly.)  
1857 Divide participants into groups that include individuals from multiple perspectives.  
1858

1859 Each small group will be assigned one of the 4 - 5 ideas to evaluate. It is appropriate to give  
1860 the groups a specific timeframe for this discussion, with the amount of time allotted dependent on  
1861 the complexity and sensitivity of the concern. In this step of the process, participants should be  
1862 encouraged to *evaluate* ideas using interest-based conversation rather than position-based  
1863 conversation. Facilitators should suggest the following practices as useful for interest-based  
1864 conversations:<sup>65</sup>

1865 1. *Plus / Minus Chart*: this is the traditional, line down the middle, pros and cons list  
1866 (also known as an advantages and disadvantages list).  
1867

1868 2. *Helping / Hindering Chart*: this is a variation on the above but focuses the group’s  
1869 attention on the ways an idea may help the congregation move toward healthy,  
1870 faithful practice or way an idea may hinder the same.  
1871

1872 3. *Interest Chart*: this seeks to document all the interests or concerns a given idea  
1873 addresses.

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<sup>64</sup> If reconciliation facilitators have an idea for dividing groups while maintaining group diversity, they should feel permission to lead accordingly. The above ideas are illustrative, not exhaustive.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., page D20.VI.

- 1874
- 1875 4. *Impact Chart*: this seeks to document the impact(s) a given idea will have on the
- 1876 congregation.
- 1877
- 1878 5. *Criteria for Solutions (Principles Chart)*: for complex situations, it may be
- 1879 necessary for groups first to identify or list the criteria that defines a “good”
- 1880 solution; that is, what constitutes healthy, faithful practice? In most instances,
- 1881 confusion on these “first principles” leads to division on how to evaluate an idea.
- 1882

1883 After each small group has an opportunity to evaluate an idea, have a member of the group

1884 share their assessments with the entire gathering. The group’s assessments should be discussed as

1885 either an appreciation or a concern:

- 1886
- We appreciate this idea because...
  - 1887 • We appreciate that this idea...
  - 1888 • We have concerns about this idea because...
  - 1889 • We are concerned that this idea...

1890 The other groups listen to the original group’s appreciations and concerns and then are

1891 invited to add their own perspectives, again using an interest-based focus that expresses itself as

1892 an appreciation or concern.

1893 *Step Four: Negotiate specific, actionable proposals using interest-based decision-making*

1894 In this next step, a specific, actionable proposal will be crafted. Once again using a conflict

1895 spectrum exercise, four corners exercise, or some other variant, divide into small groups. This

1896 negotiating step will be an iterative process of ever-growing group conversation, starting small

1897 and getting progressively larger. At each point in this negotiating step, the groups are asked to

1898 create a consensus idea. Their idea will not usually be complete, whole, and fully detailed but

1899 should convey at least a general solution with one or two actionable steps.

1900 Please note that “consensus” does not mean “unanimity” but that there exists enough

1901 agreement that most everyone can agree to an idea and those who cannot agree with an idea can

1902 still live with it knowing they have been heard and respected by the group.<sup>66</sup>

1903 The consensus-building conversations, as an iterative process leading from smaller to

1904 larger groups, should proceed according to the following guidelines:

- 1905 1. Round 1 – start with (a) small groups of four;
- 1906
- 1907 2. Round 2 – combine groups of four into groups of eight;

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., page E6.III.B. See also page F20.4.e: “If isolated dissent continues, ask whether the person can ‘live with the proposal’ or agree to give it a try,” emphasis included in the original.

1908  
1909 3. Round 3 – select one person from each group of eight to form a (c) “public” group that sits  
1910 in the center of the room while everyone else sits in a circle around them to observe their  
1911 conversation;

1912  
1913 4. Round 4 – the entire group dialogues.

1914  
1915 For each of rounds 1-3, the groups seek to create a consensus idea among themselves and  
1916 then share their idea with the larger gathering as follows:

- 1917  
1918 1. Communicate their group’s consensus idea to the entire gathering,  
1919  
1920 2. Listen while members of the entire gathering express appreciation of what they like  
1921 about the idea (that is, the positive, helpful, interests and impacts suggested by the  
1922 idea), and  
1923  
1924 3. Listen while members of the entire gathering express respectful, compassionate  
1925 concerns about their idea (using, of course, their very best I-statements).  
1926  
1927 4. Reconciliation facilitators should document each group’s idea on large paper.  
1928

1929 Round 4 leads into the fifth and final step of the problem-solving phase as described below.

1930 *Step Five: Decide and agree on a plan*<sup>67</sup>

1931 The group is now ready to craft an agreement. *The agreement should state clearly who is*  
1932 *agreeing to what, where, when, and how. You can use the disputant’s wording whenever possible.*  
1933 *An effective agreement should:*

1934 **1. Be Specific**

1935 Avoid ambiguous words such as “soon,” “reasonable,” “cooperative,” “neighborly,”  
1936 “frequent,” and “quite,” since they can mean different things to different people. Use  
1937 specific words and dates that will more likely mean the same thing to both parties. For  
1938 example, “Mrs. Wrangle and the McBickers agree to build a 5’ high board fence along the  
1939 property line between their houses. Mrs. Wrangle agrees to buy the building materials by  
1940 June 1, and the McBickers agree to build the fence by July 1. Both agree to paint their own  
1941 side of the fence by August 1.”

1942 **2. Be Clear about Deadlines**

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pages D23-24. This section cited verbatim from “The Agreement Stage.”

1943 State all times and deadlines clearly, as in the previous example.

1944 **3. Be Balanced**

1945 Everyone should win something, and agree to do or not do something. For example, “Mrs.  
1946 Jones agrees to....” “Mr. Smith agrees to....”

1947 **4. Be Positive**

1948 Encourage the disputants to state positively what they will do in the future.

1949 **5. Be Realistic**

1950 Can they live up to their agreement? It works best if they agree to actions they can control.

1951 **6. Be Clear and Simple**

1952 Avoid legal language. Use the disputants’ language if you can.

1953 **7. Be Signed by Everyone Present**

1954 After you are finished writing the agreement, read it to the parties to get their response.  
1955 Does it cover all the issues? Do they pledge to live up to it? Is there a way to review progress  
1956 in the near future? Sign and date the agreement, giving a copy to both parties.

1957 For an example written agreement, see Appendix F, page 74.<sup>68</sup>

1958 *And Don’t Forget to Speak from the Heart*

1959 An additional section to include that is not a part the example written agreement in  
1960 Appendix \_\_\_, is to ask participants’ to discuss their purpose and motivation in covenanting to an  
1961 agreement. To discuss one’s purpose and motivation is to speak from the heart; it moves beyond  
1962 the who, what, when and how to speak to the why an agreement is important.

1963 Simon Sinek, in his book *Start with Why*, expresses the compelling nature of “Why  
1964 Statements,” and their persuasive power to invite, encourage and entice a positive response. The  
1965 agreement needs to convey with realism and specificity that to which congregants will be asked to  
1966 covenant, and the agreement must communicate why such a covenant is important. Often the why  
1967 statements will be embedded in much of what people say as part of the problem-solving activity.  
1968 Two examples of the distinction between what versus why are found below:

1969 **What:** We will publish an overview of Session actions on the website, in the bulletins, and  
1970 as part of the newsletter.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., D24. Used with permission of LMPC for use by the Presbytery of Grand Canyon Reconciliation Team. May not be reproduced otherwise. For information on obtaining copies, contact LMPC.

1971 **Why:** Because we are a family of faith, the Session desires to act with transparency through  
1972 communications that help others know what Session is doing and our rationale for taking  
1973 certain actions.

1974 **What:** We will use I-Statement and interest-based decision-making in committee,  
1975 commission, deacon and Session meetings.

1976 **Why:** Because we all are God's beloved and we desire to convey that love in how we  
1977 communicate with one another, we will use the following tools to create respectful  
1978 dialogue.

1979

1980                    **STAGE THREE: Engage Creatively, Connect Constructively**1981                    **Closing Worship and Final Report**

1982                    The Reconciliation process requires closure of the *formal* activities involved in  
 1983 reconciliation that invite, encourage, and facilitate the *informal* work of living as a reconciled Body  
 1984 of Christ. There are four, formal closure activities: (1) an exhaustive written report to the  
 1985 congregation, (2) a closing service of worship, (3) distribution and receipt of an evaluation form,  
 1986 and (4) follow-up monitoring with the Session and pastoral leadership.<sup>69</sup>

1987                    The formal activities signal an end to the reconciliation process and set a clear boundary  
 1988 with the congregation that directs members toward their pastor(s), elders, and each other for  
 1989 ongoing communication, consultation, and decision-making. As such the end of the formal  
 1990 activities discourage the temptation for members to triangle the reconciliation facilitators in  
 1991 congregational life.

1992                    The formal activities also invite, encourage, and facilitate the informal – and much more  
 1993 significant – work of the congregation: to move forward together, living into their unity of  
 1994 purpose, sharing common practices, as they seek to express in word and deed that they are a  
 1995 reconciled Body of Christ. The formal work is necessary; the informal work is life-giving. The  
 1996 formal work will occur over a matter of weeks; the informal work continues indefinitely.

1997                    *The Written Report*

1998                    A draft version of the written report will be submitted to the Session, and the Session given  
 1999 the opportunity to review and respond to it. It is expected the Session will have questions,  
 2000 comments, requests for clarification or modification, and may also offer other input. It is essential  
 2001 that the report express accurately the situation at the church and what occurred during the  
 2002 reconciliation process, and all agreements moving forward. Items to include in the report are as  
 2003 follows:<sup>70</sup>

2004                    **1. Overview**

2005  
 2006                    (1) A brief description of the presenting issues that led to the reconciliation team  
 2007                    working with the congregation.

2008  
 2009                    (2) A brief description of the reconciliation process.

2010                    **2. Results of the Information Gathering Activities**

2011  
 2012                    (1) List statistically all pertinent information from the **questionnaires**.

2014

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<sup>69</sup> For a complete description of the “Closure of Process,” c.f. MSTI, pages F21-24.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pages F21-22, quoted with slight modification, emphasis included in the original.



- 2015  
2016 (2) List the minimal and maximal goals of the intervention process as defined by  
2017 the Session.  
2018  
2019 (3) List the **destructive habits** identified by the congregation.  
2020  
2021 (4) List any statements concerning **feelings of powerlessness** made by members of  
2022 the congregation that are representative of issues and difficulties.  
2023  
2024 (5) Summarize the **needs/interests** compiled during the small group sessions.  
2025  
2026 (6) Summarize the **process** used for any interpersonal mediation, though do not  
2027 name the individuals nor the specific hurts.  
2028

### 2029 3. **Agreements** and Findings

- 2030  
2031 (1) List the **workable problem areas** addressed in the problem-solving sessions.  
2032  
2033 (2) List the **agreements** affirmed by the congregation.  
2034  
2035 (3) Summarize the reconciliation facilitators' findings, including the  
2036 congregation's **strengths** and any **recommendations** the facilitators have.

2037 Upon completion of the report to the mutual satisfaction of the reconciliation facilitators  
2038 and the Session, both the Session and the Commission on Ministry shall be asked to receive the  
2039 report and include it in their minutes. The report should be considered a historical document. If  
2040 there is a pastoral transition within three years of the report, COM shall take steps to ensure pastoral  
2041 candidates have access to it upon request.

### 2042 *Closing Service of Worship*

2043 The closing service of worship is an opportunity to celebrate with the congregation the  
2044 progress they have made as well as point them forward for the continuing work of living into the  
2045 fullness of reconciliation in Christ Jesus. The congregation's ordinary worship style should be  
2046 affirmed and followed whenever possible. However, in preparing the liturgy reconciliation  
2047 facilitators should consider inclusion of one or more of the following:

- 2048 1. **Appreciation** of each other and/or the congregation. What have members learned  
2049 about each other that can be celebrated?  
2050  
2051 2. **Confession** for one's own role in any unrest, conflict, or disunity. What regrets do  
2052 members have that can be expressed publicly?  
2053

2054 3. **Covenantal Commitments** can be invited. Especially as the closing worship frames  
2055 the end of the reconciliation process and points the congregation forward, it is  
2056 appropriate to invite members to covenant to any agreements that have been created.

2057 Reconciliation facilitators are encouraged to craft creative liturgies that incorporate both traditional  
2058 and non-traditional elements. Reconciliation facilitators should consult with the pastor, musicians  
2059 and other liturgical leaders within the congregation in crafting the worship service. However, some  
2060 possibilities for the closing worship include the following:

- 2061 1. **Written responses**, including call to worship, prayers, and litanies.
- 2062
- 2063 2. **Passing the Peace** using a different format from the congregation's ordinary practice.
- 2064
- 2065 3. **Creative arts** or other expressions that may convey the poetry and power of God's  
2066 reconciling work in, upon, and through the congregation.
- 2067
- 2068 4. **Physical movement**, including such things as coming forward to sign the covenant, standing  
2069 to affirm it, lighting candles – the possibilities are limited only by one's imagination!

#### 2070 *Distribution and Receipts of an Evaluation Form*

2071 The week after the closing service of worship, an evaluation form should be sent to all  
2072 pastors, elders, and members who participated in the reconciliation process, with a request the  
2073 form be returned to the presbytery office. The evaluation form is found as Appendix G on page  
2074 75.<sup>71</sup>

#### 2075 *Follow-up Monitoring with the Session and Pastoral Leadership*

2076 Although the closing service of worship has conveyed a clear boundary that the  
2077 reconciliation process has ended, it is appropriate for the reconciliation facilitators to remain in  
2078 contact with the pastor(s) and Session for the next six months to a year. Periodic contact may  
2079 support the congregation's leadership to continue in the agreements for which they have made a  
2080 covenant and to facilitate continued healthy interactions, communication, and decision-making.

2081

2082

2083

2084

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pages F25-26, quoted with slight modifications.

2085 **Appendix A: Pre-Reconciliation Survey**

2086 Please be entirely open in sharing your perceptions of what has happened in this church.

2087 Your information will be given to the reconciliation facilitators and is **for their use only.**

2088 Information in this survey will be **held in confidence** by the reconciliation facilitators.

2089 **Please return to: [bradmunroe1963@gmail.com](mailto:bradmunroe1963@gmail.com) or 4141 E. Thomas Rd., Phoenix, AZ 85018**

2090 Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: Under 20 \_\_\_\_\_

2091 Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 20-29 \_\_\_\_\_

2092 Are you a member? \_\_\_\_\_ A non-member/friend? \_\_\_\_\_ 30-39 \_\_\_\_\_

2093 How many years have you been attending? \_\_\_\_\_ 40-49 \_\_\_\_\_

2094 How frequently do you attend Sunday services? Weekly \_\_\_\_\_ 50-59 \_\_\_\_\_

2095 2 – 3 times per month \_\_\_\_\_ 60-69 \_\_\_\_\_

2096 About once a month \_\_\_\_\_ 70-70 \_\_\_\_\_

2097 Less than once a month \_\_\_\_\_ 80+ \_\_\_\_\_

2098 List five **current strengths** of this church?

2099 1.

2100 2.

2101 3.

2102 4.

2103 5.

2104 List five **current challenges** being faced by this church?

2105 1.

2106 2.

2107 3.

2108 4.



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**Appendix B: Reconciliation Waiver and Consent Form**

We, the Session of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, having invited the Reconciliation Team of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon to lead our congregation in a reconciliation process, agree to hold harmless the Presbytery, its paid and elected leadership, and the Reconciliation Team facilitators.

We consent to the reconciliation process and have been informed of what to expect in the process, what role the facilitators will play, and what expectations are placed upon the Session and congregation for the reconciliation process to be as fruitful as possible.

We understand no promises have been made nor can be made regarding the outcome of the reconciliation process and trust God’s Spirit to speak as we listen, pray, and participate to the best of our abilities.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Clerk of Session	Date	Name	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Name	Date	Name	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Reconciliation Facilitator	Date	Reconciliation Facilitator	Date

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**Appendix C: Agreement to Enlist Reconciliation Services**

We, the undersigned, hereby agree to have the Presbytery of Grand Canyon Reconciliation Team (RT) provide reconciliation services to us. The parties agree to refrain from initiating court proceedings against each other for issues related to those in the reconciliation process while sessions are in progress or until an impasse is declared.

It is the intention of the parties that any controversy or claim between them shall be settled in a responsible and mutually satisfactory manner. Therefore, both parties agree voluntarily to cooperate with the reconciliation process by reducing poor communication patterns and by staying with the issues at hand. Both will actively participate in the search for fair and workable solutions. If successful, the process will result in a signed covenant that describes the commitments made by all parties.

Costs for the reconciliation services will be charged as follows:

- Educational workshop materials – approximately \$10 per person plus food
- Facilitation costs during the information gatherings, healing and problem-solving phases: refreshments, copy costs, if needed.

Reconciliation services will begin upon receipt of a signed agreement and will be held regularly until a mediated agreement is signed or until an impasse is declared. The reconciliation process will be determined to be at an impasse if the facilitators declare it to be such because of: (1) lack of good faith participation by either party; (2) lack of substantial progress after several sessions; (3) the decision of either participant to withdraw in writing, after consulting with the facilitators.

Because of the extensive participant review and revision, we agree to hold the facilitators harmless against errors, omissions, or future negative consequences stemming from the provision of the process and/or the implementation of the covenant. We understand that the facilitators cannot guarantee the outcome or success of the agreement and, therefore, agree to the above terms:

_____	_____	_____	_____
Clerk of Session	Date	Name	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Name	Date	Name	Date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Reconciliation Facilitator	Date	Reconciliation Facilitator	Date

2196

**Appendix D: Sample Problem-Solving Letter**

2197 To: Reconciling Presbyterian Church

2198 From: Reconciliation Facilitators

2199 Re: This Saturday's Reconciliation Problem-Solving

2200

2201 Listed below are the "workable problem areas" we have defined as expressed in the  
2202 interests people brought to the small group dialogues. We present these to you as questions we  
2203 will seek to address on Saturday. In preparation for Saturday, we invite you to come with your  
2204 own ideas about how to address these questions. However, we ask the following of you as you  
2205 prepare your own, personal responses:

- 2206 • Please remember this is a **collaborative exercise** and your voice is but one voice among  
2207 many, yet all voices will be heard.
- 2208 • Your ideas should move the congregation toward **health and wellness**.
- 2209 • We especially encourage you to consider ideas that respond to "**interests**" that may lead to  
2210 creative, broadly embraced, unifying solutions (c.f. the accompanying PDF).

2211 The process on Saturday will unfold as a "structured dialogue," (which is to say there will  
2212 be rules), that will unfold in four stages:

- 2213 • Step One: we will **BRAINSTORM** ideas, (including hearing the ideas you bring with you),
- 2214 • Step Two: we will **EVALUATE** ideas, (using interest-based evaluations),
- 2215 • Step Three: we will **BUILD CONSENSUS**, (using interest-based decision-making),
- 2216 • Step Four: we will write a **COVENANTAL AGREEMENT** regarding how we want to  
2217 be the church together.

2218 Here are the two questions we will address on Saturday:

- 2219 **1. What expectations do we have for one another – for ourselves, our pastors, our elders  
2220 and our fellow church members – when we experience a time of disagreement/crisis?**  
2221
- 2222 **2. How do we create an appropriate (Reformed) process that allows for congregational  
2223 input to Session on issues that affect the life of the church and also allows Session to  
2224 communicate to the congregation the hows, whys and whens behind their decisions?**

2225 We wish to acknowledge the reconciliation process can be difficult work, and we are  
2226 amazed by the willingness of many to be honest with one another and to seek true, spiritual, and  
2227 authentic reconciliation. This is the Way of Jesus, folks. We invite all members to participate on  
2228 Saturday regardless of one's prior participation in the reconciliation process. Saturday is the  
2229 proverbial place where "the rubber meets the road." Please come speak the truth in love, listen to  
2230 others with humility and respect, and be prepared to allow God to do a "new thing" in the life of  
2231 your church.

## 2232 **Appendix E: Problem-Solving Process Step-By-Step**

### 2233 **Step 1: Preparation**

- 2234 • Send letter to the congregation
  - 2235 ○ Explanation of the Process
  - 2236 ○ Description of the Workable Problem Areas (WPA)
- 2237 • Invite congregants to list ideas to address each WPA
  - 2238 ○ Frame invitation as a part of a collaborative exercise (not all ideas will be instituted
  - 2239 but they will be heard)
  - 2240 ○ Ideas should move the congregation toward health and wellness

### 2241 **Step 2: Brain Storming (large newsprint paper hung on wall for each WPA)**

- 2242 • Explain the process again
  - 2243 ○ Position based vs. Interest based
- 2244 • Participants write their ideas on a large post-it and stick on corresponding newsprint
- 2245 • Review ideas as a large group (do not evaluate at this point)
- 2246 • Add additional ideas as they arise (do not elicit nor discourage)
- 2247 • Note diversity of ideas
- 2248 • Merge similar ideas
  - 2249 ○ There should be 3 to 4 ideas per WPA
  - 2250 ○ If anxiety emerges during the process of elimination starts, let people express
  - 2251 their concerns through “I” statements, impact statements, and preference
  - 2252 statements (have examples of these written on newsprint, hanging on wall)

### 2253 **Step 3: Initial Evaluation**

- 2254 • Evaluate one WPA at a time
- 2255 • Divide into small groups
  - 2256 ○ Incorporate diversity through Spectrum exercise or Four Corners exercise
- 2257 • Each small group evaluates one single idea
  - 2258 ○ Introduce practices on page 52 (have them written out on newsprint, hanging on
  - 2259 wall)
- 2260 • Representative from each group will present evaluation of idea to whole group
  - 2261 ○ Present in the form of Appreciations/Concerns

### 2262 **Step 4: Final Evaluation**

- 2263 • After each small group has presented on their assigned idea the groups reforms to come
- 2264 up with a fully formed solution to the WPA
- 2265 • The small groups presents their solution to the large group
- 2266 • The large group offers feedback in the form of Appreciation/Concerns



- 2267 • Two small groups then join and come up with one consensus solution to the WPA and
- 2268 present to the larger group
- 2269 • Larger group offers feedback in the form of Appreciation/Concerns
- 2270 • Finally, the whole group meets together to come up with a consensus solution to the
- 2271 WPA

2272 **Step 5: Writing the Agreement**

- 2273 • The participants craft the agreement; facilitators act as scribes and coaches
- 2274 The final agreement should follow all the guidelines laid out in the manual under Step 5
- 2275

2276

**Appendix F: Sample Written Agreement**

2277 Trusting in God’s love known through Jesus Christ and reliant on the wisdom and courage of the  
 2278 Holy Spirit, we covenant to practice the following behaviors for the sake of the peace, unity, and  
 2279 purity of the Church:

- 2280 • To begin every meeting of Session, Deacons, or their committees with the practice of  
 2281 Word, Share, Prayer in order to nurture the spiritual bonds between us,  
 2282
- 2283 • To allow any member participating in one of the above meetings to have permission to  
 2284 “call time-out” and request a period of prayerful reflection as a reminder of our  
 2285 commitment to be guided by God’s Word and Spirit.  
 2286
- 2287 • To teach and practice the habits of interest-based conversations, particularly when seeking  
 2288 to discern God’s guidance for the healthy practice of ministry and mission. Specifically,  
 2289 we will invite one another and commit ourselves to the following:
  - 2290 ○ Express concerns with respect: “I wonder about...,” “I am concerned about...,”
  - 2291 ○ Express preferences that are values based,
  - 2292 ○ List concerns and preferences (interests) of all present
  - 2293 ○ before seeking a solution,
  - 2294 ○ Practice B.E.N.D. – Brainstorm, Evaluate, Negotiate, Decide.  
 2295
- 2296 • To teach and practice the habits of making “I statements” – “I think...,” “I believe...,” “I  
 2297 prefer...,” “I notice that...,” “I wonder about...,” “The impact this has had on me is...,”  
 2298 “What you can expect from me is....”  
 2299
- 2300 • To be mindful to speak directly to those with whom we have a concern. In order to  
 2301 encourage direct communication, we commit ourselves to the following:
  - 2302 ○ Request a time and place when all/both parties can discuss with openness and  
 2303 emotional safety
  - 2304 ○ Use I-language to express areas of agreement and appreciation,
  - 2305 ○ Use I-language to express areas of concern and/or request for change,
  - 2306 ○ Always allow others the opportunity to respond and be prepared to listen,
  - 2307 ○ Seek constructive agreement whenever possible and respectful disagreement  
 2308 whenever necessary.
  - 2309
- 2310 • At least once a year, we will celebrate a “Reconciliation Sunday” as part of the worship  
 2311 calendar.

2312 Signed: The members and friends of \_\_\_\_\_ Church

2313 Date: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_

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### Appendix G: Reconciliation Evaluation Form

Presbytery reconciliation facilitators recently worked with your congregation for the purpose of conflict reconciliation. As a Presbytery Reconciliation Team, we are committed to providing quality ministry and need your feedback to evaluate and improve our service. Please complete this evaluation form within one week. We encourage you to include your name so that we can contact you if needed for more information. Thank you for taking the time to share your evaluation with us.

1. In what activities did you participate? Mark all that apply:

- I did not participate
- Educational workshop #1
- Educational workshop #2
- I was interviewed one-to-one by a reconciliation facilitator
- Small group, structured dialogues
- Large group, healing circle
- Large group, problem-solving
- I am on Session
- I am on staff

2. Rank the overall helpfulness of the reconciliation process in working through the issues involved in your conflict.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not helpful			moderately helpful				very helpful		

Comments:

3. Were all relevant issues between parties actually aired?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Many unaired			mostly aired				well aired		

Comments:

2346 4. Evaluate the skill and competence of \_\_\_\_\_ in leading the process.

2347 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2348 Unskilled moderately skilled highly skilled

2349 Comments:

2350

2351 5. Evaluate the skill and competence of \_\_\_\_\_ in leading the process.

2352 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2353 Unskilled moderately skilled highly skilled

2354 Comments:

2355

2356 6. How fair and impartial were the reconciliation facilitators in eliciting and addressing all  
2357 viewpoints?

2358 1. 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2359 Unfair mostly helpful very fair

2360 Comments:

2361

2362

2363 7. How helpful was the process personally to you in learning new ways to deal with conflict?

2364

2365 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2366 Not at all somewhat helpful very educational

2367 Comments:

2368

2369 Self-evaluation:

2370 a. I was able to participate in the mediation process in a way that moved beyond blame, in a  
2371 spirit of self-examination.

2372 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2373 Not at all somewhat able very able

2374 Comments:

2375

2376 b. I was able to see elements in my own behavior that contributed to the stress present in our  
 2377 relationship system (e.g. triangling, taking on the hurts of others, blaming, distancing, win-  
 2378 lose behaviors, etc.)

2379 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2380 Not at all somewhat able very able

2381 Comments:

2382

2383 c. I was able to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the reconciliation process to  
 2384 express regret or confess to others the elements in my own behavior that contributed to the  
 2385 conflict.

2386 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2387 Not at all somewhat able very able

2388 Comments:

2389

2390 d. I continue to reflect on my own behavior and I want to continue to try to manage my own  
 2391 stress and any resulting reactivity better in the future.

2392 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2393 Not at all somewhat able very able

2394 Comments:

2395

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**Appendix H: Interest-Based Negotiating**2397 *Interest-Based Negotiating*

2398

- a. Parable of the Two Sisters with One Orange

2399

- i. Two sisters spent a rainy day arguing over one orange. Back and forth the sisters bickered until mom and dad stepped in to demand quiet. After listening to both sisters, it became clear to mom the sisters held incompatible *positions* (i.e. they each wanted the orange) but compatible *interests*. Can you guess their compatible interests?

2400

2401

2402

2403

- i. Older sister wanted the peel for baking, while younger sister wanted the fruit for eating!

2404

2405

- b. *Position-based argumentation is the norm for our conflicts:*

2406

- i. Goal is victory

2407

- ii. Reactive to others

2408

- iii. Do most (all?) the talking

2409

- iv. Insist on your rightness

2410

- v. Insist on your position

2411

- vi. Refuse to consider alternatives

2412

- vii. A contest of wills

2413

2414

- c. *Interest-based negotiation creates opportunities for creative, win-win scenarios:*

2415

- i. Parties are problem solvers

2416

- ii. Listen actively

2417

- iii. Clarify, clarify, clarify concerns

2418

- iv. Explore interests

2419

- v. Highlight shared interests

2420

- vi. Brainstorm and use creativity

2421

- vii. Agreement satisfies each interest

2422

2423

- d. *Self-reflection questions:*

2424

- i. Do you listen both at the surface level and “between the lines”?

2425

- ii. Do you seek to enter into the other’s perspective, to listen from their point of view?

2426

- iii. Do you ask yourself, “What do I really want here? What are my actual hopes, concerns, and needs in this situation?”

2427

2428

2429

- e. B.E.N.D.

2430

- i. Brainstorm, Evaluate, Negotiate, Decide

2431

2432

2433 **Appendix I: Bibliography**2434 ***Books on Conflict Transformation Skills***

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  - 2488 • Anxiety and Leadership in the Church
  - 2489 • Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches
- 2490 ***Workshops Hosted by the Healthy Congregations Institute (Columbus, OH)***
- 2491 • Healthy Congregations
  - 2492 • Healthy Congregations Facilitator Training
- 2493 ***Workshops Hosted by the Bowen Center (Georgetown, VA)***
- 2494 • Introduction to Bowen Theory (online training)
  - 2495 • Bowen Theory in Organizations (online training)
- 2496