

The Twelve Disciples(hip) Habits



12 Steps to TLC+ for Healthy Congregations

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Toward a Healthy Congregation: 12 Steps to TLC+

The steps described below are “best practices” for creating, cultivating, and sustaining healthy relationships for congregations, boards, committees, and small groups. Consistent practice of these steps will transform them into holy habits of TLC+ (ways of **T**hinking, **L**istening, **C**ommunicating, and “+ **L**ife”).

STEP	DESCRIPTION	TLC+ STAGE
Building the Foundation		
Step 1	Respect Each Other as the Body of Christ Affirm Scriptural truth Choose kindness and gentleness Affirm hope	Thinking
Step 2	Active Listening Skills Mirroring Paraphrasing Validating	Listening
Step 3	Using “I Language” I think, I feel, I prefer Impact and preference statements Speak only of your own experience vs. “others” or “they”	Communicating
Step 4	Personal Responsibility and Accountability Focus on managing yourself rather than managing others Open yourself to chagrin, regret, and confession Affirm forgiveness and reconciliation for yourself and others	+ Life
Creating Space		
Step 5	Practice the Pause “The Holy Pause” Self-calming Bracketing and planning conversations	Thinking
Step 6	Listen to Each Other’s Shared Experiences Take the long view Create space Encourage conversation Practice empathy	Listening

Step 7 Practice Self-Differentiation Communicating

Self-Definition + Connection = Self-Differentiation
I think, I value, what you can expect from me is....

Step 8 Remain Open to Mediation + Life

Sometimes we need help to work things out

Living Toward the Beloved Community

Step 9 Problem to Solve or “The Blame Game”? Thinking

Brainstorm
Evaluate
Negotiate
Decide

Step 10 Perspectives, Narratives, and Interests Listening

Perspective: Walk a mile in another’s shoes
Narrative: See the world through another’s story
Interests (not positions): What matters most to each person
Creates space for dialogue
Take the bricks out of the wall to create a bridge

Step 11 Values-Based Conversation Communicating

Articulate your values
Describe shared values and where there are differences in values
Why are you saying what you’re saying?
Search creatively for possible “bridges”

Step 12 Setting Boundaries + Life

Hard on behavior vs. soft on people
Consequences for persistent violation of community standards
Describe behavior with specificity
Describe consequences if no change vs. if change occurs
Describe process for reconciliation

Discussion

1. Which of the steps does your group (church, board, committee, small group, etc.) do well?
2. Which of the steps does your group need to improve?
3. Rank steps 1-12 in terms of what you do best (1) to what you most need to improve upon (12).
4. Which step(s) do you want to work on first?

Step 1 - Respect Each Other as the Body of Christ

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

1 Corinthians 12:24-27 God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1. **Worshipful Work** In his book *Transforming Church Boards* Charles Olsen lays out a strategy for changing the perception of church councils as being “board meetings” to being experienced as “worshipful work.” As members of the body of Christ, something different should be happening as we gather to plan and lead, something more than simply doing the “business” of the church. How can we do our work with a sense of calling and purpose, being inspired rather than “put-upon”? It all begins with the way we treat one another in our work together. We are God’s people in community. Olsen speaks of a Session that has a banner across the front of its meeting room identifying the folks who gather there: “A Community of Spiritual Leaders.” This is a not-so-subtle reminder that when the boards or committees of the church gather, they are working toward God’s agenda and God’s glory and not their own.
2. **The Body of Christ** As Paul writes to the Romans, it seems clear that something new and different is happening. A new people has been created. Old barriers are broken down. Jews and Gentiles are now one family. God’s grace is sufficient for all. All are one in Christ Jesus. We, as brothers and sisters, are part of a community rooted in God’s grace. This new reality of our being in Christ together should impact the way we see things, the way we do things, the way we live together as the body of Christ. We are a community charged to treat one another with kindness, gentleness, and respect. And as members of that community, we are not representatives of particular groups, or self-interested, but set apart to seek and to do God’s will. Members have different skills, gifts, and abilities as part of the body of Christ, and they are all brought to bear to serve him.
3. **Called by Grace, Called to Grace** As we gather—as congregations, committees or small groups—Paul reminds us that none of us deserve to be there. None of us are smart enough or powerful enough or loving enough. We have been called out by God to accomplish God’s mission by grace. It is by God’s mercies alone that we accomplish anything! Our work together begins and ends with praise to God for this truth. Our coming together and working together is all about worshipping God in all that we do, for we are called by grace and called to grace!
4. **R-E-S-P-E-C-T** Eric Law uses the acronym RESPECT, which both summarizes the sense of our “worshipful work” and sets the tone for all the 12 Steps. R – take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others. E – use **Empathetic** listening. S – be **Sensitive** to differences in communication or cultural styles. P – **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak. E – **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions. C – keep **Confidentiality**. T – **Tolerate** ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers.”

Discussion

1. What words describe your experience serving as an elder, deacon, member of a committee or small group?
2. How did you feel when your term was over? Relieved? Exhausted? Energized? Humbled?
3. Would you serve again if asked? If not, what would need to change to convince you to say “yes”?

Step 2 – Active Listening Skills

John 7:51 “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?”

Proverbs 18:13 If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame.

1. An important beginning place is to treat each other respectfully in order to build trust, believing we all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ. If we will create an open and receptive environment so other people feel comfortable speaking, we get started the right way. That means we also set aside what we are doing to give our undivided attention.
2. Listen to understand what the other person is saying, not to agree or disagree. This might be called mirroring, where you reflect what you think you are hearing from another person to be sure you understand their viewpoint.
3. In order to move a discussion forward, you might paraphrase what you think you heard from another speaker, asking for clarification to be sure you have understood their viewpoint correctly.
 - Focus on the speaker’s experience – “You believe...,” “You propose that...,” “Am I hearing you correctly that...?”
 - Notice facts and feelings – restate the other person’s views to be sure you understand.
 - Don’t judge or evaluate – summarize with empathy.
4. Listen with empathy and compassion, which means you seek to understand the commitments, concerns, values, and experiences of another person.
 - “I can see this situation through your eyes now, even if I don’t fully understand.”
 - “What you say makes sense even if we may disagree on this subject.”
5. Remember: the discussion is an opportunity to gain information and new insight on a topic or question rather than a time to defend your position or perspective.

Discussion

1. Think of a recent conversation or discussion you had with someone which required a decision on your part. What were some of the listening skills you were able to use to gather information and help defuse a difficult situation?
2. What style do you use when you are in a conflict situation?
 - A. Passive – dodging the controversy by being physically absent or by being silent.
 - B. Aggressive - speaking in a way which is rude or may pride oneself on "telling it like it is..." or “Your problem is that...,” which shows little awareness of the effects of our words on others.
 - C. Assertive – speaking clearly and forthrightly without either avoiding the issue or attacking other persons, using “I” statements instead of “you” statements.

Step 3 - Using "I" Language

Ephesians 4:15-16 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Paul suggests that if we will *all* speak the truth in love, we will use tools in our communications that help us join the Body of Christ together (knitting) and become a healthier community. Doing this will invite everyone to use the listening practices they have learned and take ownership of their own practices to make the whole group better.

1. **Plan:** I will make a commitment that when important discussions need to be held, I will help make a plan (set a date), help decide how we can address the topic, and thus not ambush someone who has another opinion on the topic.
2. **Priorities:** I will focus on what I believe is important, valuable, and necessary for the project to move forward. I will focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence, or integrity.
3. **Personal:** I will be specific about my own interests or ideas, not speaking in general and not speaking for others.
4. **"I" statements:** I will use "I" statements to communicate my feelings: "I feel concerned we are being unclear. Is there another way we could word that?" I will speak my truth with "I", not using "you" to accuse another person of some false motive or incorrect information: "I feel confused...." I will avoid adding, "I feel 'like'... or "I feel 'that'" which is likely to become an accusation.
5. **Preference statements:** I will clarify my intentions so others will understand my motives: "My purpose for this visit is...", "My goals for this project are...", or "My preference for this is..." Then I will allow others to do the same, so we are all hearing each other's interests and values.
6. **Impact statements:** I will make statements of impact: "This is important to me because...", or use X, Y, Z statement: "When you did or did not do X in situation Y, I felt Z. Example: "When you spoke out before I was finished sharing my thoughts in our meeting, I felt frustrated."
7. **"I" reflection:** I will recognize that I don't always have the truth, so I need to honor the truth that God works through each member of the body. (Remember Paul!). Be aware God may be speaking through another person and remember that no one possesses all of God's truth.

Discussion

1. What kinds of events or discussions trigger a response from you that takes you away from using "I" statements and leads you to use less helpful techniques?
2. With your church Session or Diaconate, are you and your colleagues using "I" statements more or "you" statements? How has that affected your work together?

Step 4 – Personal Responsibility and Accountability

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

Matthew 7:2-4 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is the log in your own eye?

1. **Grace means...check your ego.** Paul makes it very clear that none of us have done anything to deserve being called into service or into community. Grace covers all. When the body of Christ gathers, each of us is reminded that our strength, wisdom, and insight comes from God alone and that apart from God we can do nothing. That reminder serves well to keep egos in check. None of us can claim any position of leadership based on our own merit. It all comes from God. This one thought should be the filter through which our thoughts, words, and actions pass.
2. **Grace can begin...with baby steps.** Sometimes, when our egos get in the way, we don't really want to look in the mirror at our own sin. We much prefer to look out the window at others' sin, the speck in another's eye being far more interesting than the log in our own eye. Simply put: when our egos get in the way, we may not be ready to confess that we are the problem, that *our* actions and *our* attitudes are hurting relationships. On such occasions, it may be helpful to start with baby steps. Chagrin and regret can be precursors to confession.
3. **Grace means...confession is an invitation.** There is a reason why a prayer of confession is part of the opening of our worship services. We need to be honest both about *who* we are and *whose* we are. There is no hierarchy among God's people. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We all have the same need of God's grace. We all need to be honest about our faults and failures. The Gospel invites us to take personal responsibility and personal accountability for our actions and attitudes. It takes two to tango, but no one can force me to dance but my own self.
4. **Grace means...a new future is possible.** Acknowledging faults and failures opens the door to accepting the good news that the future can be different from the past. There is forgiveness from God and a mandate to forgive ourselves and one another. When God's people gather and are honest with themselves and with one another, there is always the possibility for new beginnings. We are not tied to our past if we choose to let Christ set us free. "In Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

Discussion

1. What issue in your congregation, board, or small group do you wish could be dealt with and put to rest?
2. What are some ways chagrin, regret, confession and forgiveness might clear the way for meetings to be more effective in the future?

Step 5 – Practice the Pause

Psalm 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God,” says the Lord.

Mark 8:22-23 Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes, he asked him, “Can you see anything?”

Jesus was a master of diffusing tense situations. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was tested by the religious authorities. They hoped to trap him in a mistake. It is hard to imagine that Jesus returned these queries with a quick retort. More likely he stopped, thought for a moment, and crafted a reply. Jesus must have been aware that his words and actions would be examined carefully, and he knew he was being watched by the religious authorities. Every public action had the potential to turn into a conflict. In the story of healing the blind man at Bethsaida, Jesus used his moment of silence to walk to the outskirts of the village. There he put saliva on the blind man’s eyes to heal him.

1. **Pausing when triggered** In *The Use of Motives in Teaching Morals and Religion* (1917) Thomas Walton Galloway describes the pause as that space “which lies between stimulus and response. Its function is to correlate and adjust behavior to stimulus.”¹ Pausing allows a response to be formed in the cerebral cortex, as opposed to a knee-jerk response from the mammalian or reptilian portions of the brain.
2. **Self-calming** Walking away quietly allowed Jesus to gather his thoughts. It also allowed him to focus on the blind man’s needs. Other methods of self-calming include taking deep, slow breaths; making an observation such as, “I need to note that I am feeling...;” or calling “time-out” on the current conversation for a brief period of time (e.g., ten minutes to 24 hours).
3. **Bracketing** Time-out is a form of bracketing, which allows for eliminating other distractions and planning for a successful interaction. Another form of bracketing is to “put an issue into a box” and focus solely on the topic at hand, which is not always easy, especially when triggered.
 - a. Emulate Jesus in moments of conflict or potential conflict.
 - b. Use a pause to calm yourself, instead of replying in anger.
 - c. Use a pause to craft a thoughtful response.
 - d. Walk away for a moment to gather your thoughts, if necessary.
 - e. Focus on the problem, without allowing distractions to interfere.
 - f. Respond from the place of your personal values with empathy, compassion, and courage.

Discussion

1. If someone called you a racist for advocating courses in African-American, Latino, or Asian History, how could you use a pause in crafting your reply? Remember, Jesus often used a question in his response.
2. When have you been in a situation where you did not pause and had to suffer the consequences? For example, have you ever given your child a punishment that was more onerous than deserved? How might pausing, calming, or bracketing have helped (e.g., focusing on one misdeed instead of a day full of them)?

¹ Often attributed to Victor Frankl, Rollo May, or Stephen Covey, the original author seems to be Galloway.

Step 6 – Listen to Each Other’s Shared Experience

Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

1. **Consider the effect of your decision on the next seven generations.** All cultures have processes for resolving conflict in decision-making. Most of them share important principles. This method comes from our Native American brothers and sisters and many indigenous people use it. “Seven generations” seems like a long time, but it was 150 years ago Presbyterians came to Arizona. They built churches and established missions that remain a part of our network today. Decisions about where to construct or how to conduct ministry were long-lasting. They still impact us.

If the practice is interpreted less literally it still has great value, especially when conflict is involved. It encourages us to listen to voices that may not be present at the table – our children, grandchildren, the marginalized, or future members of the church – and reminds us to respect one another.

2. **Create space.** As much as possible, hold discussions around a circular table. This eliminates power dynamics of space. The message is clear: all come to the table with an equal voice. Each participant can see and interact with the others. Just as the physical environment matters, so does making space with time. All participants should set aside an hour or two for uninterrupted conversation. Leave a space open for the “seventh generation.” This allows new ideas and solutions to flourish. Christians may interpret this as leaving an opportunity for the Spirit to speak.
3. **Encourage conversation.** Everyone must have the opportunity to speak, be heard, and listen.
4. **Practice empathy.** Brene Brown says, “Empathy is a vulnerable choice that connects with something in myself that is also painful.... Empathy supports connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.”¹ Empathy might be defined as: Vulnerability + Compassion = Empathy.

It is the personal connection created by empathy that allows for bridges of understanding to be built between people, knocks down barriers to honest sharing, and supports curious, respectful engagement with those around us, especially if we disagree with each other. Empathy is required if we are to form the kind of interpersonal connections that allow us to receive influence from each other, remaining open, kind, inquisitive, and respectful in the face of differences. As Alan Alda notes, “We are not really listening until we become willing to be changed by what we hear.”

Discussion

1. Choose a statement spoken by someone with whom you disagree. How can you mirror that statement, so that you might have some empathy with the speaker?
2. Who is the entity, represented by the “seventh generation” or the Spirit, whose voice needs to be heard in your decision-making?

¹ Brene Brown, *Brene Brown on Empathy*. (YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>), accessed May, 20, 2019.

Step 7 – Practice Self-Differentiation

Matthew 12:1-14 (In religion, Jesus defines himself with the Pharisees.) “...the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Matthew 12:15-42 (In reputation, Jesus defines himself by his behavior.) “...the tree is known by its fruit.”

Matthew 12:46-50 (With relatives, Jesus defines his essential relationships.) “...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

1. **Self-Definition + Connection = Self-Differentiation** What is self-differentiation?¹ It is an act or instance of differentiating the self, a setting apart of oneself as distinct from others such as one's family, colleagues, or congregants. How do you learn to become self-differentiated? The learning process begins the moment you are born. You continue to learn to engage in self-differentiation through your developmental years. Each new relationship requires you to engage in self-differentiation, learning how to be your true self in order to share yourself with others.
2. **Respecting boundaries, knowing your role** What does self-differentiation look and feel like when you engage successfully? You understand where you start and the other(s) stop. You know yourself and know your role. You are clear about the thoughts/feelings/actions for which you are responsible and do not take responsibility for anyone else's thoughts/feelings/actions. You are clear about where your boundaries are and what can be expected of you. You stay grounded in this self-definition and open to encountering others.
3. **Choosing to respond rather than react** Self-differentiated behavior responds to others from the place of values. Often self-differentiation uses “the pause” to good effect (see Step 6) in order to choose a response that articulates your core beliefs:
 - a. Here is what I think (based on perceptions of a situation).
 - b. Here is what I believe (based on core convictions).
 - c. Here is what you can expect from me (based on a commitment to act).

Discussion

1. What is your greatest challenge in remaining self-differentiated in your church role?
2. How have you expressed what can be expected of you in a situation where you were clear about what you thought and valued?

¹Self-differentiation is best known because of Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory and is focused on relationships rather than mental illness. It is one of eight concepts used in Bowen's Theory: Triangles, Nuclear Family Systems, Emotional Process, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Emotional Cutoff, Sibling Position, and Societal Emotional Process. Differentiation of self is a fundamental concept in Bowen's family systems theory and is the basis of a systems understanding of emotional maturity.

Step 8 – Remain Open to Mediation

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.

1 Kings 3:27-28 Then king Solomon answered and said, “Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.” And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

Matthew 18:16 If your brother or sister will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Conflicts are an inevitable part of life. They can occur between individuals, groups, teams, members of a Session, or within a congregation. Different types of conflicts arise about ideas, facts, goals, personal style differences, and values. Though unavoidable, conflict can be addressed in healthy and productive ways that can help and heal. Sometimes we need help to work things out; being open to mediation helps.

Best practices in mediation

1. Use a “Round Robin” format: everyone has a voice and an opportunity to speak.
2. Speak one at a time, no cross-talk: ensure that everyone’s voice is respected.
3. Speak directly to the mediator(s): mediators are the unbiased presence.
4. Document: have a scribe who is not a part of the process take notes.
5. Listen actively and reflectively: use “I statements” and mirroring to clarify what is heard.
6. Mediator(s) summarizes issues: ensure that all information is captured correctly and everyone feels heard.
7. Address one issue at a time: focus is critical and diffusion of focus confuses issues by merging them together.
8. Pray: use prayer as a means for establishing and maintaining a sense of connection to one another and God.

Issues that cannot be mediated

While mediation can facilitate healing and renewal, it is critical to understand that some issues cannot be mediated. Attempts to mediate the issues below are destructive and must be avoided.

1. Addictive behaviors
2. Pathological or abusive behaviors
3. A wide gap in power between the parties
4. Issues where the real decision-maker is not present or issues where people whose cooperation is needed, or who may be significantly impacted by a decision, are not represented
5. Issues requiring investigation and disclosure before fair negotiation can take place

Discussion

1. When have you found yourself in the position of mediator in a situation and what did you do?
2. What do you think/feel the most challenging part of participating in mediation is? Why?

Step 9 - Problem to Solve or “The Blame Game”?

Proverbs 2:2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom and incline your heart to understanding.

Proverbs 18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

Sometimes a problem-solving conversation can devolve into a blame game, focusing on the faults and failures of others rather than finding a good solution. In order to provide focus, it helps to discuss only one issue at a time. Discussing two or more issues simultaneously leads to a lack of clarity and confuses the conversation. When discussing the one issue, a helpful acronym is BEND: Brainstorm, Evaluate, Negotiate, Decide.

- 1. Brainstorm** Brainstorming is a way of gathering ideas that allows for everyone to contribute. Make sure to take enough time for this part of the discussion before evaluating ideas. It may be helpful to list ideas on a board or gather ideas on sticky notes. Brainstorming is the time to gather ideas, not the time to express an opinion about them.
- 2. Evaluate** Once all parties have had an opportunity to express their ideas, evaluate the ideas collected based on objective criteria such as your church’s mission and vision statement, core values, declared objectives and goals, or clearly defined policies or practices. Make sure to include the positive along with the negative. For instance, creating another Sunday School class may solve the problem with current overcrowding, but there may not be space available to do so.
- 3. Negotiate** It is important to remember that not everything can be negotiated. Negotiables include behaviors, things, and structures or systems. Things that can be discussed but not negotiated include beliefs, personalities, emotions, and perceptions. Abuse, any illegality, and any issue in which there exists a power differential between parties cannot be negotiated (see Step 8). Focusing on interests (see Step 10) provides a helpful foundation for negotiation.
- 4. Decide** Taking time to brainstorm, evaluate, and negotiate can lead to making decisions that address everyone’s interests. While some decisions will be time-critical, rushing to a decision before spending the necessary time for the initial steps can be a mistake.

Discussion

Imagine how you might use the BEND steps to address the following:

1. The new choir director plans to start auditioning people for the choir rather than including anyone who wants to sing.
2. A sizable memorial gift has been given to the church. The Buildings and Grounds Committee wants to use the funds to repave the parking lot and the Missions Committee proposes using the funds for a youth mission trip.

Step 10 – Perspectives, Narratives, and Interests

Acts 6:1-7 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples.... What they said pleased the whole community....

Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not to you own interests, but to the interests of others.

What facilitates robust yet healthy dialogue within groups? Three practical tools are perspective, narrative awareness, and interest-based dialogue.

1. **Perspectives** Perspective-taking is the ability to view an issue from multiple perspectives in order to build a bridge of understanding and connection with another person. Perspective-taking includes honoring the experience of another person, adopting the same frame of reference, and seeking to understand the “logic” they are using, be it rational thought, emotion, or intuition. It may never be possible to get to the point of agreement, but it is usually possible to clarify commonalities and specify areas of difference.
2. **Narratives** Narrative awareness is grounded in the truth that no one has direct, unmediated access to “facts.” We often infer or impute motivation to another person that is actually unknown and may be quite different from the other person’s actual motivation. Facts are also mediated by our perception of events which in turn is influenced by our perspective. The combination of inferred or imputed motivation and facts filtered through limited perception often creates a distorted narrative. It is usually helpful to ask, “What is the narrative I am telling myself about this situation?” Sharing your own narrative and listening to the other person share their narrative can clarify misunderstandings and help build agreement, or at least clarify the specific nature of disagreements.
3. **Interests** Two sisters argue over one orange. The sisters hold incompatible *positions* (i.e., they both want the orange) but compatible *interests*. Can you guess their compatible interests? The older sister wants the peel for baking while the younger sister wants the fruit for eating! Interest-based negotiation contrasts with positional thinking by asking questions about the different needs and values each party brings to a dialogue. Whereas positional argumentation often leads to a binary, win-lose choice, interest-based negotiation introduces depth and breadth to a dialogue, creating opportunities for creative, win-win scenarios.

Discussion

1. What might be the perspectives and interests of the following persons on the topic of immigration? A border patrol officer, a Honduran migrant, a rancher, a “liberal” or “conservative” pastor, a teacher in a border town elementary school, and the mayor of a border community?
2. Imagine you observe a pastor speaking harshly to a parishioner. Now imagine differing narratives you might tell yourself about this situation. How might your responses differ given the differing narratives (e.g., the pastor just lost a family member so you respond with compassion, or this behavior has happened previously so you respond with concern or anger)?

Step 11 – Values-Based Conversation

Joshua 24:15 As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord.

Philippians 4:8 Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Scripture is peopled with those who articulated their values as personal conviction. From Joshua to the apostles, our spiritual forebearers stood upon the firm foundation of values-based convictions for their speech and actions. Church history is also fragrant with the sweet aroma of conviction. From Martin Luther’s, “Here I stand I can do no other unless convinced by the Word of God,” to Martin Luther King’s, “I have a dream,” people of faith have spoken and acted upon their values.

Why does it matter that we are able to claim and name our core values? Much, if not most, congregational conflict centers around competing claims that are based in values-based convictions. Churches often argue about an issue because of its perceived importance to multiple people. The dilemma is that these multiple people often perceive what really matters, what to them are values-based convictions, differently from one another, with each response affirmed by someone who is thoughtful, kind, faithful, and loved by Jesus. So who is correct in each of these situations? Values-based conversation creates the opportunity to go deeper than a typical Session debate allows. Hearing and being heard at the level of core values creates the ability to be able to:

1. **Name each person’s core values.** Have each person name one or two (and no more) values-based convictions that are important to them on the issue. Ask, “What is your value-based conviction about this issue?”
2. **Name your shared values.** List everyone’s values on a board where they can be seen by all and then notice the convictions that are precisely the same or very similar to one another.
3. **Describe the differences in your values.** Note the values that are different from one another, naming their importance and legitimacy even if they are not the most important value to you personally.
4. **Brainstorm ways to build a bridge.** With equal measures of grit and grace, search creatively for ways to “build a bridge” that connects as many values as possible.

The next time your Session, Diaconate, congregation, or staff members are having a “robust dialogue” that seems to be heading toward possible conflict, or if the conversation is already conflictual, connect the conversation to your core values!

Discussion

1. Have each person in your group name their two core values related to being a community of faith.
2. Describe an instance when creative problem-solving led to a bridge being built between multiple core values that were significant for members of the group.

Step 12 – Setting Boundaries

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

Setting boundaries is one of the most difficult tasks for a congregation, yet it is needed and required in every church at some point. When someone persistently violates behavioral expectations shared by the community, it is the obligation of each individual, and especially of congregational leadership (i.e., the Session), to confront the individual and invite them to practice behavior that, as our ordination vows declare, “promotes the peace, unity, and purity of the church.” (W-4.0404). All things can be forgiven but not all things should be tolerated.

- 1. Be soft on people but hard on behavior.** Affirm that the individual whose behavior persistently violates the shared behavioral expectations of the community is a child of God, forgiven in Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, and their behavior is fracturing the peace, unity, and purity of the church. Echoing the words of the preacher, “God loves you just the way you are and too much to let you continue to do what you are doing.”
- 2. Focus on behavior and its impact rather than motive or intent.** When having a boundary-setting conversation, the behavior and its impact on others must be described with specificity (e.g., “When you do X, I/we experience Y”). Some people are unaware of the impact their behavior has on others. By telling them, in firm and respectful ways, they may be motivated to initiate change in what they say and how they relate to others. An appropriate response when confronted with a mirror into one’s own misbehavior or the impact of one’s behavior on others is chagrin, regret, confession, and/or repentance.
- 3. Describe the consequences for continued misbehavior.** The purpose of the consequence is not punishment but to protect the health and integrity of the Body of Christ by stopping the behavior. For example, a consequence may be to ask for someone’s resignation from a particular service in the church for a specific period of time or indefinitely.
- 4. Describe the process for reconciliation and restoration to shared community.** With every boundary-setting conversation there must be a path laid out toward reconciliation and restoration. For example, one option might be to ask for a written apology and commitment to behave in a different manner.

Discussion

1. What are some shared behavioral expectations your congregation has regarding how to relate to one another?
2. What happens in your congregation, committee, or group when someone persistently violates shared behavioral expectations? What do you think should happen?

Becoming a Healthy Congregation: Overview of the Twelve Steps to TLC+ Schedule for Two-Hour Workshop (or Retreat)

Before the workshop

Send a copy of LEST 3 document for all participants so everyone has their own copy. Ask participants to read LEST 3, especially pages 1-2, prior to the workshop.

Workshop Outline

1. **Opening Prayer, Welcome and Introductions** (10 minutes)
2. **Overview** (10 minutes) - purpose: give a brief, broad overview of the steps
 - a. Review pages 1-2 as list of the 12 steps
 - b. Point to pages 3-14 for further study at a later date: small groups, staff/Session, etc.
 - c. Focus on general attitudes about conflict and communication
 - d. Focus on Tools: give a brief description of each set of tools:
 - i. Thinking, Listening, Communicating, +Life
3. **Focus on General Attitudes: Continuum Exercises** (15 minutes) - *purpose: invite gentle self-disclosure*

Workshop leader chooses between 3a or 3b, depending on the context, participants and purpose.

- a. Personal Preference Continuum - (work with local leadership to choose the questions)

How do you feel about / react to conflict?

 - i. Leader(s) chooses 1 or 2 questions from below.
 - ii. Assign one side of the room to be #1, the other side #10 (2-9 are the middle).
 - iii. #1 represents “I got this, it's easy” and #10 “I avoid this whenever possible.”
 - iv. Ask participants to stand between #1 - #10 based on their personal preference.
 - v. Interview 2 or 3 participants.
1. Church disagreements that lead to emotional intensity.
 2. Situations that lead to one or more people using raised voices.
 3. Situations where there is a clear bully in the room and everyone else is silent.
 4. Explicit criticism of your work.
 5. Implicit criticism of your work.
 6. Brainstorming situations where everyone seems to have a different idea and “knows” their idea is the best.
 7. When there is strong disagreement between “The Traditionalists” and “The Entrepreneurs.”
 8. When there is a high level of uncertainty and church leadership is at a loss for how to move forward.

- b. Church Conflict Continuum – (work with local leadership to choose the questions)
How does your church (as a whole, as an interconnected organism) react to conflict?
- a. Leader(s) choose 1 or 2 questions from below.
 - b. Assign one side of the room to be #1, the other side #10 (2-9 are the middle).
 - c. #1 represents strong agreement with the first statement and #10 strong agreement with the second statement.
 - d. Ask participants to stand between #1 - #10 based on their personal preference.
 - e. Interview 2 or 3 participants.
1. Disagreement means a lack of respect or caring vs. Disagreement means engagement and involvement.
 2. Leaders should discourage differences vs. Leaders should encourage differences.
 3. In stress created by change, only a few voices are heard vs. In stress created by change, many voices are heard.
 4. In stress created by change, direct dialogue decreases and indirect dialogue (triangling) increases vs. In stress created by change, direct dialogue increases.
 5. It is common for individuals to react defensively or explosively toward the views of others vs. It is common for individuals to react calmly and thoughtfully toward the views of others.
 6. It is common for individuals to speak for others: “Everyone thinks...” vs. It is common for individuals to speak for themselves only.
 7. It is common for groups to focus primarily on solutions or positions vs. It is common for groups to focus on the process: “What are our needs?” “How can we creatively fulfill multiple interests...?”
 8. In my congregation, timing is uneven – delay, delay, then rush at the end vs. In my congregation, timing is steady – plan, discuss, and decide in due course.
 9. Past conflicts are either never discussed or are talked about in black/white terms vs. Individuals are aware of past hurts, own their role in past conflicts, and take responsibility not to project the past into the present.
4. **Focus on Thinking Steps (1, 5, 9): Corner Exercise** (15 minutes)
- a. Assign a corner of the room for each step.
 - b. Participants go to the corner assigned to the step *they feel is most significant/impactful for healthy congregational life*. Discuss in corner groups why they feel the way they feel. Have each corner group have one person designated to speak out for their group to explain their reasoning to the other corner groups.
 - c. Interview one participant from each corner, “Tell us about your response/choice.”
5. **Focus on Listening Steps (2, 6, 10): Corner Exercise with a Twist** (20 minutes)
- a. Use the same process as #4 above with this twist: divide participants into two groups (e.g. men/women, staff/elders, elders/deacons, pastors/laity). Have one group go through the exercise while the other group observes. Then switch groups and repeat the process.
 - b. Participants go to the corner assigned to the step *they struggle with the most*. Discuss in corner groups why they chose this step.
 - c. Interview one participant from each corner, “Tell us about your response/choice.”

6. **Focus on Communicating Steps (3, 7, 11): Corner Exercise with a Twist, II** (20 minutes)
- In the same groups as in 5 above, participants go to the corner assigned to the step *they feel the other group does best and which they appreciate*. Discuss in corner groups why they chose this step.
 - Interview one participant from each corner, “Tell us about your response/choice.”
7. **Focus on +Life Steps (4, 8, 12): Think, Pair, Share** (15 minutes)
- Explain to participants that steps 8 (open to mediation) and 12 (boundary setting) are important but that both of these steps depend upon a healthy practice of step 4 (personal accountability). Therefore, the following exercise will focus exclusively on step 4: personal responsibility and accountability.
 - This will be a “Think, Pair, Share” exercise. Participants are asked to pair with one other. They will be given one-minute to think and two-minutes to share their responses to the following questions.
 - I work harder to (a) manage my own response/behavior vs. (b) manage others responses/behavior.
 - I am (a) open to chagrin, regret, and confession vs. (b) I struggle with chagrin, regret and confession.
 - I find it easier (a) to forgive others vs. (b) to forgive myself.
8. **One Focus / Commitment:** (10 minutes)
- Hand-out 3x5 cards to each participant. Ask each participant to write a “Note to Self” regarding one thing to which they will commit (to learn, to do, to notice, to become aware, etc.)
 - Ask 3 or 4 participants to share their “Note to Self.”
9. **Next Steps** (5 minutes)
- Ask the pastor/group leader to outline the plan for continuing the conversation / learning toward using the 12 Steps to TLC+ in the congregation.
10. **Close in prayer**

Sample Schedule for Weekend Retreat

Friday Evening -- (All activities can be expanded and allowed more time for discussion and dialogue)

- Dinner
- Numbers 1-3

Saturday Morning

- Debrief the previous evening: “What do you remember, appreciate, wonder about?”
- Numbers 4-7
- Lunch

Saturday Afternoon

1. Free time!
2. Dinner
3. Numbers 8-9 (This can be a pre-dinner conversation, too.)

After the Workshop/Retreat

Follow-up with the local leader(s) one week after the workshop to inquire about,

1. Debrief the experience
 2. Answer questions
 3. Next Steps
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