

Positive  
**Working Together**



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## Section 1

### Promoting good working relationships and managing conflict in the Church

These guidelines have been produced to assist districts, circuits and local churches in dealing with bullying and harassment. In doing so it is recognised that the promotion of positive behaviours in the life of the Methodist Church and managing conflict well when it occurs are closely linked and of critical importance. It is recognised that the Church is not immune to displays of unacceptable behaviour, and that bullying and harassment can be a significant issue. Whilst the primary intention of this guidance is to provide advice on issues relating to bullying and harassment, it is recognised that this often occurs when issues of conflict arise and become problematic. The guidance therefore provides information and resources about conflict management and the promotion of positive working within the context of bullying and harassment.

Although this guidance promotes informal approaches to dealing with issues of bullying and harassment, it is recognised that some matters are so serious, or relationships have become so strained, that it is appropriate to hold others to account and challenge their behaviour via the Church's formal processes.

In this document a range of sources is quoted, both from the Methodist Church and other Christian documents, and also from other contexts and traditions, where these are pertinent to the subject. The definition of unacceptable behaviour and bullying and harassment adopted in this guidance is as follows:

***Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.***

***'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.***

***Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved.<sup>1</sup>***

*This definition is explored further below (see Section 12).*

<sup>1</sup> *Dignity at Work: Unacceptable Behaviour, Bullying and Harassment. A Comprehensive Guide for Workplace Representatives in the Not for Profit Sector of Unite the Union Rosenburgh and Connolly 2008. Unite 2007*

## Section 2

### Who this guidance is for

This document is potentially useful to anyone associated with The Methodist Church, particularly the guidance it provides in relation to positive behaviours and managing conflict in relationships.

Different groups of people are associated with the Church in different ways. It is important to be clear about how this guidance applies to each group, and how it relates to other aspects of the Church's polity.

- **Ministers:** this guidance is offered to all ministers. It is put forward within the context of the covenant relationship which exists between ministers and the Conference.

This guidance is issued by the Methodist Council, and this body is responsible for any review and updating required. If the informal processes proposed here are appropriate in a particular situation but fail to resolve issues of dispute or concern then the matter may potentially be raised under complaint procedures (see Section 12 of this Guidance).

- **Members of the Methodist Church:** this guidance is offered to all Church members.
- **Lay employees:** lay employees have contractual provisions which refer to specific personnel procedures. Such provisions take precedence over this guidance. Therefore the contractual provisions applying to lay employees will specify how matters of concern may be addressed in procedural terms. Further guidance for lay employees is available in the Lay Employment Guidance Pack.
- **Persons who are not Church members** but are involved in the life of an individual church or circuit: the Church has no jurisdiction over such people. However, the Church expects all those involved in its life to behave with respect and dignity for others, as set out in this guidance.

## Section 3

### Why “Positive Working Together”?

The Methodist Church recognises the serious impact which poor behaviour and badly managed conflict can have on individuals, communities and on the Church more widely.

A range of policies and procedures already exists to help manage these issues within the different contexts in which they sometimes occur. These include:

- the Methodist Council Dignity at Work Policy, applicable to Methodist Council employees
- the Grievance Procedure (model) contained in the Church’s “Lay Employment Pack” which is recommended to local Methodist employing bodies for incorporation into lay employees’ contracts of employment
- the Complaints and Discipline Process
- the Grievance Procedure for ministers as approved by the Conference.

At the same time the Church also recognises the importance of promoting a more proactive approach, helping people work together to prevent bullying and harassment, and manage conflict appropriately at an informal level before it reaches a point where individuals feel they have no option but to raise a formal grievance or complaint.

Reflecting on their own experiences and understanding at local level, a number of individuals have raised the need for additional guidance on issues of unacceptable behaviour - including bullying and harassment. This is combined with

the increasing body of national and international evidence which shows that a positive and proactive approach can help avoid everyday, low-level poor behaviour escalating into highly damaging conflicts.

The guidance aims to:

- Establish a basis for the Methodist Church’s approach to prevention and management of poor behaviour by informal means, based upon theological reflection and understanding, and best practice where applicable.
- Be clear about how such informal approaches relate to the context and formal procedures of the Church.
- Be clear about what the Church expects from those to whom the guidance is offered, both in terms of positive behaviours and those which the Church considers to be unacceptable.
- Describe the range of options available to those wishing to pursue an informal route to resolution of conflicts or concerns.
- Be rooted in the covenant relationship that exists between ministers and the Conference (recognising that this is not applicable to lay employees, volunteers or others). Where applicable, the Covenant relationship strengthens our commitment to positive working, both in providing a context for seeking support and being proactive in modelling and encouraging good behaviour in ourselves and others.

## Section 4

### Overall context

There is an established legal framework concerning bullying and harassment. In reality, however, only a very small number of the most serious and protracted cases are likely to end up on a legal pathway to resolution. Even these cases can only proceed if all formal, internal Church procedures have been exhausted. As a Church, this may not be the most appropriate starting point for this work. Rather, it may be helpful to consider the underpinning theological principles,

drawn from existing Methodist theological reflection. This may provide some helpful insights into the promotion of positive working relationships and behaviours that may help to prevent conflict from escalating in the first place.

This guidance should be read in the context of other Church policies such as Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults, and care needs to be taken to ensure that, where appropriate other policies are accessed and actioned.

## Section 5

### Positive Working Together - theological themes

Some theological themes are identified in order to assist reflection and inform issues relating to positive working together, promoting good working relationships, and situations where incidents of bullying and harassment are alleged.

The approach to bullying and harassment set out in this section is rooted in Methodist tradition, and draws upon

the theological thinking expressed in Conference reports, liturgy and hymnody.

Positive working together is viewed through the lens of three key themes: a shared humanity, journeying together in learning and understanding and humanity's need of God's grace.

#### A Shared Humanity

All humanity is made in the image of God, created for relationship with God and with each other. This shared humanity of all people and the desire of Christians to grow in the knowledge of God, themselves and each other is explored in the 2006 Conference Report *Living with contradictory convictions in the Church* which states:

*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. (4.3)*

Additionally, the report provides helpful ideas about the richness and breadth of human relationships and how these may be informed and enhanced by understandings of God:

*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. (6.1)*

Christian discipleship includes a commitment to the church as the Body of Christ in the world, where each part has a distinctive function but is part of a whole. Christian understandings of God as one divine being who is Trinity emphasise the relational nature of God. *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) gives such an example: "to speak of God as a loving communion of three

coequal 'persons' suggests that the Church should be a community of mutual support and love in which there is no superiority or inferiority." (2.1.9)

Methodism emphasises 'relatedness' as essential to its understanding of Church. The Methodist connexional principle as described in *Called to Love and Praise*: "... witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God." (4.6.1) According to the 2005 report, *The Nature of Oversight*, 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.*

For Methodists the prayer at the heart of the Covenant Service is a significant expression of the commitment to growing in discipleship. The introduction to the prayer is a reminder that:

*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.*

The prayer is a deeply personal one, but is prayed alongside others in the church community. The words are a powerful counterpoint to anyone grasping at status or claiming superiority over their sisters and brothers in Christ.

**...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.**

The humility expressed is not seen as a licence to treat others, or oneself, as willing victims, recognising that all, including the strong and powerful, are called to take on servanthood. Rather, it may be seen as an encouragement to value oneself and others in new ways. This is echoed in the hymns of Charles Wesley, for example 498 in *Singing the Faith*:

**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.**

## Journeying together in learning and understanding

**H**ow people grow in their understanding of God and themselves, both individually and in community, and how difference of opinion and perspective may be accommodated are key aspects of positive working together. The 2006 Conference report *Living with contradictory convictions in the Church* considers the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in human relationships, recognising that different ideas and perceptions are often held, often on contentious issues:

**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. (4.3)**

In this context, it is also helpful to consider the importance of listening to and understanding each other. The report goes on to say:

**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. (5.4)**

that differences of understanding and perspective may bring to the church community:

**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. (5.7)**

Early Methodists drew strength and encouragement from the mutual accountability of the class meeting. The hymns of Charles Wesley are rich in the imagery of individuals being gift to each other, and describe their interdependence. For example, *Singing the Faith* 686:

**Make us of one heart and mind,  
courteous, merciful and kind,  
lowly, meek in thought and word,  
altogether like our Lord.**

**Let us for each other care,  
each the other's burden bear,  
to thy Church the pattern give,  
show how true believers live.**

One of Charles Wesley's hymns speaks of the shared life together as a 'Transcript of the Trinity'. This is an explicit reminder of the harmonious communal life of God finding expression in the community of God's people.

It is also important to consider the very real challenges

## Humanity's need of God's grace

Positive working together acknowledges that humanity is flawed, the personal and social effects of this, and humanity's need of God's love and grace.

Like other Christian Churches, the Methodist Church is called to respond to the Gospel of God's love in Christ and live out its discipleship in worship and mission. Yet the Church is made up of flawed human beings and often fails. The 2005 Conference report, *The Nature of Oversight*, explains that "the function of ensuring that the Church remains true to its calling is known as oversight." (1.7) In Methodism oversight is essentially shared and seeks to promote human flourishing.

***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. (4.5.2)***

Whilst written for a very different context, the 2004 Conference report *Domestic Abuse* sheds some useful light on this theme in the context of both the individual and the church community, in the context of sin and alienation from God:

***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. (2.26)***

Therefore, in thinking about how people may work positively together it may be helpful to be reminded of both individual and structural or corporate perspectives which may come into play in situations of difficulty or misunderstanding. One such perspective relates to the

## Conclusion

The above thoughts are offered for reflection, recognising that positive working together often takes place within a complex environment where many issues come into play. The reflection is offered to provide a broad picture of themes and concepts which may be

use of power within the Church. In this respect *Domestic Abuse* also considered how power may be expressed in both positive and negative ways:

***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. (2.48)***

The report went on to consider the theme of forgiveness, acknowledging that this concept is complex and often challenging:

***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. (2.39 - 2.40)***

The concept of forgiveness can sometimes be problematic. Whilst it is often desirable to forgive, forgiveness may be very difficult, and only appropriate at certain points in interpersonal processes. It must never be talked about glibly, recognising that forgiveness may be costly and can easily be manipulated to another's purposes. It may take time, and individuals must be allowed to move forward in their journey of forgiveness at their own pace, honouring the steps along the way.

pertinent in individual situations.

As a final thought, in the *Methodist Worship Book*, the prayer at the end of the order of service for "Communion at Pentecost and Times of Renewal" is a shared

affirmation of the gift of the Holy Spirit in transforming the Church's communal life:

*God of power,  
may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,  
may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us,  
may the gifts of your Spirit equip us  
to serve and worship you  
now and always. Amen.*

Following this reflection is detailed guidance and advice aimed at providing practical solutions and approaches to developing a culture of positive working together in the local church context, at circuit and district level.

## Section 6

### Putting this into practice - promoting positive working relationships<sup>2</sup>

Starting from the distinctively Christian standpoint set out in the theological reflection creates an opportunity for individuals associated with the Church to behave in a manner which models the very highest standards of human interaction and relationships. The guidance contained in this section draws on a number of sources both from within the Christian community and from expertise elsewhere. The aim is to create a shared understanding of what is appropriate behaviour, recognising that it is not possible or indeed appropriate to be prescriptive.

On an everyday basis high standards of behaviour require attention being given to how individuals communicate with each other, how people are treated, how information is managed and shared and how difference is understood and embraced.

In practical terms this means:

#### ● **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.

<sup>2</sup> The guidance provided in Sections 7 and 8 draws extensively from the following documents:

- *Managing Conflict in the Church*, December 2006 by Paul Clark - [http://pmgermany.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/conflict\\_management\\_seminar.pdf](http://pmgermany.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/conflict_management_seminar.pdf)
- *Breaking The Cycle of Conflict* by Gary R. Allen - [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200503/200503\\_050\\_break\\_cycle.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200503/200503_050_break_cycle.cfm)
- *Dealing with Gossip* by William D. Bontrager, J.D. 1710 C.R. 121, Hesperus, CO 81326 970-259-3384 wdb@frontier.net
- *The Escalating Stages of Church Conflict* [www.resolvechurchconflict.com/the\\_stages\\_of\\_unresolved\\_church\\_conflict.htm](http://www.resolvechurchconflict.com/the_stages_of_unresolved_church_conflict.htm)

- **How we manage information**

- Being aware of the power associated with possessing information.
- Being aware of the potential impact on others of either sharing or withholding information which affects them.
- Adjusting how sensitive information is shared (including the format used) in order to avoid any negative impact on others wherever possible.

- **How we embrace difference**

- Valuing and celebrating the differences in others and the uniqueness of each individual.

- Valuing and celebrating the diversity of cultures and backgrounds within the Church and in wider society.
- Reflecting honestly on our own prejudices about others and addressing the impact which these may have on our own attitudes and behaviour towards others.
- 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.
- Accepting that power is distributed unequally between different groups in society and behaving in ways which are sensitive to this fact.

## Why this approach is helpful

- **Creating shared understandings**

Taking account of the comments above, it may be unrealistic to expect that, just because people are associated with the Church and may share a common faith, they will automatically be able to work together harmoniously. We are all shaped by our unique background and life experiences:

*“each individual’s convictions, experience and insights, however diverse, are brought into conversation with each other”<sup>3</sup>*

We know from our own experience (both in the Church and more widely) that these ‘conversations’ work best when people understand what is expected of them. Research into organisational and workplace relationships supports this, and can helpfully inform the church context. Clarifying what can be expected

of each individual (and what they can expect from others) helps everyone involved to navigate safely through the difficult task of working, worshipping, volunteering and being with others who are, inevitably, different from us. Using the positive expectations as a reference point, we are better able to understand a range of helpful and productive behaviours. This helps us to adjust our own behaviours and expectations accordingly, resulting in more harmonious and congruent relationships with those around us. Case study 1 gives an example of how important it is to create shared understandings about behaviour and expectations. Please see Appendix 1

- **Mutual accountability**

Positive expectations establish how we are accountable to each other and to our shared values, as well as confirming our interdependence.

<sup>3</sup> Conference report 2006 *Living with contradictory convictions in the Church*

## Section 7

### Positive Working Together in Disagreements

*Manage conflict, or it will manage you. Whenever churches have faced conflict openly, the congregations have grown stronger in the process. But whenever they have hidden from conflict, it has emerged when congregations are the weakest and least prepared. The longer the congregation hides, the more 'political' and power-orientated the struggle becomes, and the more destructive its impact.<sup>4</sup>*

Although this guidance is primarily concerned with issues of bullying and harassment, it is often the case that inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour arises

### Defining and understanding conflict - some approaches

There are many different ways in which conflict can be defined and many different types of conflict. This section explores understandings of conflict from a range of Christian and other resources, with the aim of encouraging reflection and understanding of the many ways in which conflict comes about. For the purpose of this guidance the following definition may be helpful as a starting point:

*As a practical matter, I find it useful to think of conflict as existing if at least one person believes it to exist. If I believe us to have incompatible interests, and act accordingly, then I am engaging you in a conflict process whether you share this perception or not.<sup>5</sup>*

Another approach to understanding conflict stresses that we as individuals are extremely vulnerable because we carry the “seeds of conflict within our storehouse of thoughts.”<sup>6</sup>

A further way of looking at conflict is in reference to human needs. This says:

- at the centre of all conflicts are human needs
- people engage in conflict either because they have needs that are met by the conflict process itself
- or because they have (or believe they have) needs that are inconsistent with those of others.

from a context where conflict is not dealt with well. It is recognised that conflict is an inevitable part of life. However, when conflict is handled badly it often leads to poor behaviour. Therefore, within this context an understanding of what conflict is, and is not, is very important. The nature of conflict is explored, followed by some practical ways it might be worked with in order to bring about positive outcomes where there are differences or disagreements. Although informal approaches to dealing with conflict are offered here, it is recognised that there are some situations where, due to the gravity of what is alleged to have occurred, it is necessary to move quickly to formal processes in order to ensure that individuals are properly held to account.

On this understanding people engage in conflict because their needs cannot be transformed or settled until they are addressed in some way.

Organisational perspectives on conflict place the onus on the organisation itself to prevent conflict between those who are engaged in carrying out the business or function the organisation serves. Thus conflict occurs simply because organisations allow it to happen.

Typical causes of conflict in church settings

- **Power struggles** - People will take sides with the leader or worker that they personally support.
- **Spiritual bullying** - Sometimes leaders or those in authority will use their position to claim a superior spirituality which they believe gives them the right to be quite directive about how others should live their lives. This may cause others to feel powerless or alternatively rebel, **sometimes in inappropriate ways.**
- **Different perspectives** - Everyone sees the world a little bit differently. Ten people can observe the same occurrence and often see ten different things. Case Study 2: “Gossip” (Appendix 1) looks at how a negative perception can be challenged by focusing on the positive attributes of a person.
- **Different goals** - People think they are saying the same thing, yet they have very different goals. Some people have hidden agendas which makes things even more difficult.

<sup>4</sup> *Handling Holy wars*, Ron Kraybill - <http://salvationist.ca/2009/05/how-to-manage-conflict/>

<sup>5</sup> *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> *Conflict Management: The Courage to Confront*, Richard Meyer (Columbus: Battelle 1995)

- **Different values** – Whilst we are all part of one Church which holds a core set of beliefs in common, the reality is that we hold values which are sometimes at odds with the values of others in the Church. Case study 3: “The consequences of not dealing with conflict” (Appendix 1) describes a clash which occurs due to two people’s different styles and priorities.
- **Personality clashes** - There are certain personalities that struggle to function effectively together.
- **Unrealistic expectations** – eg I expect my church to be a place for quiet prayer and reflection, others expect it to be lively and loud.

*Unclarified expectations in fellowships, as in marriage, frequently result in disillusionment, frustration and despair, because when we nurse unrealistic hopes of another person or relationship, there is only one thing that person or relationship can do. Fail.<sup>7</sup>*

- Personal issues and insecurities – eg individuals who have experienced difficult or dysfunctional

parental relationships may struggle to relate to males or females in leadership roles; others might be constantly comparing themselves negatively with others on a personal level. Individuals will often be unaware of these traits or ‘scripts’ which have been learned from childhood or other life experiences. Case Study 3: “The consequences of not dealing with conflict” considers a person whose behaviour is driven by scripts and insecurities.

- **Material/structural issues and changes** - Any time a church is required to cut its budget, merge with another church or make structural changes (eg re-configuration of the church building, such as removal of traditional pews), the likelihood of interpersonal conflict increases significantly. Intense struggles and personal blaming can occur if one group in the church feels their voice is not being heard or if they feel money has been improperly spent.
- **Ideological and theological differences** – The inclusive and democratic traditions of the Methodist Church encourage debate on a wide range of theological issues. This open stance can lead to conflict as individuals work through their different interpretations of God’s word and message together.

## Embracing conflict

**M**any people within the Church are often shocked to discover that conflict is an everyday part of Church life. Such conflict appears to contrast sharply with the Christian message emphasising love and reconciliation. Surely our commitment to these values will ensure that Church communities are the last place we should expect to experience conflict?

As noted in the Theological Reflection above, however, the reality is that the church is made up of imperfect human beings and, in human organisations, conflict is inevitable:

*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.<sup>8</sup>*

For any family, community or organisation, conflict simply *is*. It is not something which can or should be either avoided or ignored. All our shared experience and extensive research on organisational wellbeing tell us that when conflict is ignored or avoided, it gets worse.

There is evidence to suggest that conflict management is more of a problem within church organisations than in other types of human organisation, partly due to this clash between expectation and reality. Most people expect to encounter some form of conflict when they go to work, but not when they attend church.

This places an onus on us to work together to better understand conflict, how it affects the Church and how it must be actively managed, rather than avoided. Conflict management, then, becomes an intentional, ongoing interpersonal and organisational process instead of a periodic reaction to conflicting events. Taking shared responsibility for managing conflict is the only way to ensure that we minimise the negative impact it can have on individuals, church communities and on the Church’s mission.

*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.<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> *Creative Conflict: How to Confront and Stay Friends*, Joyce Huggett (Inter Varsity Press, 1984)

<sup>8</sup> *Caring Enough to Confront*, David Augsburger (Regal, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> *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)

Whether we are aware of them or not, we all enter conflict with certain assumptions about its nature. Sometimes these assumptions are very helpful to us, but at other times they limit our ability to understand what lies behind a conflict and what alternatives exist for dealing with it. We need frameworks that expand our thinking, that challenge our assumptions, and that are practical and readily usable. As we develop our ability to understand conflict in a deeper and more powerful way, we enhance our ability to handle it effectively and in accordance with our deepest values about building peace.

However, in order to simplify the task of handling complex conflicts, we need to complicate our thinking about conflict itself. This is an ongoing challenge for everyone concerned with conflict and its resolution. For example, in some Christian contexts the importance of forgiveness is highlighted. Whilst this may be helpful, it may also be a way of leaving important issues unexamined, and may put considerable pressure on the alleged victim to take a course of action which they are not ready for or do not feel is appropriate.

### 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.

*And what happens to a little problem that doesn't get resolved when it's little? It gets bigger and bigger until it becomes a real problem that's going to require a lot of time, energy, and resources to be solved. It's much easier to confront problems early, while they're still small and manageable. When a problem isn't addressed quickly, it can easily spin out of your control.<sup>10</sup>*

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. Case study 4: "Early intervention via checking out" (see Appendix 1) looks at how this might be done.

#### 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.

<sup>10</sup> *Success is a Journey: 7 Steps to Achieving Success in the Business of Life*, Jeffrey J Mayer (McGraw-Hill, 1999)

**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.

## Managing conflict through 'caring challenge'

People can exhibit behaviours or mannerisms that cause irritation. Often people may not be aware of their behaviours and their effects on others. Learning ways to challenge and confront in a manner which is loving and supportive is a key skill required for addressing conflict early on. Case Study 5: "Challenging negative cultures" (Appendix 1) gives an example of how a negative culture might be challenged in an appropriate way. In looking at this issue it is important to be aware of issues of power and its misuse in the Church. 'Caring challenge' (as described below) is not designed to be a tool which oppresses others who may be weak and vulnerable, and therefore powerless. Rather, it must be considered in the context of respect and concern for others, and with a spirit of humility on the part of the person who is challenging another.

In 'caring challenge' we have the goal of helping another person grow and develop, whilst recognising that we ourselves often fail to understand and acknowledge our own shortcomings. Indeed we may also change as a result of this process as we reflect on the issues which arise. The word caring is perceived by most people as a very positive word, yet the word challenge has only negative connotations. Putting these two words together provides a balance which may lead to effective human relationships.

Abraham Maslow points out that once people know and realize the truth about themselves, it can be a very liberating experience. After the initial pain has been overcome, self-knowledge can flow easily. It feels good to know about something, rather than to wonder.

There are a number of key points to bear in mind once we have decided to challenge someone about behaviour which is causing concern. Paying attention to these can significantly improve the chances of the conflict being resolved early. In some cases a well-managed confrontation can be a turning point in a relationship, releasing the positive potential which the energy behind

conflict often contains:

**a) Personal reflection**

It is important to begin with a process of self examination. Why am I seeking to confront this individual? What power relationships are taking place in this relationship? Do I see behaviours in this person which are in my own personality, but which I am not prepared to acknowledge or examine? How can I make the other person feel safe and valued? These are all difficult questions but are essential in ensuring that a good interaction takes place.

**b) Timing is critical**

We do not want to move too soon or nor do we want to wait too long. By waiting too long additional problems may occur. It is always better to call the fire brigade when we see smoke coming from a house than wait until the flames are rising up through the roof.

**c) The place is critical**

There is a right place and a wrong place for a caring challenge. It is always advisable to find a place where you can speak together without any interruptions. Email and telephone calls are very impersonal and limit the care you can show. Try to find the most relaxed situation possible and think carefully about how the environment (eg layout of chairs) can send out subtle messages, eg sitting behind a desk conveys unequal power, formality and distance.

**d) Get the facts**

What we perceive as truth is often very different from reality. Appearances can be very misleading and that is why it is important to ask caring questions to the person you are confronting. Here are some suggestions about how to frame your questions:

- Use open, not closed questions.
- Use leading, not loaded questions, "What makes you feel the way you do now"?

- Use cool, not heated questions. This is about de-personalising and externalising in order to create distance between the emotions and the issues.

For example, if I am angry with you for something eg you keep taking my designated space in the car park, I can confront you in different ways in order to ascertain facts:

**Heated**

*“Do you deliberately take my parking space every morning?”*

**Cool**

*“Can I just check that you are aware of the arrangements around car parking?”*

- Use planned, not impulsive questions.
- Use treat, not trick questions. This is about providing incentives and being solution focused. For example:

**Treat:**

*‘Can we have a chat about car parking because I really don’t want us to fall out about it?’*

**Trick:**

*‘Are you aware of the arrangements around car parking?’*

- Use window, not mirror questions. Most often, mirror questions involve restatements of what the other person has just said. For example:

**Person A:**

*I’m feeling really tired today.*

**Person B:**

*I guess it sounds like you don’t have as much energy as you usually do?*

*An alternative ‘window’ type question in this context might be:*

**Person B:**

*What do you think might be behind you feeling so tired today? (ie a question which moves towards ascertaining facts rather than simply acknowledging that feelings have been heard).*

**e) Depersonalize the issue**

Do not try to make the issue into a personal problem. Always separate the issue from the person themselves. Take a collaborative, problem-solving approach and tone, using constructive language, eg “There is a sensitive issue I need to talk to you about and that we need to work on together to resolve.”

This helps to separate the problem from the person and is likely to be received more positively than, “I am worried about something you have done”.

**f) Don’t prolong the discussion**

In other words, don’t drag it out and make it to be a bigger deal than it really is. Theatrics can be very detrimental when you are trying to help someone find the right way to go. Caring confrontation does not need to last for hours at a time.

At the foundation of every successful discussion lies safety. When others feel frightened or nervous or otherwise unsafe, you can’t talk about anything. But if you can create safety, you can talk with almost anyone about almost anything—even about failed promises. People feel unsafe when they believe one of two things:

- You don’t respect them as a human being (you lack mutual respect).
- You don’t care about their goals (you lack mutual purpose).

Creating safety is the underlying notion for effective caring challenge. Caring always comes first, which is then followed by challenge. It is necessary that we create a context of caring that shows the other person that we are genuinely and sincerely concerned about them as a person.

In summary:

- A context of caring must come before any challenge.
- A sense of support must be present before criticism.
- An experience of empathy must precede evaluation.
- A basis of trust must be laid before one risks advising.
- A floor of affirmation must underpin any assertiveness.
- A gift of understanding opens the way to disagreeing.
- A context of love and respect sets us free to level with each other.

It is also useful to bear in mind the following:

- Do it privately, not publicly.
- Do it as soon as possible.
- Address one issue at a time.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition.
- Deal only with actions the person can change.
- Avoid sarcasm.
- Avoid words like 'always' and 'never'.
- Present criticism as suggestions or questions if possible.
- Don't apologise for the meeting.
- Don't forget the compliments, but be sincere – communicate value (appreciate, correct, encourage).

#### **Caring challenge as a balancing act - some examples:**

*"I care about our relationship. I feel deeply about the issue at stake."*

*"I want to hear your view. I want to clearly express mine."*

*"I want to respect your insight. I want respect for mine."*

*"I trust you to be able to handle my honest feelings. I want you to trust me with yours."*

*"I promise to stay with the discussion until we've reached a new understanding. I want you to keep working with me until we've reached an understanding."*

*"I will not trick, pressure, manipulate, or distort the differences. I want your unpressured, clear, honest view of our differences."*

*"I give you my loving, honest respect. I want your caring-challenging response."*

Statements of this nature must be framed within a context where issues of power and safety have been thought through carefully and are fully understood.

#### **Guidelines for finding consensus.**

- Avoid arguing over individual ranking or position. Present a position as logically as possible.
- Avoid 'win-lose' statements. Discard the notion that someone must win.
- Avoid changing of minds only in order to avoid conflict and to achieve harmony.
- Avoid majority voting, averaging, bargaining, or coin flipping. These do not lead to consensus.
- Treat differences of opinion as indicative of incomplete sharing of relevant information, keep asking questions.
- Keep the attitude that holding different views is both natural and healthy to a group.
- View initial agreement as suspect. Explore the reasons underlying apparent agreement and make sure that members have willingly agreed.

Individuals engaged in conflict must ultimately find the solution themselves. This may involve making bad decisions along the way, which they have a right to.

## Section 8

### The Importance of seeking support

It is extremely important to seek support if you need it when experiencing negative behaviour from someone, or when you are seeking to challenge someone about their own behaviour. In many situations it is sufficient to talk matters over with a trusted friend or colleague who is outside your immediate environment. This will often give you a fresh perspective on your situation. Dealing with issues of bullying and harassment, whether you feel you are the victim or the alleged perpetrator, can often be very stressful and it is important to ensure that you have appropriate support mechanisms in place.

Good support can be helpful in many ways, for example in restoring a sense of control when you feel out of control in a situation; achieving a sense of empowerment so that you feel that you have choices and options in a situation; providing a way of separating the negative behaviours themselves from the impact they have on you; reflecting on difficult issues of power, victimhood and forgiveness and understanding that one's response (eg tears, loss of confidence) is a normal response to abnormal circumstances or poor treatment.

## Section 9

### Sources of support

As noted above, support is often best provided informally by a friend or colleague, working with you in a peer capacity. However, it is important to be mindful of the role of superintendent as a source of both oversight and support in these matters, and where appropriate the District Chair. That said, sometimes individuals feel that these people are the sources of difficulty and that it would better to have support from outside the circuit, for example from a neighbouring superintendent (or Chair) who may be able to advise on courses of action and approaches. Each district also has a Reconciliation Group consisting of skilled and experienced people in these matters. These groups provide a space where support and advice can be provided.

A source of support which can be very effective is that provided by an informal **peer support group**. Often informal support occurs naturally between friends and colleagues, and can be effective as a means of exploring emotions, reactions and understandings. That said, sometimes such support is not available or appropriate. An alternative is to set up an **intentional peer support group** to help you work through in a more systematic way how you may take forward a situation of alleged bullying and harassment. Appendix 2 provides guidelines about how such a support group might work.

Other options for support include the provision of **counselling**, which for ministers is available from the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service ([www.cmincs.net](http://www.cmincs.net)). Counselling is often helpful in exploring and understanding one's own behaviour and developing strategies to work constructively in a difficult situation.

Alternatively working with a **spiritual director** provides an opportunity to examine the impact of a situation

on one's individual journey of faith. There are regional networks and registers of spiritual directors which can easily be found via an internet search, or the Retreat Association may be able to help ([www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection](http://www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection)).

**Pastoral supervision** may provide an opportunity to examine your day to day practice and explore fresh perspectives in a difficult situation. Pastoral supervisors (like Spiritual Directors) are often known in a local context, so it may be useful to explore contacts in your local area. Alternatively, the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE) has a national list of contacts ([www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk](http://www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk)).

Districts and circuits may also know of local **coaches** or **mentors** with whom you can work in a structured and time-limited way on specific issues of concern.

Finally, there may be **wise and experienced individuals** available locally who can provide advice and support on a one to one basis. In thinking about whether to work with such a person it is useful to consider their skills and background, along with their knowledge and understanding of the Church and its processes. It is also useful to think about what kind of support you are looking for and whether the individual can reasonably provide it.

Sometimes people experiencing alleged bullying or harassment seek significant levels of support and have high expectations of the person who they work with. In seeking to work with a specific supporter it is essential to explore with them at the outset what each other's expectations of the process are, whether they are reasonable and can be met. If this is not done the relationship may break down and cause additional anxiety.

## Section 10

### Formal routes to resolving conflict

The Methodist Church has clear procedures in place for dealing with any complaints which may arise and these are contained in Part 11 of the Standing Orders of the Methodist Church. A complaint may be brought by anyone, whether a member of the Church or not, who objects to the words, acts or omissions of a member of the Methodist Church. The Local Complaints Officer, usually the circuit superintendent minister, will try to resolve the complaint locally and, where local resolution is not possible, the complaint can be referred to the Connexional Complaints Panel.

Where the subject of a complaint is a lay employee, then any complaint would need to be addressed to the individual's supervisor/line manager and dealt with in accordance with the individual's Contract of Employment and related Disciplinary Procedure.

The Methodist Church has also developed a grievance procedure for ministers.

Although this guidance emphasises the importance of informal means of resolution, it is recognised that some situations are so serious, or relationships so fractured, that a formal process is necessary in order to resolve an issue.

## Section 11

### Statement on unacceptable behaviours

Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable. If it is not challenged it is likely to escalate into bullying and harassment and lead to significant difficulties and costs for all concerned. For the purposes of this guidance, a three stage definition has been used in order to clarify the differences between unacceptable behaviour and bullying/harassment, and to address the issue of intent.

**Examples of unacceptable behaviour** - Please see Appendix 3 for examples of unacceptable behaviour. These are offered not as a prescriptive list but to illustrate the many ways that unacceptable behaviour may manifest itself.

#### Definition

*Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.*

*'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.*

*Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved.<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> *Dignity at Work: Unacceptable Behaviour, Bullying and Harassment. A Comprehensive Guide for Workplace Representatives in the Not for Profit Sector of Unite the Union, Rosenburgh and Connolly 2008. Unite 2007*

## Section 12

### Moving Forward

The hurt and distress that can come about as a result of bullying and harassment is often significant and can feel overwhelming, affecting many areas of our life. Throughout this guidance there is an emphasis on taking early and appropriate action in order to avoid escalation wherever possible. The process of challenging poor behaviour may be demanding and painful, and may challenge us to reflect on our own actions.

There comes a point in all situations where it is right to move on and move forward. This may be at the conclusion of an informal process where issues have been explored and agreements reached for the future. This can be a particularly difficult stage, especially if the situation has been very demanding of our time and energy, and raises a number of important questions.

### What is the place of forgiveness?

Forgiveness is of course at the heart of our faith. We have all been forgiven and this must impact profoundly on our dealings with others. In the context we are considering here, forgiveness has been described as the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitudes regarding an offence, lets go of negative emotions, such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well<sup>12</sup>. This description is helpful in emphasising that the process is a journey which takes time, and may involve insights and reflections not just about the offender, but about oneself as well. It may be a journey

of learning which can be painful, with hard-won insights based upon reflection.

Forgiveness is often a painful process and it must be recognised that it is sometimes very difficult to forgive, taking much time, patience and emotional energy. An individual must go through this process at their own pace, and cannot be rushed. In some circumstances the hurt experienced may be so great that the process of forgiveness takes a long time and may not be complete. Individuals must be respected at whatever stage they have reached in this process.

### How do we positively move forward?

We all have the potential to experience pain and damage as completely disabling in an area of life, and when this happens we often get 'stuck' and cannot move forward. It is important to acknowledge this, and that the process of moving forward may take a long time.

It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes we find the process of learning and reflection difficult, and that sometimes individuals simply cannot learn and move forward, be they the victims or perpetrators, and regardless of the amount of support given. These situations must be respected, but also held within a context of hope that change is possible. To assist thinking and reflection on this matter Case Study 6

explores a situation where an individual could not move forward and the issues which arose from this. Equally, Case Study 7 considers a situation where a person was able to move forward, despite the difficulties.

It is also often important to reflect on issues of power and victimhood. We may have been subject to an inappropriate use of power (for example, spiritual abuse where an individual invoked God to legitimise their behaviour), may have exercised this ourselves, or may have been seen as a passive victim, perhaps for cultural reasons. These are important issues to consider, remembering that the call to Christian servanthood is a call to the powerful as well as the weak.

### Worship resources to support us in moving forward

Sometimes it is helpful to use liturgical and related resources to help us move forward, and to acknowledge personal change, often after much hard work has been done. This may help us in situations of potential reconciliation, forgiveness or being able to let

go of pain or hurt. Appendix 4 provides some resources which may be useful in these contexts.

<sup>12</sup> *Forgiveness: a sampling of research results*, American Psychological Association, 2006

## Case study 1:

### Creating shared expectations and understandings

Surinder had a very good working relationship with Simon, her boss at the Community Cafe. At a Friday evening work social event following a very busy week, Simon made a throwaway comment about Surinder's background which made everyone laugh. Surinder laughed along as well but this was only a cover. In fact she was hurt by what Simon had said. She had found it to be insensitive and disrespectful.

The reason it had particularly upset her is that it made her doubt the respect in which she had assumed Simon held her. Simon was someone she respected a lot. What he said undermined her confidence in him, in their relationship and, to an extent, in herself. It caused her to wonder whether all the nice things he had said in the past about her work and her professionalism were not in fact true. It was also very out of character for Simon. Up to that point he had always behaved in a respectful and professional way towards her and the rest of the cafe staff, which is why she had felt so safe and confident with him.

Whilst thinking about the situation over the weekend Surinder remembered the briefing session she had attended on "dignity at work" as part of her induction into the Community Cafe two years previously. She re-read the policy which she had been given at the time. This helped her to confirm her sense of having been wronged, regardless of what Simon had meant by what he had said and particularly because he was in a leadership position. It also described some options for seeking support and taking action. She remembered the advice given that intervening early was always better than waiting until things got worse: "nip it in the bud or it will nip you back".

She talked through her options with her partner on the Sunday morning who pointed out that if she spoke to Simon and he didn't respond reasonably, she still had all the other options available to her – including taking out a formal grievance against Simon if necessary. This conversation helped her reach a final decision about what to do.

The next day at work she asked Simon if she could have a quiet, confidential word regarding something which had upset her. As she had hoped, Simon took this seriously and arranged to meet with her later that morning. He also asked her where she wanted to meet and if anyone else needed to be there. She said not. At the meeting

Surinder explained the situation and got quite upset when she described how much she had been hurt by what Simon had said on the night out. She told him that she was struggling to understand why he had said it. She also said that she couldn't see how it fitted with what she felt she could reasonably expect from her manager when she started working for the Community Cafe, and that it had undermined her confidence in him and in herself.

Although she had found all this very difficult to say to Simon's face, she immediately felt better once she had said it and was pleased with herself for not having chosen the very tempting alternative options that she had considered including:

***"just ignore it and try to forget it ever happened, it will stop hurting after a while"***

***"maybe I can't take a joke" or***

***"maybe I misheard him."***

She was even more pleased she had raised it with him when she heard Simon's response. He explained that he had made the comment very flippantly and, given what she had now explained to him, he completely understood why it had offended her and that he now completely regretted ever having said it. He apologised very sincerely and asked if there was anything he could do or say to put things right, including speaking to the others who had been present if that would make a difference. He explained that he had perhaps made the mistake of being a bit too relaxed and had shown poor judgement. He reiterated how much he enjoyed working with her and respected her and her work within the team. Surinder responded by saying that she was satisfied with his response and did not need him to speak to the rest of the team.

Simon also reminded her of her right to raise a formal grievance against him if she chose to and he explained how that would work. She said that she would not be taking this route. Simon thanked her for having had the courage in herself and the confidence in their relationship to have raised it with him in this way. He finished by promising her that he would do everything in his power to make sure that nothing like that ever happened again between them. And it didn't.

## Case study 2:

### Gossip

*“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarrelling ceases.” Proverbs 26:20 (NRSV)*

#### Member A:

“That woman with the baby was seen going into the manse again last week.”

#### Member B:

“So I heard. It’s amazing that the minister is so willing to give up his time for people from outside the church, given how hard he works anyway. I can’t believe anyone who knows him would even think there is anything going on, other than him helping her through some crisis or other.”

*Gossip is the vocalization of potentially destructive things about another, whether true or false, when that other person is either specifically identified or readily identifiable, and when that other person is not present and able to respond. William D. Bontrager, J.D.*

Focusing on gossip is important as it is so often dismissed as ‘just gossip’, yet it can be extremely destructive. To besmirch someone’s reputation or integrity without knowing the whole truth and without them being given an opportunity to defend themselves is a powerful negative act. Replacing the phrase ‘it’s just gossip’ with ‘it’s just racism’ makes the point.

The practice example above also demonstrates the technique of using ‘positive gossip’. This takes the opportunity presented by negative gossip and turns it on its head by deliberately responding with something positive about the person under discussion. In this example the respondent also takes the opportunity to remind the gossip of the expected standard of positive behaviour (“I can’t believe ... etc”), further promoting and modelling the positive culture being sought. This way of operating can, over time, be transformative.

## Case study 3:

### Consequences of not dealing with conflict

The Revd Christopher Jones and Ruth Wharton had avoided any major clashes for the previous two years, though neither had ever found the other easy to be with. Ruth preferred to be in control and was highly organised in relation to her work as Church Treasurer. Christopher's apparent lack of interest in finances frustrated Ruth enormously, as did the endless excuses he gave for always arriving late to meetings due to 'pastoral issues'. Only once had Christopher actually read the detailed monthly accounts provided by Ruth prior to the finance meetings, and that had appeared to make little or no difference to his understanding of them, as far as Ruth could see. In this way Christopher reminded Ruth of her father, whom she remembered as being lazy and irresponsible, especially when it came to money matters. Though she was now relatively well off, Ruth's husband allowed her virtually no say in how their family finances were managed. When the opportunity had arisen for her to use her accounting skills as Church Treasurer, she had grabbed it with both hands.

There had been two minor incidents between them since the Revd Jones' appointment as minister. Each time Christopher had backed down immediately, believing this to be the right thing to do in the face of what he experienced as Ruth's rude and unacceptably aggressive stance over what he believed to be relatively minor issues. Christopher hated the idea of being in conflict with one of his members and felt that to be so would show he had failed in his ministry. He had often been praised for his pastoral abilities, an area he saw as a key strength. He was convinced that his ability to bring peace and acceptance to difficult situations would help in his troubled relationship with Ruth. As if to prove this, Ruth had been uncharacteristically pleasant towards him for several months after each of these incidents. She had even made a point of thanking him publicly for his willingness to listen and to accept advice. He had noticed, however, that on neither occasion had Ruth apologised for her rudeness towards him, despite this being worse on the second occasion.

The issue of the potential purchase of the Community Hall brought the problems in their relationship to a head. The hall lay adjacent to the church building and had been empty for several years prior to suddenly coming up for sale. Christopher had long seen this building as the perfect opportunity to provide the type of open, flexible space which, in his view, the church with its traditional pews had always lacked. Owning and adapting the Hall would broaden the church's appeal to young people,

families and potential new user groups, including those from the margins of society. His vision was for the type of thriving, modern, forward-looking church which had brought him into ministry in the first place.

As it happened the announcement of the sale occurred in the same week that Christopher found out that his mother, for whom he was the main carer, had been diagnosed with dementia.

After a difficult week re-organising his mother's care schedule, alongside conducting two funerals and co-ordinating a large fund-raising event as part of his involvement with a local hospice, Christopher arrived at the meeting he had called to discuss the possible purchase of the Community Hall. Despite everything happening that week, he had managed to prepare, with his daughter's help, a short PowerPoint presentation that described his vision for how the new building might be used. He was particularly pleased with himself for this as he was aware of his reputation for not being particularly well-organised in terms of preparation for meetings or use of new technology.

As he reached the front door of the church, where the meeting was being held, he interrupted Ruth and one of the church stewards who had clearly been deep in conversation up to that point. The steward, someone he regarded as a good friend, acknowledged him and asked after his mother but appeared uncomfortable and embarrassed. Ruth ignored him completely, walking away from him and into the meeting room without even looking at him.

As soon as Christopher opened the meeting Ruth's body language projected boredom and dismissiveness. This continued throughout his presentation and on two occasions Ruth looked at her watch whilst he was speaking. When he put his favourite image on the screen (a group of young offenders he had worked with in a previous appointment) Ruth frowned and looked quizzical as if to say "what's that got to do with us?" He found this gesture deeply upsetting and undermining. Overall he felt that his presentation (and his own performance) had fallen flat, especially when compared with the excitement he had felt whilst preparing it the previous evening.

As soon as the meeting was opened up for discussion Ruth spoke first. She thanked Christopher for his "lovely" presentation and went on to explain in great detail, backed up by copies of a complex financial spreadsheet which she handed out, why it was irresponsible for

the church to even consider purchasing the Hall. She concluded by saying that surely anybody with even the

most basic understanding of finances would see that the proposal was naïve and ill-conceived.

## Options

1. Stop the downward conflict cycle at this point and answer the question, “how does the church expect the Revd Jones and Ruth and others who might become involved at this point to respond to the conflict which has arisen”?
2. Let the conflict cycle run further and become more destructive.

## Case Study 4:

### Early intervention via 'checking out'

Magda felt uncomfortable after she had interrupted her colleague Alan during a Bible discussion, correcting him on a minor historical fact. She was concerned that her action had unintentionally humiliated him in front of the group. She noticed that he had said very little after her intervention, which was unlike him.

The following day she realised that she was still anxious about the meeting. The incident kept returning to her thoughts, despite how busy she was. She remembered the advice she had once been given about 'the importance of listening to gut feeling' and so decided she needed to do something to address her niggling anxiety.

When thinking through her options she felt caught between not wanting to over-dramatise what was probably a very minor incident and not wanting to ignore her feeling that she might have upset him. She decided not to call Alan as that might confuse him even more. Instead she would find a quiet, private moment during the church finance meeting the next day, a meeting they both attended.

She approached Alan during the coffee break at the meeting and asked for a quiet word. This indicated to him that it was a private conversation she was seeking. He was happy to oblige and moved away from the others in the room.

Magda started by saying that she hoped it was nothing serious and that she had thought about whether she needed to say anything at all but that she thought it best to err on the side of caution. She explained her concern about embarrassing him at the Bible study group, especially as he had said very little after her interjection.

Alan smiled and thanked her for her concern but told her that he had not been in the least bit embarrassed, or, as he jokingly put it, "no more than I usually am when I choose to open my big mouth on stuff I know nothing about!". Magda was immediately reassured that he was being sincere. From his demeanour it was clear to her that he had not been offended.

Alan went on to say that her intervention at the meeting had in fact made him think about the topic in a totally different way from before. This was why he had been in an unusually reflective mood afterwards.

Alan thanked Magda for making the effort to check things out with him. They briefly continued their discussion on the historical topic before joining the finance meeting as it re-convened.

### Analysis

There are two main points from this case study:

1. We never quite know how what we have done or said may have impacted on others.
2. It is always better to err on the side of taking action if our instincts tell us something may not be quite right.

It could be argued that even though Magda handled the situation in an appropriately low-key manner, she was still making a mountain out of a molehill. This misses the point. Magda was uncertain about where the incident had left her relationship with Alan. Uncertainty in relationships is the seed of mistrust. Small seeds which go unchecked and unchallenged can sometimes grow into major disputes. By checking out with Alan she chooses the risk of being mildly embarrassed for a few seconds (ie Alan thinking she had made something out of nothing), over the risk of their relationship becoming undermined.

Magda's careful actions provide Alan with a confidential space into which he can place his genuine response to the incident. As it happens (in this version of the case study) he has not been offended. Even so there is an argument to say that by taking action Magda has helped to strengthen their relationship and has modelled (even if it is just to one other person) the positive, early intervention culture which the Church is seeking to grow. She has demonstrated concern, courage and competence in conflict prevention.

The goal of conflict prevention suggests that the minor risk associated with acting always outweighs the potentially major risk of doing nothing. Anyone in any doubt of this might choose to reconsider their position if Alan's response to Magda's checking-out had been:

***I'm pleased you have raised this with me Magda. I wasn't going to say anything but now you have raised it I was actually mortified by the way you first cut across me and then proceeded to prove to everyone in the room how idiotic my comment had been. I know I'm not an expert like you but I was so embarrassed that I'm thinking about whether I can ever show my face there again***

## Case study 5:

### Challenging negative cultures

Mowton Church administration group met every Monday morning following activities over the weekend. The group co-ordinated the weekly finances and bookings of the small, rural church, including taking calls and general correspondence on behalf of the minister.

The group comprised Judith and Robert (a married couple) and Heather. It had started on an informal basis seven years previously when the last minister had moved on.

In September a new minister began providing pastoral oversight for Mowton. Initially the minister was grateful for the work being done by the administration group as it enabled her to focus on a serious planning issue at another of her churches, Scurfield, which was being rebuilt.

After four months in post, however, the minister became concerned that the administration group was contributing to a highly negative outlook amongst the members at Mowton. Conversations during her pastoral visits invariably combined nostalgia about the past with very low expectations for the future of the church. When she asked individuals why they felt this way, the response nearly always included “Judith said...” or “Robert said...”

Preaching at Mowton also left the minister feeling that something was not right, though she struggled to identify precisely what it was.

The Scurfield building project was taking up vast amounts of the minister’s time at that point. In addition a personal crisis was taking up what was left of her emotional energy, leaving her with precious little space to even think about the Mowton situation in-between her visits there. When she did think about Mowton she recalled a similar situation in a previous appointment where the negative influence of a small yet powerful group had been allowed to continue for two years before eventually breaking out into open conflict between the local church, the minister involved and circuit stewards. She decided to approach the circuit superintendent with her concerns about Mowton and reconfigured things to allow her to spend more time there.

She visited Mowton the following Monday afternoon, having emailed Judith the previous evening out of courtesy and to let her know what time she would be dropping in. Judith’s reply had asked her to explain why she ‘needed’ to visit. She had chosen not to respond.

Despite this the group greeted her in a polite and friendly manner when she arrived. The discussion covered the previous day’s service, who was ill and who was better, plans for Christmas services, etc. During this conversation Robert mentioned that he had heard that the building project at Scurfield had turned into a ‘complete nightmare’. The minister gently challenged this by saying that whilst the project was definitely at a difficult stage, these types of development often ran into planning problems. She said she was sure that, with God’s help and with the determination of the Scurfield members to have their new extension, they would get through the current tricky patch. She also mentioned that the Scurfield stewards were convinced that the new extension would help them attract new, younger members to the church, as well as providing new income via the mother and toddler group three mornings per week. It would also provide them with a space to develop their work with local asylum seekers and refugees.

This was received in silence by the group, who were clearly discomfited by what she had said. Heather eventually broke the silence, saying that she thought what was happening in Scurfield sounded interesting. She mentioned that they had received a letter from the coordinator of the asylum seekers and refugees project several months ago, asking if their church would like to be involved in any way. They had discussed it between the three of them but had decided that the church was too small to accommodate a new project and that there would not be enough interest locally. Robert added that people in Mowton tended not to be interested in “that sort of thing”.

The minister asked them how they saw the future of Mowton Church. Judith said that since being on the administration group they had seen bills rising rapidly whilst income and membership had fallen off sharply. She described Mowton as having been a thriving church in the past which had been looked after properly by its members. Now the church was always “in a complete state” when they arrived on Monday mornings, especially if the Youth Church had been in. Robert mentioned that he had heard rumours about problems being caused by the same Youth Church Leader at a previous church, but he didn’t know if that was true or not. He also said that they had asked the local Churches Together group to meet elsewhere because of the problems they had caused with trying to park so many cars the last time they used the church.

The minister said that she was sorry they felt so

negatively about things at the moment but could see that they had made a huge contribution to keeping things going over recent years. She acknowledged that it was upsetting to witness the struggles of a small, rural church with falling membership, especially for those who had been part of the church in its 'heyday'. She asked them what would make a difference. Judith and Robert did not respond to this question but Heather said that just having someone listen to them had helped, as the work every Monday was starting to feel like a thankless task. She suggested that it might be time for others to take on the weekly administration.

The minister asked that all letters and communication relating to her be redirected and said she would speak to groups using the church to ask for their cooperation in terms of tidiness/parking, etc. She reassured them that they need not worry about the Youth Leader. She knew him well and he was completely trustworthy. Any rumours

were, in her view, unfair and unfounded. She said that she would ask the leader of the refugee and asylum seeker project to speak at a forthcoming Sunday service to see what interest could be generated. She finished by inviting them to visit Scurfield the following week to see how the members there were planning to use the additional space, once the new building was complete. In the event only Heather was able to visit Scurfield.

During her trip to Scurfield Heather confided in the minister that she had been struggling with Robert and Judith's negative attitude for some time but had not known what to do or say. She was concerned that they were often the first people to read the post or answer the phone after the weekend and that this gave them quite a lot of power over what went on in the church and how it was viewed by members and by people from the outside. Following the minister's visit she was now more hopeful that things might improve.

## Case study 6:

### Difficulties with moving forward

Fran enjoyed arranging the flowers in her local church and was very committed to helping out in any way she could. She was a diffident young woman with a six-year-old daughter who did not work outside the home, and both her parents and grandparents had attended the church, with deep roots in the area. Most of Fran's friends were church members and her social life revolved around church-related activities.

Hilda was a woman in her 50s who had recently joined the church. She was a manager in the NHS and had significant responsibilities within her job. She had great energy and a willingness to take on tasks, and soon became a valued and influential member of the local church.

One Saturday morning, the Revd Peter Giles, the minister of the church, found Fran sobbing in the church kitchen and asked her what was troubling her. She explained that Hilda had just been in the church, whilst she was replacing and rearranging the flower displays, and said, "is this really the best you can do?" Before Fran could respond, she claimed that Hilda had grabbed a bunch of flowers and thrown them onto the floor saying, "these are dying and need replacing ... do I have to do everything around here?"

Fran went on to say that Hilda had behaved in a similar way on three earlier occasions and it had now got to the point where she did not feel that she could carry on arranging the flowers. She was also finding it difficult to attend any church event where Hilda was present. She stated that she felt intimidated and bullied by Hilda and it had left her very shaken. She had not disclosed this to anyone else as she could see how well-respected Hilda was in the church and was afraid her friends might turn against her if she told them.

Peter offered to have an initial conversation with Hilda, on Fran's behalf, to see if there was a way to resolve the problem. Later that evening, he approached Hilda and discussed the matters raised by Fran. Hilda confirmed that she had spoken to Fran on a number of occasions, as she was concerned that the displays often looked a bit tired, may have been a bit sharp, but was only trying to help. Hilda expressed irritation at the fact that Fran had not spoken directly with her about this and went on to say that other church members had made comments

about Fran not replacing dying flowers. Hilda agreed, at Peter's suggestion, to meet with Fran to discuss the matter further. The meeting would be facilitated by Peter.

Peter arranged the meeting and Hilda offered an apology for her behaviour towards Fran, although she reiterated her concerns about the freshness of the flower arrangements. Fran was quiet and subdued and said very little. After the meeting Peter spent some time checking out with Fran how she felt about the situation and offered her supportive strategies for moving forward. However, she seemed quite withdrawn.

Three weeks later, a number of Church Stewards approached Peter to express their concerns about the fact that Fran had not attended Church recently, had called in sick in relation to her flower arranging duties and appeared depressed.

Peter visited Fran as a result of this. He spent a considerable amount of time seeking to further understand her perspective on the situation. Although Fran could see that Hilda had raised legitimate concerns, she found it impossible to try to re-establish their relationship – she simply felt hurt and intimidated by what she saw as Hilda's overbearing efficiency. She found this oppressive.

Over the next few weeks, Peter met with Fran on a number of occasions. It became clear that Fran remained very hurt, and that her reaction to Hilda may have been coloured by earlier life experiences. In order to support her he arranged for some counselling sessions which Fran found helpful. However, at the end of these Fran still felt she had been unjustly treated by Hilda and did not wish to associate with her or be reconciled.

Peter continued to meet with Fran, and also arranged for her to be visited regularly by a pastoral visitor from one of his other churches so that she could receive support. However, Fran could not move forward to reconciliation with Hilda, and their relationship remained fractured. All parties recognised that whilst reconciliation was desirable, it was not possible to achieve this at present. Peter hoped that the continued support of the pastoral visitor would help Fran to move forward in due course, but grieved at the effects that this fractured relationship had on Fran, and to some extent on Hilda.

## Case study 7:

### Moving forward positively

**K**arl, a church member in his mid-sixties, has been involved with church in a variety of roles for over 30 years. He is well liked and respected within the church, which is located in a small semi-rural community, and people often fondly describe him as 'part of the furniture'. Karl is a Church Steward and is an articulate and regular contributor to church meetings. He has devoted his life to the church especially since his wife died and his adult children moved on.

Karl has become increasingly concerned about recent proposed boundary changes to the circuit as he believes these will inevitably lead to the closure of his local church. Karl had enjoyed close working relationships with the recently retired minister, who had been stationed in the circuit for almost 20 years.

The Revd Denise Peters is a young female minister married, with two young children, recently stationed in the circuit having been in active circuit ministry for six years. Previously Denise was stationed in a large, busy suburb of a major city. She is experiencing significant difficulties with the current manse, including rising damp, warped window frames and a leaking roof.

Denise is fully supportive of the proposed boundary changes as she believes the church will grow only if it is able to share resources more effectively across the district.

Karl approached the circuit superintendent, the Revd Davies, following a Church Council Meeting, appearing very upset. Karl explained that he felt Denise regularly interrupted him during discussions concerning boundary changes, spoke over him, ridiculed his opinions in front of other Church members and regularly raised her voice when responding to his comments. Karl felt disrespected and bullied by Denise.

Karl continued by saying that, despite a number of requests to Denise to meet on a one-to-one basis to discuss this matter, she had 'cold-shouldered' the idea stating that she was too busy and that 'there is nothing to discuss'. Karl now felt that he had no choice but to make a formal complaint.

The Revd Davies suggested to Karl that he have an informal conversation with Denise to see whether there was a way to address Karl's concerns. Karl agreed to 'hold-off' on making a complaint and await the outcome of the Revd Davies' proposed action.

### Outcome

The Revd Davies did manage to meet with Denise to discuss the concerns raised by Karl. Denise was quite shocked at the feelings expressed by Karl and became quite tearful. It emerged that Denise was experiencing considerable stress as her manse was effectively a building site and she had found the move to the new circuit very difficult because she was not used to living in a more rural environment. It also emerged that the children had not settled well into their new school.

She was also quite preoccupied with the pressures of managing the boundary changes and expressed some frustration at the attitude of Karl and other Church members, who, she felt, were not prepared to consider the potential advantages to the changes and were undermining the process. Denise indicated that she felt a little intimidated by Karl given his history and strong relationships within the local Church and the position of power she felt he had.

The Revd Davies suggested referring the matter to a member of the District Reconciliation Group who was experienced in mediation. Both Karl and Denise subsequently agreed to meet with the mediator and this proved very successful. The mediator provided an opportunity and the environment within which Karl and Denise were able to calmly listen to each other. Denise was able to acknowledge that her stress levels had clearly impacted upon her behaviour and apologised to Karl. Karl was clearly unaware of some of the issues Denise had been dealing with and acknowledged that he had become somewhat defensive about the proposed changes. He admitted that this had impacted upon his own behaviour. Both Karl and Denise shook hands and agreed to make time to have more informal discussion about the boundary changes. Neither party felt that a written apology from Denise was necessary.

In subsequent weeks, Karl realised that he had not been as sensitive towards Denise as he might have been and may have subconsciously used the power which came from his position in the circuit, and familiarity with people, to exert a strong influence in his interactions with her. He acknowledged that this could be seen as bullying and promised himself that this would not happen again.

## Appendix 2:

### Guidelines for setting up an intentional peer support group

An intentional peer support group can be established in order to explore a problem of bullying and harassment. In it, a group of people get together to talk through a specific issue in an open, non-judgemental way, brought by the person experiencing the problem (the 'issue bringer').

A defined period of time is set aside (usually an hour), in a private, safe and confidential space. The issue bringer begins by describing the issue as they see it themselves, followed by the group members asking questions in order to gain understanding and insight into it. It is suggested that the group be made up of five or six people in total.

The group members refrain from offering solutions to their view of the problem; instead they mostly ask a variety of probing questions. This allows the issue bringer to explore it creatively, perhaps to see it in a different light, and redefine the issue and their relationship to it.

Through reflection, the issue bringer may be enabled to see more clearly both the broader context to the problem and the depth to which it runs. This would include how the individual experiences it and what part, if any, that person has in maintaining the problem. The aim is that through fresh insight new options and solutions will be opened up.

### How should the group operate?

Ground rules on confidentiality (both during and after the meeting) and intentional listening (rather than problem solving) must be established at the outset. It is also important to agree the length of the meeting and whether a further meeting will take place.

It will also be important to decide whether one person takes on the role of facilitator or whether the issue

bringer takes responsibility for this. This decision will depend on the skills existing within the group itself.

It is important that the group works in a non-judgemental way and honours the particular mix of experience, skills and abilities that each person brings. Questioning should be open and respectful.

### Possible outcomes from a meeting

At the end of a meeting the issue under discussion will have been explored from a number of perspectives and angles. This will hopefully leave the issue bringer with new thoughts and feelings about it, potential solutions, and possibly a way to decide new behaviours to adopt

themselves. They will feel supported by the group, and have a place to refer back to should they need to seek further meetings. They will also have been able to 'normalise' their thoughts and feelings, eg 'others are just like me' in their response to the problem.

### Helpful behaviours from support group members

The following behaviours are considered to be most useful for effective learning to take place, and should be borne in mind when selecting members:

- Questioning skills to help people to find their own solutions to their problems.
- Active listening skills to communicate to people that they were being understood; to help them work out their own solutions but not give solutions; to help them clarify their situation, the facts, their thoughts, and their feelings; to hear without judging or evaluating.
- The ability to give and receive feedback to help people learn and develop; to increase their self-esteem and to make them feel valued.
- An understanding of group process to appreciate the

difference between task and process and between helpful and sabotaging behaviours.

- Creative problem-solving skills to provide a range of tools to help the group when they become 'stuck'.
- Understanding the process of learning to enable people to appreciate the variety of ways in which people can learn.
- Ability to maintain a respectful and honest approach to each other at all times.
- Ability to check in with the issue-bringer regularly to see if what they are doing at present is still the most useful thing to be doing.
- Skill in using, where necessary, a blend of summarising, reflecting on and reframing techniques.

## Appendix 3:

### Examples of inappropriate behaviour

These examples are taken from work carried out by a national trade union which has undertaken some

important work in the area of bullying and harassment. This list is not exhaustive but is for illustrative purposes.

#### 1. Behaviour that offends or insults

- Shouting at a target, alone or in front of others.
- Criticising, belittling or patronising a target, alone or in front of others.
- Using foul, obscene, malicious or offensive language.
- Back-stabbing, backbiting, sniping, mud-slinging, etc.
- Spreading rumours and gossip.
- Telling tales to discredit.
- Displaying offensive and insulting pictures, graffiti, emblems, etc.
- Regular use of sarcasm to demean the target and without consent.
- Libel or slander.
- Inappropriate jokes, banter, comments, suggestions or aspersions about the target.
- Snide remarks, jibes, name calling, use of offensive nicknames.
- Insubordination intended to undermine the target.
- Exacting punishments for mistakes.
- Being 'two-faced', saying one thing to the target's face, something else, normally the opposite, to others.
- Ending offensive comments with 'I was only joking - haven't you got a sense of humour?'
- Writing comments or opinions about a target on social media which are inappropriate or offensive, or what would not be said directly to them.

#### 2. Behaviour that intimidates or threatens

- Threatening violence.
- Physically attacking a target.
- Pointing and wagging of fingers.
- Thumping a table.
- Stamping of feet.
- Jumping up and down.
- Screaming.
- Having a temper tantrum.
- Going purple in the face.
- Intrusion of a target's personal and intimate space.
- Standing over a target.
- Inappropriate touching, caressing, holding, grabbing, etc.
- Shoving, barging and pushing.
- Blocking or barring the way.
- Vandalism of a target's property.
- Spying, pestering or other inappropriate, intrusive questioning, particularly into the target's personal or domestic life.
- Making a target the subject of a 'witch hunt'.
- Deliberate action outside of work that adversely affects the target's working life.
- Blaming a target automatically for anything that goes wrong.
- Encouraging colleagues to spy, snoop, eavesdrop or 'snitch' on the target.
- Malicious or ambiguous letters sent to the target's home, partner, family or friends.
- Anonymous telephone calls to the target or target's family, especially at unsocial hours.
- Ordering of unwanted goods or services to the target's home address with malicious intent.
- Using one's status to undermine or influence others, such as calling on God to legitimise a form of behaviour, course of action or theological perspective.

#### 3. Behaviour that isolates or excludes

- Excluding the target from anything to do with the running/operation/working/management of the project, team, office, church or circuit.
- Sending a target to 'Coventry'.
- Giving a target the 'cold shoulder'.
- Ignoring a target's views or opinions.
- Talking about a target, in their presence, in the second or third person.
- Excluding a target from social activities.
- Limiting communication to memo, e-mail or via a third party in lieu of speaking directly.
- Forcing the target to sit apart from colleagues, eg in a remote corner.
- Ending conversations when the target enters the room.
- Whispering about the target in their presence or behind their back.
- Making comments in a meeting about an individual which are said quietly and are later claimed to be private rather than public.

## 4. Behaviour that is directly work related

- Setting a target up to fail.
- Changing targets/deadlines without consultation and for no good reason or at short notice.
- Constantly highlighting errors or mistakes.
- Withholding of information, permission approval consent, etc that the target has a reasonable expectation of being given in order for them to carry out their duties.
- Withholding of support at times of necessity.
- Denying the target the resources or equipment necessary to do the job, whilst allowing others the resources and equipment as and when required.
- Denying training opportunities for a new role so as to keep the target incompetent and therefore open to criticism.
- The removal of status, authority, or tasks for which the target was recruited, especially in an underhand or devious manner.
- Removal of any authority which is necessary for the target to carry out their work.
- Refusing to assign or delegate work, then criticising for non-completion of the same work.
- Increasing the target's responsibilities but removing the necessary authority.
- Increasing responsibilities without informing the target.
- Deliberate and persistent undermining of the target's professional competence.
- Setting tasks without timescales and then criticising for not completing the work 'on time'.
- Sabotaging, interfering or impeding performance for the purpose of later criticism.
- Preventing the target from progressing by intentionally blocking development or training opportunities.
- Assessing performance far lower than documented achievements merit.
- Assessing performance or appraising significantly and adversely at variance with previous reports.
- Assessing performance at odds with the assessment of the individual, colleagues, peers, etc.
- Excessive monitoring of a target's work.
- Being coerced into regularly undertaking work of a higher status but without recognition.
- Setting impossible, arbitrary or unclear targets re: quality or quantity of work.
- Refusing to clarify target's role/function.
- Overburdening the target with work.
- Inappropriate, overbearing or excessive supervision.
- Removing areas of responsibility without consultation.
- Ordering a target to work below their level of ability and competence.
- Reassigning work unnecessarily or unexpectedly, perhaps replacing it with inappropriate or menial tasks.
- Imposition of non tasks or work which is unnecessary.
- Claims of misconduct, breach of discipline, etc but refusal to formalise or put in writing.
- Misusing power/disciplinary procedures to ensure the target's removal.
- Demotion, real or implied.
- Making threats of disciplinary action for trivial or fabricated incidents but refusal to discipline others for severely disruptive behaviour.
- Holding meetings, the purpose of and attendance at which is significantly at variance with what the target has been led to believe.
- Refusal to minute meetings or attempting to deny the opportunity to take minutes of meetings.
- Producing minutes that are inaccurate and one-sided.
- Meetings run more like interrogations.
- Attempts to deny representation where this would be appropriate.
- Suggesting a target should resign or questioning their calling in an inappropriate way.
- Regularly taking advantage of the target's good nature with regard to work tasks.
- Refusing to give approval for training until the very last moment or withdrawing approval at short notice.
- Refusal, without reasonable cause, of reasonable requests for leave, compassionate leave, change of working pattern, etc.
- Unreasonably delaying approval for the above until the last moment.
- The monitoring of telephone conversations without consent.
- Contacting the target on holiday or sick leave with 'urgent' work or unreasonable demands.
- Interfering with, intercepting or 'losing' mail addressed to the target.
- Giving the target difficult tasks but colleagues are given 'nice' or 'easy' ones in comparison.
- Misrepresenting a target's work as their own or taking undeserved credit.
- Colleagues being appointed without recourse to the correct procedures/due consultation.
- Unwarranted copying of critical emails to others.
- The use of innocent third parties to fabricate complaints.
- Using third parties to carry intimidating messages or carry out unwelcome actions toward the target.

- Claiming that there are complaints about the target but refusing to substantiate or confirm in writing, or be specific.
  - Claiming that third parties agree, concur or support the perpetrator's point of view, especially with respect to criticisms or alleged shortcomings.
  - Criticising the target for doing what others do without being criticised.
  - Inconsistent criticism.
  - Criticism that exaggerates, makes mountains out of molehills.
- Giving unjustified praise to confuse or deceive.
  - Demanding that work be redone or repeated, especially when it's satisfactory or complete.
  - Refusal to acknowledge achievement, worth, value, success, etc.
  - Deliberately undervaluing, downgrading, ignoring or minimising the value of the target's contribution.
  - Frequent changes of mind, reversal of decisions with little or no notice and without explanation or reason.

## Appendix 4:

### Liturgical and related resources

This section offers liturgical and related resources which may be helpful to individuals at different stages of the process of moving forward from a situation

#### Methodist resources

The *Methodist Worship Book* contains the following liturgies:

- An order of service for healing and wholeness

#### Other resources

##### 1. Liturgical resources

The Iona Community offers two liturgies which may be helpful in the context of Positive Working Together.

#### Extract from:

##### **A communion liturgy - the memory of brokenness and the hope of healing<sup>13</sup>**

*Beloved God,  
with the eagerness of a child, you wait for our coming,  
with the urgency of a lover, you long for our return  
with the anxious heart of a parent, your arms ache to  
hold us  
and we would come, restless or reluctant,  
weary or wary,  
hurting and yet hoping beyond hope  
stand still, undecided.  
We are drawn by the promise of your kindness  
but we are afraid of your disappointment  
of your judgement  
of your turning away from us.*

*So many people have let us down  
failed to deliver  
refused us as we really are.  
Are you one more shattered hope?  
No one could blame you if you closed your door,  
for we too have been the failures, the betrayers, the  
deniers,  
We too have hurt, and hurt and hurt again ... O beloved  
God,  
you are still there, still eager,  
still waiting patiently with arms wide open.*

of bullying or harassment. Often these will be useful after much hard work has been done, as a way of acknowledging personal change.

- A service of repentance and reconciliation

These are commended as being potentially helpful to individuals seeking to move forward.

#### Extract from:

##### **A communion liturgy on the theme of the Transfiguration<sup>14</sup>**

*On mountaintops and in valleys  
in our hopes and in our hearts  
God knows us better than we know ourselves -  
and God forgives us when we cannot forgive ourselves!*

*By God's mercy, we are forgiven;  
by God's mercy we are made whole;  
by God's mercy, we are equipped to serve others...*

*...that I am loved,  
even when others tell me differently;  
that goodness is the path which I am meant to walk,  
and others will help me to follow the Way,  
as I can be a guide to them.*

<sup>13</sup> *The memory of brokenness and the hope of healing - A communion liturgy* (taken from *Praying for the Dawn*, Wild Goose Publications 2007) available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>14</sup> *A Communion Liturgy on the theme of the Transfiguration* by Thom M Shurman, Wild Goose Publications available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

## 2. Prayers

**T**hese prayers may be helpful to individuals within the context of wishing to move forward from difficult experiences.

### **Lord of the morning**<sup>15</sup>

*Bless to us, O God, this day, fresh made.  
In the chorus of birds, bless us.  
In the scent of blossom, bless us.  
In the wet grass and the spring flowers, bless us.  
Bless us and heal us for we come to you in love and in trust.*

*We come to you in expectant hope.  
O God,  
give us a well of tears to wash away the hurts of our lives.  
O God, give us a well of tears  
to cleanse the wounds,  
to bathe the battered face of our world.  
O God, give us a well of tears  
or we are left, like arid earth,  
unsanctified.*

### **Your kingdom come**<sup>16</sup>

*Lord,  
you know our deepest desires  
and we know the vision of your Kingdom...  
we bring before you those elements in our lives  
in need of your transforming power:  
that which we misuse or neglect,  
that which we reluctantly let go of,  
that which we believe is not good enough:  
inspire us and disturb us to examine our deepest desires.*

### **A prayer in brokenness**<sup>17</sup>

*O God,  
I cannot undo the past,  
or make it never have happened!  
- neither can You. There are some things  
that are not possible even for You  
- but not many!*

*I ask You,  
humbly,  
and from the bottom of my heart:  
please, God,  
would You write straight  
with my crooked lines?  
Out of the serious mistakes of my life  
will You make something beautiful for You?*

*Teach me to live at peace with You,  
to make peace with others  
and even with myself.*

*Give me fresh vision. Let me  
experience Your love so deeply  
that I am free to  
face the future with a steady eye,  
forgiven,  
and strong in hope.*

### **A general intercession for those in trouble**<sup>18</sup>

*\*We hold before God:  
those for whom life is very difficult;  
those who have difficult decisions to make, and  
those who honestly do not know what is the right thing to  
do.*

*\*We hold before God:  
those who have difficult tasks to do and to face,  
and who fear they may fail in them;  
those who have difficult temptations to face, and  
who know only too well that they may fall to  
them, if they try to meet them alone.*

*\*We hold before God:  
those who have difficult people to work with;  
those who have to suffer unjust treatment, unfair  
criticism, unappreciated work.*

*\*We hold before God:  
Those who are sad because someone they loved  
has died;  
and any who are disappointed in something for  
which they had hoped very much.*

*\*Indicates a change of reader (if desired)*

<sup>15</sup> Lord of the Morning from *Prayers for forgiveness*: edited by Kathy Galloway, Wild Goose Publications 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>16</sup> Your Kingdom come from *Prayers for forgiveness*: edited by Kathy Galloway, Wild Goose Publications 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>17</sup> By Andy Raine (after Ignatius Loyola) as found in *Celtic Daily Prayer* published by Collins. Used with permission.

<sup>18</sup> William Barclay in *A Barclay Prayer Book*, SCM Press, Norwich, 1990 (amended liturgically in *Celtic Daily Prayer* published by Collins. Used with permission.

### 3. Blessings

**T**hese blessings are offered as they express emotions often experienced in situations of conflict or misunderstanding.

#### **Sometimes pain sweeps over me<sup>19</sup>**

Lord  
sometimes pain sweeps over me -  
pain of limbs, pain of heart.  
There is heaviness in movement and thought.  
But why am I telling you this?  
You already know and are bearing it with me -  
enabling me to carry on -  
blessing me with your strength and love.

#### **If our days darken<sup>20</sup>**

If our days darken  
may hope bud within us as the ivy does,  
blossoming into green, unexpected flowers when the  
winter comes

#### **In times of affliction<sup>21</sup>**

May we discover that the road we didn't choose  
didn't want to travel,  
is a highway that leads unerringly  
towards the light.

#### **A Blessing on inner darkness<sup>22</sup>**

Bless to me, O Lord,  
the darkness in my journey,  
the wounds of deepest longing,  
the risk of still believing.

O intimate, incarnate One,  
stay close where I most need you,  
where you already are:  
in my mistakes - healing;  
in my emptiness - inflowing;  
in my nothingness - God.

#### **Let light enfold me<sup>23</sup>**

Let light enfold me  
that my inward eye may see clearly  
the path that lies ahead.  
Let my mind be opened up  
that I may recognise  
the sign posts along the way...

...Let me be embraced  
with the love by which  
the whole of creation is moved,  
the very essence with which  
all things are held together,  
dependent yet independent,  
whole yet individuated,  
in which all are my relatives.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce Clarke in *A book of blessings*, edited by Ruth Burgess: Wild Goose Publications, 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>20</sup> Frances Copsey in *A book of blessings*, edited by Ruth Burgess: Wild Goose Publications, 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>21</sup> Frances Copsey in *A book of blessings*, edited by Ruth Burgess: Wild Goose Publications, 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>22</sup> Angela Ashwin in *A book of blessings*, edited by Ruth Burgess: Wild Goose Publications, 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

<sup>23</sup> Anon in *A book of blessings*, edited by Ruth Burgess: Wild Goose Publications, 2007, available from [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

