



## POSITIVE WORKING TOGETHER

In response to issues of bullying and harassment the Methodist Church produced the Positive Working Together guidelines. The guidance provides churches with information and resources about conflict management and the promotion of positive working together within the context of bullying and harassment. The resources help churches to develop a culture of positive working, that deals with disagreement and conflict in a way that builds up the church and minimises issues that may lead to bullying and harassment.

Those who lead worship and preach are in a powerful position to enable others to reflect theologically on the themes of positive working together and through their communication with others have potential to shape culture positively. It is hoped that this session will help preachers and leaders of worship to begin to reflect on the themes of Positive Working Together.

This session, written by Gary Hopkins (Ministry Development Officer in the Ministries: Vocations and Worship Team) using the Positive Working Together guidelines, is designed to last about an hour based on the indicative timings below. It can be used in a Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Meeting or as part of a study day. The aim is that everyone should leave understanding the value of Positive Working Together.

### Outline

1. Setting the scene
2. Theological themes
3. Positive working relationships
4. Embracing and understanding conflict: Case Studies
5. Bible and preaching links
6. Closing

### 1. Setting the scene

Watch the Positive Working Together video found on the Methodist website at [Introducing Positive Working Together](#).



Video

### 2. Theological themes

Ask participants to get into small groups. Give them a copy of Resource 1 cut into cards. Ask them to read the cards and decide on three different categories to group them into.



10 mins



Resource 1

Once they have completed this, ask participants about what links they have found between the cards.

Explain that they are taken from the Positive Working Together guidelines and they are from the following sections:

- A Shared Humanity (Cards 1, 2, 6, 9, 13)
- Journeying together in learning and understanding (Cards 3, 5, 10, 12)
- Humanity's need of God's grace (Cards 4, 7, 8, 11)

\*Please note that it is not important for participants to have correctly sorted the cards. The aim of the activity is to get groups to engage with the content of the cards and to explore what they might be saying in the context of Positive Working Together.

### 3. Positive working relationships

So how do we put positive working together into practice?

In groups, ask participants to split a sheet of paper into the following four sections:

- Communication
- How we treat each other
- How we manage information
- How we embrace difference

Ask participants to write what they think positive working together looks like in each section. If participants need some ideas, share a couple from Resource 2.

Hand out Resource 2 to participants so they can compare their ideas to those found in Positive Working Together.

\*It would be helpful if each participant had a copy of Resource 2 to take away from the session.



**10 mins**



Flipchart or  
whiteboard  
& pens



**Resource 2**

#### 4. Embracing and understanding conflict: Case Studies

For the following activity, each group will need a copy of Resource 3 and one of the case studies from [Positive Working Together](#) (case studies begin on page 24). Each group should have a different case study.

Ask the groups to read the case study together and relate it to the practice found in Resource 3.

- What are their reactions to the situation?
- How do they think it has been handled?
- Does it relate to their experiences in church life?
- How might we work towards a positive working together culture?



20 mins



Resource 3



Case Studies

Ask groups to feedback their case studies and reflections.

#### 5. Bible and preaching links

Ask participants to reflect on what they have read and discussed during this session, by exploring links with the Bible. Ask them to reflect in small groups by responding to the following questions:

- Are there any bible stories or verses that come to mind when thinking about today's session?
- How might these bible stories or verses help us to understand how disciples of Jesus should live together?
- What themes might you be able to use in preaching to help others understand how we can live as God's people in ways which enable positive relationships?



10 mins



Bible

#### 6. Closing

Read John 13:34-35 and then conclude the session in prayer.



Pray  
together



## Resource 1

<p><b>Card 1</b></p> <p>Members of the Church are given the tasks of knowing themselves, recognising their uniqueness as well as their shared humanity. They are to reflect on their personal desires, convictions and sense of calling and to relate these respectfully to those of others. Such tasks can be achieved only in a community in which individuals are open to God and one another. By being open to one another, each individual's convictions, experience and insights, however diverse, are brought into conversation with each other.</p> <p>(2006 Conference Report, <i>Living with contradictory convictions in the Church</i>, 4.3)</p>	<p><b>Card 2</b></p> <p>Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.</p> <p>...Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment, and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing.</p> <p>(Covenant Service prayer)</p>
<p><b>Card 3</b></p> <p>Make us of one heart and mind, courteous, merciful and kind, lowly, meek in thought and word, altogether like our Lord.</p> <p>Let us for each other care, each the other's burden bear, to thy Church the pattern give, show how true believers live.</p> <p>(Charles Wesley, <i>Singing the Faith</i>, 686)</p>	<p><b>Card 4</b></p> <p>Sin is our alienation from God which is also our alienation from one another and the whole of the created order, embodied in all the ways in which people and the earth fail to flourish as God intends. Sin needs to be explored as individual choice, action and inaction and as structural or corporate action and experience. There is always an interplay of many factors.</p> <p>(2004 Conference Report, <i>Domestic Abuse</i>, 2.26)</p>

<p><b>Card 5</b></p> <p>By being open to God, the shape and nature of the Church community are formed in response to God's creative spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms both individuals and communities through their openness to God. Participation in the Holy Spirit's work in this way is a fundamental part of any theology of relationships which acknowledges that the Church is a complex community in which pluralism and difference are inevitably present.</p> <p>(2006 Conference Report, <i>Living with contradictory convictions in the Church</i>, 4.3)</p>	<p><b>Card 6</b></p> <p>Connexionalism... describes a way of relating in which individual people and individual groups ... do not exist by and for themselves but with and for others. This is not just a matter of co-existence but of shared existence ... it is of their essence that they are interdependent and discover their true identity and develop their full potential only in and through mutual relationships in which they are constantly sharing resources, both spiritually and materially.</p> <p>(2005 Conference Report, <i>The Nature of Oversight</i>)</p>
<p><b>Card 7</b></p> <p>God's intention is that all have life in abundance (John 10:10). If life in abundance is the goal of creation, and the kingdom of God a symbol of the future which God wills for the whole created order, then all exercise of oversight is to be understood within this purpose.</p> <p>(2005 Conference Report, <i>The Nature of Oversight</i>, 4.5.2)</p>	<p><b>Card 8</b></p> <p>All within the Church have power, in the sense of being able to affect each other. The effects which some people's actions have, can, however, be more significant than those of others. This can be related to their status within the community, the office they hold, the length of time they have been associated with the Church, or because of individual charisma. Power can be expressed and embodied in particular words and actions, or it can be exercised 'non-actively', through an atmosphere which supports, or which silences or stifles ... In all of these places, power can be used to energise and enable, or to dominate and overrule.</p> <p>(2004 Conference Report, <i>Domestic Abuse</i>, 2.48)</p>
<p><b>Card 9</b></p> <p>The interconnectedness of the nature of our relationship with God and with others in the multiple communities of family, friendships, contexts of work and leisure, and church forms the fabric of our being ... How we live with each other, in other words, is a hallmark of who we believe God to be and how we believe God enables us to be.</p> <p>(2006 Conference Report, <i>Living with contradictory convictions in the Church</i>, 6.1)</p>	<p><b>Card 10</b></p> <p>The most significant growth in understanding takes place when empathetic listening, respect and openness for the other is present within the context of a relationship. This growth in understanding often stretches beyond a fuller appreciation of the other's experience and thinking to new insights into the individual's self-understanding and their understanding of God.</p> <p>(2006 Conference Report, <i>Living with contradictory convictions in the Church</i>, 5.4)</p>

<p><b>Card 11</b></p> <p>Forgiveness is that which addresses a break or crisis in a relationship, enabling the relationship to continue ... God, who knows all that has shaped us, loves as the ideal parent who knows the child. God is supremely the one who is able, willing and ready to forgive. In Christ, we have understood God's forgiveness as free, but never cheap, since it comes at the cost of the cross. God forgives, not to punish but to release and bring wholeness.</p> <p>(2004 Conference Report, <i>Domestic Abuse</i>, 2.39 – 2.40)</p>	<p>Card 12</p> <p>Openness to new insights and difference requires us as a Church to engage with different stories beyond those with which we are familiar and comfortable. The unfamiliar can disturb and unsettle the stories we usually live by.</p> <p>(2006 Conference Report, <i>Living with contradictory convictions in the Church</i>, 5.7)</p>
<p><b>Card 13</b></p> <p>Now let me gain perfection's height,          now let me into nothing fall,          be less than nothing in your sight,          and feel that Christ is all in all.</p> <p>(Charles Wesley, <i>Singing the Faith</i>, 498)</p>	



## Resource 2

### Communication

- Paying attention to how we greet and address each other on an everyday basis, ensuring that we are at all times courteous, respectful and appropriate, regardless of the communication format (ie including email/social media, etc.).
- Being mindful of the impact our communication has on others (including body language) and making an effort to understand our communication from the perspective of how it is received by others, regardless of how we intended it to be received.
- Using language which is at all times inclusive, non-discriminatory, appropriate (including in tone, volume, manner) and sensitive to the reasonable expectations and sensitivities of others.
- Being aware of how our power over others is communicated (in whatever way that power is manifest) and taking measures to ensure that such power is not misused or abused (for example, not using our position to preclude theological or other perspectives which are different from our own, thus subtly undermining others).
- Only communicating about other people what we would be prepared to communicate to them face-to-face unless there are overriding and justifiable reasons not to do so (eg safety, confidentiality).
- Making an effort to check with others whenever we fear we may have upset or offended them in order to promote confidence and clarity in our relationships with others.
- Making time to genuinely listen to what others communicate to us, particularly when the situation is sensitive or personally challenging to us. Also making an effort to understand the importance - to the other person and to our relationship with them - of what has been communicated.

### How we treat each other

- Treating every person fairly, equally and with dignity and respect.
- Behaving at all times with integrity, honesty and openness.
- Adjusting our behaviour, including language, if we understand it to be causing offence in any way or if it has caused offence.
- Bringing unfair treatment to the attention of others so as to avoid it being repeated.
- Challenging inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour we have witnessed. Doing this in a constructive, sensitive and proportionate way.
- Responding to criticism of our own behaviour by genuinely listening to what is being said, remaining calm and reflecting honestly on its potential validity before responding.
- Being aware of and promoting the safety of others - both in a physical sense and ensure that there is appropriate emotional safety in our interactions with others.
- Being aware that at times we may lack self-awareness and that this may impact negatively on our behaviour, and being open to receive feedback about this.
- Being careful about how we exercise power, particularly where this is related to our position or office, potentially leading to spiritual bullying, where God is invoked to legitimise a form of behaviour.

<p><b>How we manage information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being aware of the power associated with possessing information.</li> <li>• Being aware of the potential impact on others of either sharing or withholding information which affects them.</li> <li>• Adjusting how sensitive information is shared (including the format used) in order to avoid any negative impact on others wherever possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>How we embrace difference</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuing and celebrating the differences in others and the uniqueness of each individual.</li> <li>• Valuing and celebrating the diversity of cultures and backgrounds within the Church and in wider society.</li> <li>• Reflecting honestly on our own prejudices about others and addressing the impact which these may have on our own attitudes and behaviour towards others.</li> <li>• Embracing the fact that others will sometimes hold opinions or take approaches we may find challenging. Responding to this in a way that reflects how we would wish them to respond to hearing our opinions on the issue.</li> <li>• Accepting that power is distributed unequally between different groups in society and behaving in ways which are sensitive to this fact.</li> </ul>
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### Resource 3

Conflict is natural, normal, neutral, and sometimes even delightful. It can turn into painful or disastrous ends, but it doesn't need to. Conflict is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. Conflict simply is.

*Caring Enough to Confront*, David Augsburger (Regal, 2009)

When the conflict cycle is not broken, the church usually becomes ineffective in sustaining itself and reaching its community. Those outside have no desire to affiliate with a conflicted church.

*Breaking the Cycle of Conflict*, Gary R. Allen  
[http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200503/200503\\_050\\_break\\_cycle.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200503/200503_050_break_cycle.cfm)

### Five essential elements for effective conflict resolution

#### a) Learn to recognize and address a conflict in its earliest stages.

This is something we all know intrinsically, but emotionally we find difficult to practice. We have the notion or the hope that the ensuing conflict will go away by itself or at least the disputing parties will simply let the issue rest. Combined with this is the reality that we all are prone to chronic avoidance in our important relationships. However we also know that conflicts that are postponed will usually reappear at a future time that is even more inconvenient than the beginning.

We procrastinate in the early phases of conflict management because most of us simply do not enjoy conflict of any kind. Through early intervention in a conflict situation we will probably have less damage control to deal with as opposed to waiting until it is too late. Early intervention may prevent the interpersonal destruction that often ensues as problems go unattended.

#### b) Keep everyone focused on the conflict issues.

It is important that we clearly define the issue that each party is concerned about. There is a tendency for people to focus on too many areas or issues which in the end brings greater

confusion and even more conflict. As individuals it is so easy for us to get sidetracked or bogged down by matters that do not pertain to the priority issue at hand. Participants may have to be constantly reminded about what the issue is and in this way we will avoid chasing rabbits.

#### c) Provide the three 'Ps' of conflict management.

**(i) Permission:** Parties need permission to disagree without feeling guilty. This is a key issue. Each person needs to be able to communicate openly, even when an issue is tension-filled. Pressure is often reduced when individuals are reminded that conflict in itself is neutral, natural and normal.

**(ii) Potency:** Each person needs to be able to state their position with strength and clarity. Even as individuals are sharing their feelings and opinions in a conflict situation, they can be helped to more clearly express what they mean eg by being asked questions such as "you mean to say you felt slighted when X did not invite you to speak at the meeting?" This helps parties to more readily express the issue at hand. Too often people beat around the bush when they are trying to discuss their deepest personal differences. Getting the real issues on the table so that a solution can be found is critical.

**(iii) Protection:** People involved in conflict need to be protected from being needlessly hurt and from needlessly hurting others. People are already emotionally experiencing hurt when they ask for help. It is important that they are protected from becoming even more hurt. This is where a neutral person with the right facilitation skills can be helpful.

**d) Enable the parties to see a way out of the conflict situation** by suggesting options to their present approach, situation or behaviour. There will always be possible points of agreement, even as the two parties communicate their areas of concerns. Using a neutral mediator who is skilled in spotting opportunities to build on potential points of agreement can help. A mediator or facilitator will be able to suggest unique solutions that often cannot be seen by those who are entangled in a heated conflict. Although the concept of forgiveness is often important in some contexts, the process of forgiveness is itself often a difficult journey, and care must be taken to recognise where individuals are on that journey. It is not helpful to make forgiveness a condition without taking into account these matters.

**e) Work to turn every conflict into a problem to be solved** — and involve all parties in searching for solutions to the problem. By taking a proactive, exploratory approach which encourages parties to take responsibility for designing a resolution to their own conflict, even the most challenging problems can lead to very creative solutions.