

# GLENVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH LEADERS AND LEARN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION SKILLS

On Friday and Saturday, October 5 and 6 over 50 GCC clergy and lay leaders attended a nine-hour workshop on Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches. The workshop, designed by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC), and sponsored by the Executive Board and the PMRC, was led by LMPC Executive Director, Richard Blackburn. Richard is an ordained pastor and a recognized expert with many years of experience teaching family systems theory and mediating conflict resolution in churches.

Those attending the workshop listened to lectures, participated in structured dialogue and engaged in role-play simulations which contributed to their understanding of the role which conflict plays within the church and how the use of conflict transformation strategies can actually contribute to resolution, healing and renewal. What exactly did we learn?

We learned that conflict is normal in human relationships—both between individuals and within groups. We learned that conflict is neither good nor bad; and that conflict needs to be embraced and confronted, as an opportunity for resolution and growth, rather than avoided. We learned that through the movement of the Holy Spirit, God can be a strong and constant presence as we confront one another and work through our conflicts. We learned that in the New Testament both Jesus and Paul addressed the causes of conflict and the need for resolution. In Matthew 18:15-22 Jesus actually set forth a prescription for resolving our conflicts. In his letter to the church at Ephesus Paul urged Christians to resolve their conflicts by “speaking the truth in love.” (Eph. 4:15-16, 32). Participants completed the Friendly Style Profile, which identified the particular negotiating styles each of us employs in calm situations and in stormy situations. By understanding our own style and that of others, we can work more effectively at identifying the mutual needs and interests which we may share in a given conflict situation. By employing interpersonal peacemaking skills, such as speaking directly with our antagonist, rather than “triangling” with others, effective listening, paraphrasing, avoiding blame and using neutral “I statements” (“I felt hurt when .....”) we can lower the level of anger or frustration and concentrate on resolving what it is that has hurt us. By being hard on issues, but easy on people, ignoring positions and seeking to document needs and interests, and employing a collaborative “win-win” negotiating style, rather than a competitive “win-lose” style we can focus our attention on identifying solutions, rather than harboring resentment.

Once we learn to use these interpersonal peacemaking skills successfully, we can begin to employ them to resolve conflicts within the church. Through learning to really listen to each other, to hear the hurts and respond with a statement of acknowledgement, regret or apology, we can move toward healing. Through collaborative negotiation we can cut through positions and get to needs and interests. Through creation of a written church procedure on resolution of conflict and appointment of a congregational mediation team we can eliminate feelings of powerlessness and move toward resolution and reconciliation.

## REACTIONS FROM SOME OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED:

“The Conflict Transformation sessions on Friday evening and Saturday were a wonderful personal growth opportunity for me. I recognize that when church leadership welcome open disagreement, conflict is viewed as an opportunity for increased engagement and involvement. I was particularly struck by the importance of separating issues and people so that we can be hard on the issues and soft on people. Thanks to all who made this possible.”

*Lloyd A. Bettis*

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“I learned to welcome conflict at GCC, i.e. diversity of opinion, as an expression of passionate member engagement.”

*Pamela Hertel Mers Riedy*

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“I was delighted by how much all of us benefitted from the workshop and the positive impact I think it will have on the life of GCC.”

*Rev. Howard W. Roberts*

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“Being together this weekend freed and empowered all I’ve met to feel and incorporate God’s spirit.”

*Sally Schreiner*

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“This workshop was very helpful to me because it outlined how conflict in church can be healthy and how not dealing with such conflict can lead to a feeling of powerlessness.”

*Barbara Schwarting*