



**A Workshop to Restore Hope and Harmony Where It Most
Belongs – in Conflicted Faith Communities**

**Developed and Presented by:
Dr. Darrell Puls
Peacebridge Ministries
Darrell@conflicttopeace.com**

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Part 1: Preparation.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Working Definitions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
In the Beginning.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Initial Contact.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Your Expectations.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Dancing in the Minefield of Culture	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Why is Conflict in Faith Communities So Destructive?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Contexts of Organizational Conflict	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Group Structure.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Group Process	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conflict Management	Error! Bookmark not defined.
What Causes Conflict Among You?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sources of Conflict	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Unique Characteristics of Disputes in Faith Communities	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Mission and Vision Statements	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Data Filtering and Biases	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Interests: The Heart of the Matter	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Scripture: The Ultimate Weapon.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Data Gathering	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Interview Checklist.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Summarizing Collected Data and Pattern Identification	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Communication Skills.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
A Litany of Misery.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Decision Making Models	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Helping Them Reconnect.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Behaviors that Inhibit Reconnection	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Guidelines for Giving Feedback.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Resistance.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Wounded Healer	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Finding Your Wounds.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Getting Out of God’s Way	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Into the Big Empty	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Part 2 – Process and Intervention.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Crucible.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Logistics	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Beginnings	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Ground Rules	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Opening Lines – The Lament.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Problem-Solving Process	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Facilitating Group Change	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Suggestions for Questions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Suggestions for the Peacemaker.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Value Disputes	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Values v. Preferences	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Escalating Options for Values Disputes:.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Values Clarity.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Settlement Agreements	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Forgiveness and Reconciliation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Defining Forgiveness	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Objections and Responses.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Why Forgive? The Surprising Answers!.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

TRUTH: A Post-Conflict Forgiveness and Reconciliation Process	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Turning.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Putting Miles on Your Moccasins	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Light of God Within.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Barrier of Self	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Reframing from Shame to Guilt	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Mutuality	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Turning towards Home	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Turning to Action	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Turning and Hope.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Turning Narrative.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Remembering.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Overcoming Barriers.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Guilt Enough to Go Around	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Communal Confession	Error! Bookmark not defined.
To Whom is Confession Made?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Limiting Confession	Error! Bookmark not defined.
“Truthiness” and the Truth.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
From “Truthiness” to Truth.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Untangling the Wreckage	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Remembering Narrative.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Understanding	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Secret Life of Apology.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Making it Real.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Revealing Your True Face.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
How before Why	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Slow Dancing	Error! Bookmark not defined.
A Simple Gift	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Why Apologies Fail	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Understanding Narrative	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Transformation.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Assurance	Error! Bookmark not defined.
From the Inside Out.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Changing the Wind	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Return.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Reconciliation – or Not?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Transformation Narrative.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Healing.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Justice/Mercy Continuum	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Why Justice Fails to Satisfy	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The World Turned Upside Down	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Kiss of Mercy.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Summoning Mercy.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Healing Narrative.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Endings	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Postscript.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Author	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 1	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Glasl’s Conflict Escalation Model	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 1: Transitions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Tasks of the Transition Process	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix 2.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Transitional Flow Charts.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Recommended Reading	Error! Bookmark not defined.

SMALL WARS

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 5:9)

Introduction

Wars begin over small and even inconsequential disputes. As people feel disrespected and disregarded, resentment grows, and with these the conflict grows as well. Wars rarely start in the open, but find their seeds sprouting within small slights and abuses.

This is a workshop on the dynamics of conflicts within faith communities, particularly congregations. It is designed for those who have the desire to work with these conflicts.

The techniques described in this workshop are different than those used to mediate smaller interpersonal conflicts and are also different from those used in secular organizational conflicts. While the author comes from a Christian background, the dynamics, techniques and processes found here are universal in application.

Conflicts in religious settings always raise questions of morality, of right and wrong, and of injury that must be addressed. How these injuries are addressed can take many forms. In most cases, the Peacemaker must probe and locate the underlying issues that lie at the very core of the conflict in order to resolve it.

This moral dilemma requires tackling the underlying problem adequately. And unless it is tackled properly, the conflict persists: It does not go away and comes back in myriad forms, becoming ever more pernicious. . . . Peace in all its forms . . . asks for justice in resolving all conflicts. So that the aggrieved party is satisfied with the result and being at peace works for peace with all concerned.

~Siraj Islam Mufti, *Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam*

As we shall see, justice is a fluid concept that changes shapes and is always unique to the conflict and the people within it. Justice that heals is inseparable from mercy, but the forms they take together are unpredictable.

This manual is in two parts: **Preparation** and **Intervention**. The Preparation section describes the underlying forces and factors that you must examine and consider before you do the actual

intervention. Preparation is in a linear form that moves from the earliest contact through final preparations. Intervention describes the actual intervention process where everything comes together. The two parts are inseparable. Done well, they create a seamless-appearing process that moves in a logical and rational progression that increases in power and flexibility as it goes forward. This process goes well beyond the settlement agreement where traditional mediation ends—settlement is only the end of the beginning! We will continue on to full resolution of the underlying needs.

As in medicine, the first rule is to do no harm! Done poorly or without due care and caution can leave them in worse condition than before you walked in the door.

Everything in this manual has been field tested and used multiple times in real faith community conflicts. While there is room for theme and variations, I think you will see that staying with the process as outlined is the most effective way of moving conflicted congregations from active hostility to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Peacemaking is a time-honored profession and calling, but it is not a safe one. There are times when the people you are trying to help will turn on you in their frustration and pain. It takes both courage and humility to walk into a room where there are dozens of angry people and declare to them that you are there to restore peace. They may focus on you, but you must remember that it is not about you!

In much the same way as a chicken contributes and a pig is committed to a ham and egg breakfast, you must be committed. They have lost their way and are stranded in a cold and miserable place. You will lead them to freedom.

The Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

