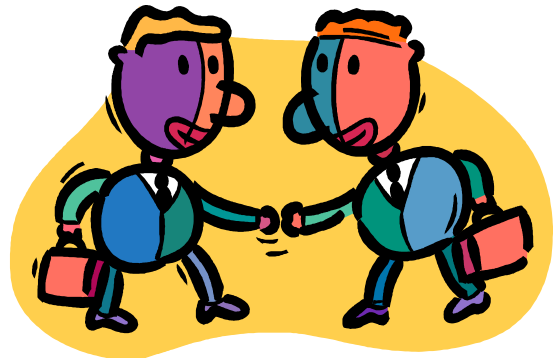


## Conflict Resolution in the Church

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to them, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

It has been said that if you are a group without problems, you are not a group. Organizational and interpersonal dynamics require anyone in a position of leadership, especially in the Church, to accept human differences as inevitable, acknowledge conflict as something that can be healthy and appreciate that conflict resolution skills are as critical to successful ministry as the ability to teach, preach and counsel.



### SOME KEY TERMS WE HAVE TO DEFINE:

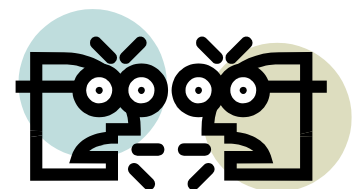
**Communication** is a multilevel process of sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal messages that are distorted by noise, occur with a context, have some effect, and provide some opportunity for feedback.

Communication is a very complex process of encoding and decoding information in the blink of an eye. We are receiving hundreds of pieces of information in a conversation and responding to them at multiple levels that we might not even be aware of.

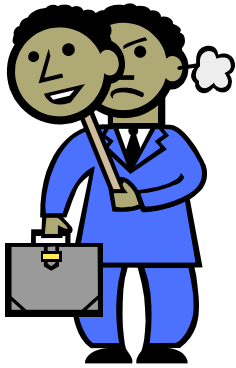


**Negotiation** is communicating or conferring with another so as to arrive at a settlement of some matter. Mindful negotiation involves being aware of the strategies and tactics one uses when negotiating. Negotiation requires the ability to separate out the differences between the position and the interest. Your interest is core. What you want to come out of a negotiation. Your position is the way you have defined your interest. People most likely get stuck when they focus on positions over interests. Individuals and groups are free to truly negotiate when they can focus on their deeper interests and desires, not on the positions that appear in opposition. Negotiation deals with the tangible and the intangible, the cognitive and the emotions. You are dealing with people more than positions.

**Conflict** occurs when there is a struggle over perceived incompatible goals, values, behavior, or power and perceived interference from others in achieving ones goals. Conflict has also been defined as two objects trying to occupy the same space at the same time- a physical impossibility. The complexity of conflict is that it evokes strong cognitive, emotional and physical reactions in us. In Church culture we tend to have a fear of conflict.



(Please turn over)



We define conflict as something that is “Unchristian”. After all, we need to be “nice” to each other. The difficulty of not acknowledging and dealing with real authentic conflict is that its issues never truly get resolved, we end up losing our engagement with others or, worst of all, it can lead to passive aggressive behavior. Passive aggressive behavior is “simply forgetting” to return the call, misrepresenting the truth in a “nice” way or telling someone that they really don’t want what they want.

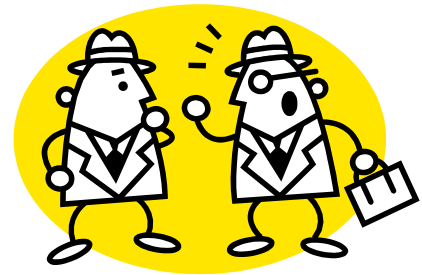
From St. Francis to Steve Covey the primary rule of conflict resolution is, “Seek first to understand, and then be understood.” The most potent tool for successful resolution of conflict is not the mouth, but the ears. Listen with not only your head, but your heart as well. Always support the power base and dignity of the other party.

Don’t confuse sympathy with empathy. Sympathy is agreement. Empathy is simply understanding. Understand what the other person is saying, what they want, and their capacity to hear you are greatly magnified.

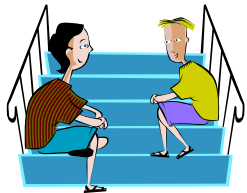
### **Key Strategies for Successful Conflict Resolution:**

#### ***SEPARATE PEOPLE FROM THE PROBLEM***

- Put yourself in their shoes
- Don’t blame them for your problem
- Discuss each other’s perceptions
- Give them a stake in the outcome by making sure they participate in the process
- Acknowledge their emotions; let them blow off steam
- Listen and acknowledge what they’re saying
- Challenge the problem, support the person



#### ***FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS***



- Be specific about your interests
- Get at their interests by asking what is behind it
- Acknowledge their interests as part of both the problem and the solution
- Be concrete but flexible

#### ***INVENT OPTIONS FOR MUTUAL GAIN***

- Separate inventing from deciding
- Broaden your options
- Invent agreements of different strengths
- Identify shared interests
- Dovetail differing interests



Conflict can be good when it is a symptom of discontent. It is in the milling and the refining of our tensions that we engage each other and find true companions on this journey. The gospels are full of stories that begin in conflict and result in a change of heart, a healing or a new openness to the kingdom. Not only is it institutionally wise for us to tend to the conflicts that arise within our communities. It is who we are called to be.

Contributing Author: William (Bill) Coy, MAA/MFT, is a Senior Associate of *La Piana Associates, Inc.*, based in Oakland, CA specializing in non-profit restructuring and re-engineering. Bill is an experienced consultant and teacher with particular skills in helping growing organizations to manage their human resources, develop their leadership talent, and integrate their changing cultures. He is also an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco’s Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management, where he teaches the core graduate level course on Human Resource Management. As an active member of the NACPA Staff, he conducts workshops at annual NACPA Convocations. Various dioceses have also utilized his services and benefited from his vast experience through management training workshops and seminars.