

CROSS

Connection



The Cross Connection is a monthly publication of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod published for its clergy, associates in ministry, lay leadership and ecumenical partners.

From the Bishop

April 2016

God's Beloved People,

I've just read a very helpful piece written by Ken Inskeep of the ELCA Research and Evaluation Office. Ken's office is funded by our "mission support," the portion of our congregational budget that goes to unrestricted support of the church as synod and Churchwide offices. Just as important, this kind of paper would not be possible except for your annual parochial reports, so thank you to all those of you who have filed yours this year and "Please, please!" to the rest of you! We need your information to plan for our common future!

Ken is a skilled and trusted interpreter of ELCA statistics and a very fine writer and armchair theologian. In this piece, a background paper to the effort Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has proposed entitled "Future Directions," (see her article in the February "Lutheran") Ken offers us the statistics that let us see from a 40,000 foot perspective and begin to imagine how God is shaping a future for our church. I don't remember ever seeing such an excellent summary of the last 50 years of Lutheran life in the United States. The paper is posted at www.ewaidynod.org.

The picture isn't necessarily a pretty one, but then again, it is a human picture and history and so it reflects our efforts, good and bad. It certainly reflects the work we have attempted, over and over, to capture an urgent future in a very complicated era. I'd be very interested to see what you "see" in this paper. Here's a few things I noted:

- The peak year for ELCA (and predecessor church bodies) membership and financial support was 1965. I was a sophomore in high school. Where were you and how did you come into active membership in the church over the years?

- We're a Baby-Boom church, as the statistics show our hey-day years of 1946-1964.
- In terms of evangelism and stewardship we're locked-down, stubborn, faithful and persistent in our practices, and we don't change them!
- Local needs of congregations take priority. The heart of the church is in the congregations and most congregations believe they are doing exactly what they should be doing.
- At two major turning points, the mergers in the early 60's and in 1986, the world changed dramatically just as we sought renewal with out-of-date tools!
- "In a negative, self-reinforcing feedback loop, as mission support declines and whole units were down-sized/eliminated, the case for mission support becomes more difficult to make." (p. 11).
- The age-old challenge to the church is "how to present its theology so that it is recognizable and appealing to outsiders."

So there is our promise and peril. There have been easier times to be the church but no time is more important than right now! We remain a church bearing the promise of Life right at the center of our being. I pray that the promises recounted in Holy Week rekindle your desire to share these promises with others!

Easter Joy!

Bishop Martin Wells



Change; Being Made New

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!
2 Corinthians 5:17

What does Easter mean to you? When you come to church on Easter Sunday and during the season of Easter, what do you expect to happen? Many come to hear about the power of God in the risen Christ Jesus. We want to be reminded of God's love for us, and how far God goes to be in relationship with us. We listen for God's grace; undeserved love. It is a time to hear an inspiring sermon and to receive encouragement. Perhaps it will change our perspective, our understanding of who God is, and how God acts, and impact our self-understanding in relation to God. Easter may be a time to be challenged to behave differently, perhaps to be more loving or forgiving. It may be a time to be make a commitment to live out our faith more intentionally; stewardship. But I want more than that!

I want to be made new. I want the resurrection power to transform my life, not in any way that I can even determine or predict. I want to be made new in Christ whatever that looks like. I want to be joined with Jesus so that I am clothed with Christ. Maybe I won't even recognize myself! It is a bit scary don't you think? But I don't want any less than this for Easter, otherwise it is like any other time. Of course the resurrection power is at work every day but there is something about being receptive and ready for anything to happen during this season. It involves change. Does this sound good to you?

We prefer the known to the unknown, even when we don't like the way things are. However "If we do what we've always done, we'll be what we've always been." We want young people to come to church but we don't want anything to change. We can all joke about how Lutherans don't like change, and we fear it. But actually the experts say we fear loss, not change. "People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss" says Ron Heifitz in his books on Leadership and Change (or watch him on YouTube). Loss is a part of Good Friday which doesn't feel "good" at all. The fastest growing church I have been involved with (not a Lutheran church) changed their worship services to using a rock band and the older people didn't like the music at all. But when I talked to them they said they would put up with anything so as to have young people in church. They have quadrupled in size and have 3,000 for worship every Sunday and have 9 services every Sunday morning in 3 different venues. The older people got their traditional service back! I guess listening to Christian rock music was their Good Friday, but now they are thrilled.

Transformational Ministry workshops are being offered around the Synod (next one May 14th , 9-noon, at Trinity Lutheran, Coeur D'Alene) and there are 4 main things that Transforming churches have in common: 1. Sense of purpose 2. Willingness to change 3. Shared leadership 4. Relationships; with God, their faith community and the broader community. In this workshop the stages of change are discussed from feeling unsettled, all the way to integrating the change.

Are you willing to be made new by the power of God? When the one who was seated on the throne in Revelation 21:5 says "See, I am making all things new" does that sound exciting to you or scary, or both? I feel both, but I want it anyway. I want to grow into Christ and be transformed by Christ. I am willing to change, I think. Are you? May you be made new by the power of the risen Christ!

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2



CROSSROADS

Redefining Your Vocational Vision

This 2-day workshop will help you to:

- Clearly assess your key vocational strengths, interests, values and transferable skills
- Better understand your best vocational “fit” in terms of your professional strengths and interests
- Identify a number of viable vocational options and potential “next steps”
- Redefine your personal and professional vision for the next chapter in life and ministry
- Develop a workable strategic plan to live out your vision

Upcoming Seminars

Seattle, WA Nov 9-10, 2015 Portland, OR Feb 2-3, 2016
 Spokane, WA April 5-6, 2016 Seattle, WA June 1-2, 2016

There are still some spots available for the upcoming Spokane event!

TRANSFORMATIONAL MINISTRY and LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

For Clergy and Lay People Saturday May 14, 9-noon

At Trinity Lutheran Church
812 N 5th St Coeur D'Alene, ID

Discerning congregational mission, purpose and vision

- How to develop a ministry plan
- Leadership development and multiplication
- Change dynamics
- Conflict management

Led by synod Transformational Ministry team of Pastors:
Duane Anderson, Laura Olsen and Helga Jansons

For any questions contact Pastor Helga Jansons phone 509 380 7122

RSVP by April 29th Helga.jansons@elca.org so that we have enough materials and lunch
No fee. Donations for lunch provided will be accepted.

In preparation for this event:

Bring existing mission or purpose statements if you have them
 Bring any plans or goals that your congregation has developed over the past few years
 Note the leaders in your congregation; church council, committee/team chairs, and informal leaders
 Think of examples of ways in which your congregation has made intentional changes and how that went
 Remember a conflict within your congregation and how it was managed

Presiding bishop

By Elizabeth A. Eaton

Holy Saturday

A space between Good Friday and Easter



MICHAEL D. WATSON

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (John 19:40-42).

None of the Good Fridays in our lives can. The resurrection came after an actual death. The crucifixion was not a metaphor. A heart stopped beating. He breathed his last. A son died. Mothers in Syria and El Salvador and the South Side of Chicago stand at the cross.

But Holy Saturday is more than the necessary and holy space to face death without denial and to grieve without the dulling anesthetic of sentimentality. There is something much deeper going on. It is an invitation to accept that life, as we know it, is over. All of our plans, all of our willfulness and all of our good intentions are over.

On Holy Saturday we are invited to shed our life and enter the tomb. Our effort and righteousness as much as our sin bind us. Our effort to save our lives binds us. This is true as much for the church as it is for each member.

I'm grateful for the faithful innovation and hard work of our people and congregations. I'm not so far removed from parish ministry that I don't remember its struggles as well as its joys. There is something noble and dear about saints who come week after week, year after year to hear and receive the gospel and, as a response to grace, participate in God's reconciling work in the world. But there comes a time to take to heart Jesus' teaching: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

The day between Good Friday and Easter can be seen as empty, a void, something to be resisted at all costs, something to be filled. It is the same reaction that many in our culture have to silence. It's as if sound and activity prove that we still exist. But I think the space between crucifixion and resurrection—truly terrifying and truly compassionate—beckons us from our life to life in Christ. After all, it wasn't all the noise and fireworks that got Elijah's attention, but the sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:11-13).

When we shed our lives and enter the tomb, when silence is all around, then we see that Jesus is already there ahead of us, anticipating us, welcoming us to be still and to die in him and find our life in him. Rest, dear church. □

Holy Saturday. A pause. A space between Good Friday and Easter. A full tomb and, except for the guard, an empty garden. Still. Silent.

We don't pay a lot of attention to Holy Saturday other than as our day of preparation for Easter Sunday. The youth group needs to get ready for the Easter breakfast. The altar guild is busy arranging lilies and preparing the altar. Grocery stores are filled. Eggs are dyed. We are occupied with busy anticipation. We have moved on from Good Friday. Even the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night looks forward to and heralds the resurrection.

We, of course, live after the first Easter. We do know how the story turns out, and it would be contrived to be in Holy Saturday as if we didn't know about the resurrection. But we are given this one holy day to pause. We are given this holy space to grieve, to be empty, to realize that life, as we know it, is over.

This is deeply uncomfortable in our culture. We see this on the news when people start to speak about closure immediately after a tragedy. This could be a well-meaning attempt to relieve the pain, but it doesn't heal. There is danger in moving too quickly from grief. It is important to resist the urge to usher the afflicted to "closure."

Grief from Sandy Hook, Mother Emmanuel, Katrina, San Bernardino and other tragedies cannot be rushed.

I think the space between crucifixion and resurrection—truly terrifying and truly compassionate—beckons us from our life to life in Christ.

Priorities in Context: Sustainability and Membership Growth*A Background Paper for the Future Directions Table*

Kenneth W. Inskeep

Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Revised, January 2016

In this report, I have taken a more thematic approach rather than provide a summary of the actions of the various groups called, over the past 10 years, to discuss the future of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The issues addressed by these groups, however, provide the basis for this report and I believe I have covered the most important themes. The groups include the Blue Ribbon Committee (2006-2007), the Living into the Future Task Force (LIFT I, 2009-2011 and Lift II, 2011-2014), the Group of Nine (2011-2012), the Mission Funding Task Force (2012), the Three Leadership Tables (2012-2013), The Church Council Retreat (2014), and the Conference of Bishop's Think Tank on Mission Support (2014-2015).¹ Each of these groups, in one way or another, addressed the sustainability of the mission and ministry of the three expressions of the ELCA—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization.²

Sustainability

Focusing on sustainability is an effective means for assessing church goals and planning for the future. Sustainability is an important measure of any organization's ability to effectively interact with its environment and, ultimately, to carry out its mission. Sustainability is not only a question of existence, but of capacity and impact. What does an organization intend to do and at what level? What are the resources it needs to accomplish its goals? How much is enough? What do the trends suggest?

Financial Resources

Over the last 10 years, undesignated giving to congregations in the ELCA has declined from 1.85 billion to 1.75 billion (-5%). Adjusted for inflation, the decline is 22 percent. Mission support, which is the money given for the support of synods and the churchwide organization, has declined from \$130 million in 2005 to \$99 million (-24%). Adjusted for inflation, the decline is 37 percent.

The financial resources available to congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization of the ELCA are dependent upon a series of decisions. First, members make a decision to give undesignated contributions to their congregations. In 2014, the average contribution per baptized member was \$465. In 2005, the average contribution per baptized member was \$460 (adjusted for inflation).

¹ The Church Council Retreat focused most of its attention on governance issues.

² The LIFT Task Force was asked to address the whole "ecology" of the ELCA and, as a result, was the most wide-ranging of these groups. It focused on the societal and economic changes in American society and attempted to assess the organization, governance, and interrelationships among the church's expressions in light of the changes. Among its recommendations were proposals to change the frequency of the Churchwide Assembly, to review of how the church addresses social concerns, to review of the constitutional responsibilities of synods, and for an expanded role for the Conference of Bishops in its relationship to the Church Council. At its most basic level, however, LIFT made two recommendations its priority. These recommendations were: 1. support for the work of congregations and, 2. the strengthening of synods so they can be more effective catalysts for mission planning. Both of these recommendations came from a deep concern for the long-term sustainability of congregations and the implications of struggling congregations for the whole church.

Call Process Status

A Process beginning/congregational study	I Interim	AP Associate/Assistant Pastor
B Names received or on-site visits in process	P Pastor	VP Visitation Pastor
C Call in process/issued	CP Co-Pastor	AIM Associate in Ministry
NV New Vacancy	LP Lead Pastor	L Lay Position
TC Term call	SP Supply Pastor	TM Transition Minister
VP Visitation Pastor		(available for the open-ended call)

POS	LOCATION/CONGREGATION	STATUS	PASTORAL CARE	
P	Boise, ID – King of Glory	B	Kristi Bummer	I
P	Boise, ID – Shepherd of the Valley	A	Joel Westby	I
P	Cheney, WA – Emmanuel Lutheran	A	Shelley Wee	I
P	Chewelah, WA – St. Paul Lutheran	NV	Betty Krafft	SP
P	Firth, ID – Bethel Lutheran	A	Paul Malek	TEEM
P	Kennewick, WA – Lord of Life	B	Ron Shipman	I
P	Lind, WA – Good Hope	NV		
P	Mattawa, WA – Grace Lutheran	I	Ginny Kreckling	I
P	Othello, WA – Pilgrim Lutheran	TM	Don Short	TM
P	Pasco, WA – First Lutheran	A	Phylis Stromme	I
P	Spokane, WA – Bethlehem Lutheran	NV	Steve Wee	SP
P	Sprague, WA – St. John Lutheran	C		
P	Wilbur, WA – Wilbur Lutheran	NV		
P	Yakima, WA – Central Lutheran	A	Joel Martyn- A/P	Dean Stewart I

Roster Changes

Calls Accepted

Rev. Linda Fender has received a call to serve as Chaplain at Heart and Home Hospice.

Rev. Don short has received a call to serve as Transition Minister at Pilgrim Lutheran in Othello, WA. He started March 3, 2016

Lutheran World Relief Boxcar Loading

will take place April 29-30

Are your quilts and kits ready?

Celebrating Abundance to Serve in Mission Stewardship Workshops

Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1020 S. A St Moses Lake Saturday April 30th 9-noon

Trinity Lutheran 1300 NE Lybecker St Pullman WA Saturday May 21st 9-noon

Lord of Life Lutheran, 640 N Columbia Ctr Blvd, Kennewick, May 19 5:30- 8:30pm

Advent Lutheran, 13009 E. Broadway, Spokane Valley May 18 5:30-8:30pm

In conjunction with our Synod Mission Campaign “My Synod: Moving in Mission Together,” stewardship workshops for congregational leaders are being offered. Focused on strengthening local congregations in leading annual stewardship efforts, the workshops will include information and insight into the Synod’s Mission Campaign, and offer strategies for incorporating it into ongoing stewardship.

Our guest presenter for these workshops is Marc Rieke, our Mission Campaign consultant. Marc serves as Senior Consultant for The Enrichment Group, a team serving Christian churches in capital and annual fund appeals, stewardship education initiatives, feasibility and visioning studies, and strategic planning efforts. In his 15 years with Enrichment, Marc has led more than 75 successful capital campaigns in churches and church-related organizations.

Workshop participants will have the opportunity to:

- Explore the heart of generosity
- Gain new language and approaches to lead stewardship in healthy and uplifting ways
- Learn how to shift thinking and acting from a mentality of scarcity to one of abundance
- Consider ways to forward mission and ministry vs. emphasizing “budgets”
- Discern how we can best help one another joyfully live into the relationship that God keeps with us
- Better understand how we can deepen faith and serve mission through acts of witness, service and giving

Workshop participants will gain:

- A deepened understanding of the scriptural basis for stewardship
- An expanded knowledge of best practices regarding implementing stewardship appeals
- Language and specific techniques to use in effective stewardship appeals
- A success plan to implement an annual stewardship appeal together with the Synod’s Mission Campaign appeal in your home congregation

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Offers Curriculum Package for VBS

Did you know that Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM), a non-profit organization that supports the outdoor ministries of the ELCA, has a Vacation Bible School Curriculum for use by congregations? LOM’s curriculum from the last few years, including the 2016 theme, “The Jesus Way,” is available in a bundle for use in congregational VBS programs. As Augsburg Fortress no longer produces an annual VBS curriculum, this could be a valuable tool for the congregations that you work with who are looking for a curriculum with a solid theological background.

The bundle includes the preschool, lower elementary/day camp Bible studies, crafts, games, and graphics. The curriculum is perfect for churches looking to create continuity between the camp and VBS experience, or those simply looking for a new and creative approach to VBS. Plus, this VBS curriculum is also great for churches who are trying to be a little more green. The curriculum is downloaded once it is purchased, so churches don’t need to worry about the extra waste (or cost) that comes with buying a fancy boxed VBS set.

For more information, visit the following website www.lomnetwork.org/resources/omcurriculum.

Creating Beauty

Halima Khalil Al Hajj Moussa is a 17-year-old Palestinian refugee, living in Ein El Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon. As a result of violence in Palestine, Halima is one of many young refugee girls displaced by instability in her homeland. Throughout Lebanon, refugees have settled in a variety of housing types, ranging from rented apartments to informal settlements to refugee camps like Ein El Hilweh. Living sometimes 20 or more people to a room in dark, cramped spaces without heat or air conditioning, the refugees worry most about paying rent and providing meals for their families.

Through the generosity of quilters and kit-makers, LWR was able to partner with American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) to distribute Personal Care Kits to refugees living in Lebanon. The contents of the Kits allowed many girls to have a few items of their own in the midst of difficult circumstances. “During ... hygiene promotion sessions at our center, we noticed that many young girls don’t have access to personal hygiene items and share towels with their family members,” said Almaza Al Chaaraoui, head of Women’s Program Center in Ein El Hilweh camp. But beyond receiving these hygiene items, girls were able to use towels from the Personal Care Kits in embroidery training sessions to express their creativity. “We came up with the idea of embroidering the towels [in the Personal Care Kits] so the girls could personalize their towels and learn a new skill at the same time,” said Almaza.

Your gifts of Personal Care Kits not only provided needed hygiene supplies to refugees, but allowed these girls a chance to see the beauty that can be created by their own hands. Sixteen-year-old Hiba couldn’t believe how lovely the decorated towels turned out, as she held her Personal Care Kit in one hand and needles and pins in the other. “Embroidery is part of our heritage and I believe we have a duty to preserve it,” she smiled with pride. “Having a personal towel with a Palestinian pattern is a constant reminder of who I am and where I come from.” With the same care that you pack Personal Care Kits, these young women learned to stitch beautiful designs with care into their newly received towels. Thank you to all of the congregations who work so hard to extend these gifts of love to people like Hiba and Halima!

You are cordially invited to the Lutheran Campus Ministry at EWU Annual Benefit Dinner

April 30, 2016

Doors open at 5 PM. Dinner at approximately 6 PM.

**Advent Lutheran Church
13009 E Broadway
Spokane, WA 99216**

The dinner of pulled pork and fixings is complimentary.
Beer and wine available with donation.

**Guests will be asked to donate to the ministry.
A dessert auction plus a silent and live auction will be held.
Tickets at www.lcmewu.com or call 509.951.5701**

*Help fill the room. Gather your friends & family.
Host a table of 8!*

Dress: Bright casual clothing

*Handcrafted items, new items or gift cards are greatly appreciated
for the auction.*

**Your tax-deductible donation goes towards preserving and
growing this ministry that serves all students attending EWU.**

We appreciate your support!
www.lcmewu.com



Pray with us

We ask that you keep the ministry of the church, our synod, and the whole world in your prayers, as well as the people listed below . . .



For congregations and pastors in call process.

For those who suffer loss, may they find hope.

For children in school, may they learn more than just reading and writing - may they also learn compassion and caring.

For the caregivers, may their actions be rewarded with hope and a sense of kind accomplishment.

For those aspiring to political office, may their ambitions be in the best interest of the people they hope to serve.

For clergy and lay staff in our synod office and in our congregations.

For those facing the struggles of aging, may they find the joy of youth and also know the peace and joy of being older.

Prayer Requests . . . to be included or removed from the Synod Prayer Request list, please send your request to the synod office@ewaidsynod.org, or call 509-838-9871.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Zion Lutheran Church of Spokane Valley is seeking an organist to play for Sunday mornings and special services.

Must have organ and keyboard ability to play liturgy, hymns, and accompany choir anthems.

Email cover letter, resume, and statement of faith
(not to exceed 150 words)
to: office@zionlutheranspokane.org
or Call 509-926-5407

**EASTERN
WASHINGTON
IDAHO SYNOD**

of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

314 S. Spruce St., Suite A
Spokane, WA 99201-5823



**April 2016
Newsletter**

Let Down the Nets
Lifting Our Vision
Jesus First, Last, Always
God's Grace, Our Gratitude
The Spirit Powers Us
No Fear! Transformation
Connections Multiply Miracles
Go, Tell & Serve



Please reproduce any and all articles for publication in congregational newsletters or bulletins.

The **Cross Connection** is also available on the synod website at

<http://www.ewaidsynod.org/synodpublications.html>.

Deadline for articles is the 5th of each month.

Synod Calendar

March 2016

- 14 Global Mission Meeting - All Saints - Spokane, WA
- 16 Fig Tree Breakfast
- 19 Global Mission Meeting
- 19 Rachel Kurtz & Agape at Prince of Peace - Spokane
- 25 Good Friday - Synod Office closed

April 2016

- 15-17 Synod Assembly - Boise, ID
- 18 Synod Office closed
- 23 Mission Interpreter Training - Yakima, WA
- 30 Lutheran Campus Ministry @ BEWU Dinner
5:00 Advent Lutheran - Spokane Valley

May 2016

- 1 Rev. Jillain Ross Installation - Toppenish, WA
- 12 Rural Ministry Meeting - All Saints, Spokane
- 13-14 Candidacy Meeting - Spokane, WA
- 14 Transformational Ministry - Trinity, CDA



Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our Hands

Staff

- Bishop The Rev. Martin Wells
- Director for Evangelical Missions .. The Rev. Helga Jansons
- Program Administrator Cathy Steiner
- Assembly Manager Julia Bennett
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- Net-Worker Linda Howell
- Net-Worker The Rev. David Kappus
- Net-Worker Kristin Koskella
- Net-Worker Jim Peterson

THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

EDITOR: CYNTHIA WOOLEVER—WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

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HOW TO DEAL WITH CHURCH CONFLICT

The governing board met to make their final decision about hiring a new pastor. Having narrowed the field to two candidates after a long discussion, a board member moved for a vote. As expected, another board member objected to the motion. During the discussion, this member made clear that she strongly opposed hiring one of the candidates. Equally clear from the discussion was that the remaining board members favored the candidate that she vehemently opposed! She stated that she would leave the church if the board voted to hire the candidate she disliked. When a final vote was taken, the board unanimously (minus the opposing member, of course) voted to offer the position to the candidate she opposed. What the board did not know at the time was that she was leaving the church because of a job transfer. Was winning an argument more important to her than what was best for the congregation?

Becoming Comfortable with Constructive Conflict

The first step is to accept that conflict is normal. Conflict and disagreements have been part of the church since the days of Paul, Peter, and Barnabas. Christians often disagree on strategies and goals. Whenever people work together on something important, they will see things differently. Research shows that growing congregations exhibit and deal with more conflict than declining churches. Thus, conflict can coexist with growth and lead to positive results.

Discovering the Key Issues behind Conflict

At a regularly scheduled meeting, ask members of the governing board or other decision-making group to individually answer the short list of questions below. Ask people not to sign their names. At the next meeting, distribute the compiled answers and request each board member to silently read the document. Discuss the results together and begin to develop some posi-

tive next steps regarding how your group will approach future conflict.

- During the past two years, have we usually disagreed about the same issue or a different issue each time? If the same, what is that issue?
- If you had to name only one cause behind our disagreements, how would you describe that cause?
- If you had to make a list of secondary causes, what would you put on that list?
- Regarding how our congregation handles conflict, please state in one sentence what you specifically *want* to see happen.

Creating a Healthy Church Culture

The more comfortable we become with discussing differences of opinion, the more we are able to find constructive ways to resolve differences. In a healthy church environment, those conversations are characterized by these traits:



1. Decisions are made by the input and involvement of most members. Damaging conflict brews in churches where too many decisions are made by only a few members and the rest are in the dark.
2. The pastor and other church staff are treated with respect and fairness. There is a process in place (such as a personnel committee) for dealing with complaints.
3. There is system in place for making decisions and assuring accountability. Effective polity—the operational and governance structure of any church—ensures that the system doesn't become an instrument for those willing to take advantage of ambiguity about the exercise of authority. Leaders refrain from making unilateral decisions and process decisions through the appropriate committees and governing board.
4. The church consistently uses a fair process to put the best-qualified persons in positions of leadership. Regular rotation of office holders is part of that process. This allows new people to become involved and prevents any individual from wielding too much influence over a long period.
5. The congregation is outwardly focused and genuinely welcomes new people.
6. The church has a clear mission focus and direction for ministry that is widely shared. Without such unity, destructive conflict flourishes in the vacuum.¹

Promoting Positive Member Behaviors

Every church member should share in the responsibility for more constructive church conversations and effective decision making. Leaders who follow these guidelines can help make that happen.

Assert that every member's view is equally important. Do not tolerate bullying behavior that is so overbearing or aggressive that it leaves no emotional room for other people to disagree.

Keep disagreements public and on the table. Sometimes people fear discussing difficult issues in a meeting because it might cause disunity or hurt feelings. But when conversations go underground, disagreements intensify and make matters worse. Unfortunately, leaders choosing this strategy later regret that they didn't do everything they could to resolve the conflict.

Always talk directly with others. Avoid the temptation to substitute this positive approach with talking about others. Speak only for yourself, not for others. For

example, do not tolerate the phrase “people are saying.” Insist on facts and the names of specific people if someone purports to be speaking for others.

Do not rescue people who try to exert power and control through threats. Common threats are “I will leave this church” or “I will withhold my financial contributions.” When a church yields to such threats, it is never a positive outcome.

Beware of barking dogs. Sometimes churches have one or two members who seek attention and want to win any church fight just for the sake of winning. They are like barking dogs behind the fence when you are walking down the sidewalk. The more you acknowledge their negative noise outside of meetings, the more you encourage it. Don't jump the fence and join them!²

*Don't be a rabbit or a skunk.*³ Skunks stand their ground and fight in odorous ways. They use negative comments, label persons or groups with whom they disagree, or challenge personal motives and character. Most of us are rabbits that would rather run away from such personalities. We need to assert our right to express an opinion or viewpoint that is constructive. By speaking up for ourselves, we guarantee all opinions are part of the discussion.

Hope for Positive Outcomes

The opening example illustrates several factors detrimental to preventing and resolving conflict. The church did not have a process in place to vet and select pastors. One individual had a long-established habit of using threats to get her way. Only when other members finally called her bluff did she realize she could no longer get away with such behavior. Her last vote was her parting shot.

When leaders and members faithfully fill their role as equal participants, set clear boundaries about acceptable church behavior, and create a culture where differences of opinion are expected, congregational life moves toward peaceful decision making.⁴

1. Thom Rainer, “Nine Traits of Mean Churches,” <http://thomrainer.com/2015/03/nine-traits-mean-churches/>.

2. This analogy was part of a comment left anonymously on a blog post.

3. Herb Miller, “Become Comfortable with Conflict: Step One to Moving Beyond It!” *The Parish Paper*, January 2010.

4. Congregations can create formal covenants (see examples at <http://www.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2011/02/Behavioral-Covenant-Samples3.pdf>; or Gil Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).