

Conflict Resolution Policy, Suggested Procedures and Supporting Material

25 June 2025

1. Purpose

This policy aims to help church members live out the call of Christ to be peacemakers, to pursue unity in the body of Christ, and to resolve conflict in ways that honour God and reflect His grace.

The policy is followed by a more in-depth exploration of the Biblical framework for approaching conflict, a flowchart and suggested process for helping resolve conflict, and then appendices to help with conflict resolution.

2. The Policy

At Grace West Anglican Church, we are committed to resolving conflict in ways that honour God and reflect the grace of Christ. We recognise that, as God builds his church,

Conflict arises not merely from differences of opinion or disagreement, but when that disagreement escalates and starts to involve: tension, misunderstanding, changes in behaviour and communication, the disruption of healthy relationships and increase in emotional strain. It may occur even when no one has acted wrongly.

We recognise that conflict is a normal part of life and that facing it can be difficult. Yet, it also brings opportunities for personal growth, serving others, and building unity in the church. With the help of prayer and the power of God's Spirit, we aim to approach conflict with love for God and love for one another.

We acknowledge that conflict can arise in any relationship - whether in marriages, friendships, ministry teams, families, or among or with church staff. Anyone can find themselves as one of the parties involved.

We encourage people to avoid unhelpful behaviours like gossip, withdrawing from others, avoiding hard conversations, or dragging others into conflict.

Shaped by Matthew 18, we encourage a stepped approach: begin with a private conversation, seek help from a trusted third party if needed, involve church staff for guidance, and pursue professional Christian counselling when appropriate.

We also encourage others who may be supporting someone in a conflict situation to respect this stepped approach. It's important not to disrupt the process by becoming involved in a way that is unhelpful or encourages taking sides, even with good intentions.

Conflict sometimes occurs in the context of power differences. Those with greater power - whether positional, informal or even physical - should respond with humility and gentleness, making it easier for others to be heard. Those who feel vulnerable are encouraged to speak honestly and, if felt needed, seek support.

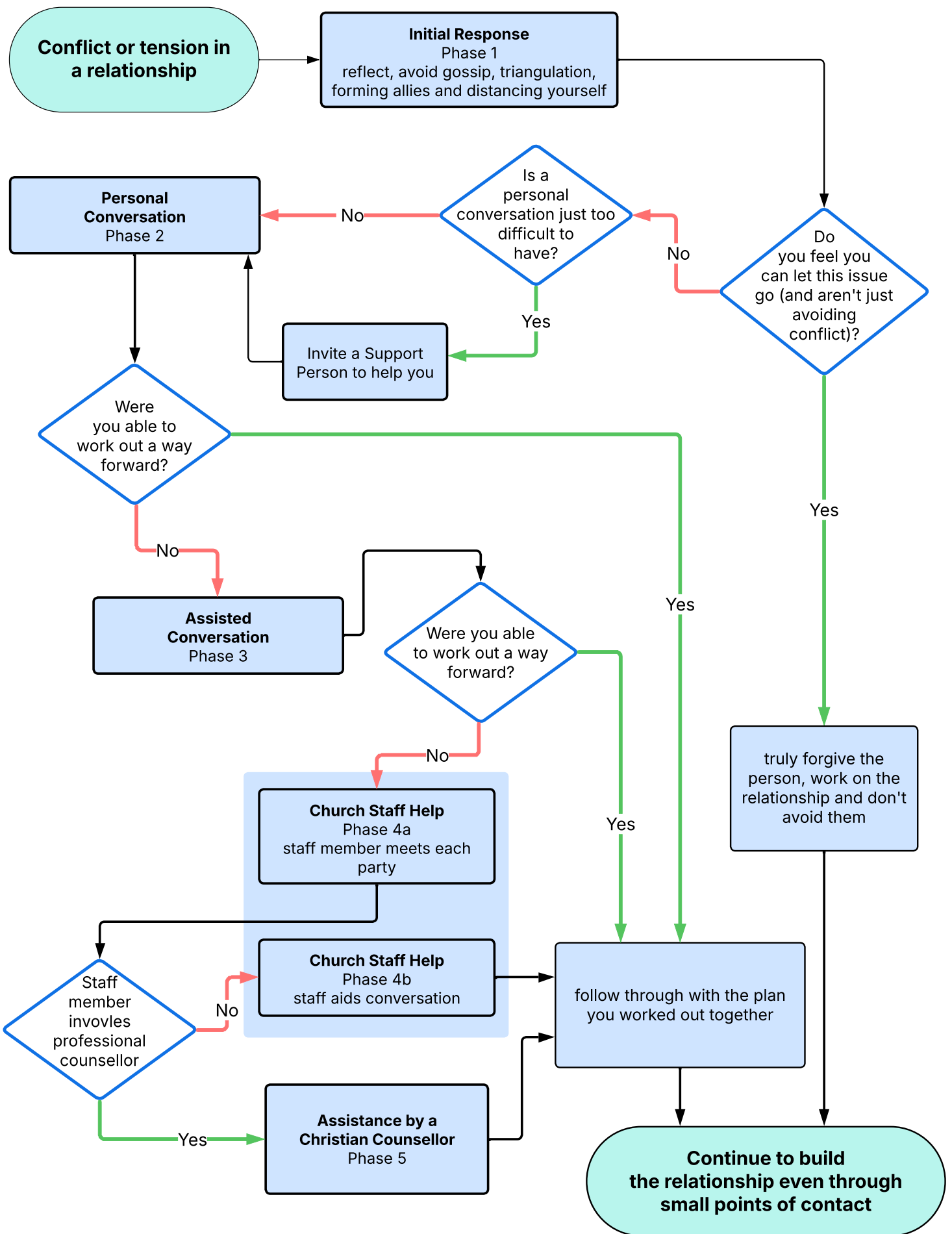
Parish Council will set a budget for professional counsellors in the Ministry Resources Budget with expenditure determined by the Rector with proper authorisation from the Wardens.

The church staff team will be made familiar with this policy and available to discuss issues of conflict with church members. Church ministry staff will be trained to an appropriate standard in conflict resolution and aware of situations where professional help ought to be engaged.

Every member of Grace West is encouraged to cultivate an attitude that reflects the heart of Christ in all relationships within the church. All members should be made aware of this policy and it is anticipated they will approach conflict resolution promptly, with patience, kindness, and a genuine commitment to reconciliation. It is expected that directions from the church staff will be treated seriously.

This policy does not replace any policy to do with bullying, misconduct, abuse, violence or the mechanisms for reporting such behaviour.

3. Conflict Resolution Flowchart



4. Biblical Framework

The church as God's people

In the church, God is building a diverse community of believers. As 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us, the church is described as the body of Christ - where, despite there being many parts with different gifts, backgrounds, and perspectives, yet we are, together, called to be one body in Christ:

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” 1 Corinthians 12:12–14

This diversity is a rich blessing, given so that we might serve God, one another, and the world and display the power of God in the gospel. However, as we work closely together in the cause of Christ, our differences can also lead to conflict - not necessarily because of wrongdoing, but often through misunderstandings or differing expectations.

Conflict as an opportunity for growth

Learning to deal with conflict is a normal and even beneficial part of any relationship, including within Christian community. Rather than something to be feared or avoided, conflict can be a powerful opportunity for growth. It brings into the open issues such as hidden assumptions, unmet needs, and differing perspectives, where they can be addressed with honesty and grace. Conflict provides an opportunity to listen, learn and appreciate different opinions and assess one's own position on matters.

Conflict is an opportunity to practise humility, patience, forgiveness, and love. By engaging in conflict with a heart that seeks understanding and reconciliation, we mirror the love of God and build stronger, more authentic connections with others. In this way, conflict becomes not just a challenge, but an invitation to grow in Christlikeness and deepen our love for one another.

Relationships take time, patience, and intentional effort. Conflict is a natural part of life, and we want our church community to be prepared with healthy expectations for how to navigate it well.

Rather than avoiding one another or responding with hostility, our hope is that members of Grace West will engage in conflict with grace, humility, and Christlike love - seeking understanding, restoration, and unity.

Some Biblical Foundations to approaching conflict

The Biblical approach to conflict in the church is based in truth, love, humility, and a desire for reconciliation. Instead of disengaging from each other, the goal is to rebuild a damaged relationship.

Resolving matters quickly

The scriptures encourage us to raise issues quickly and settle them as quickly as possible:

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Ephesians 4:26–27

Conflict despite no wrongdoing

Conflict can arise even when neither party has done anything morally wrong, simply because of differing perspectives, expectations, communication styles or through miscommunication or misunderstandings (Acts 15:36–41).

Seeking peace

As Paul urges us in Romans 12:18 to seek harmony even in moments of disagreement. As such, conflict is a discipling moment where we learn what it means to put our faith into action.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18

The writer to the Hebrews speaks in a similar way, with a focus on the effort involved in maintaining peace with others:

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14

Ephesians 4:2–3 reminds us to pursue unity and truth with humility, bearing with one another in love and striving to maintain the bond of peace.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:2–3

Forgiving others

Colossians 3:13 calls us to forgive generously, just as Christ has forgiven us, demonstrating grace even when it's difficult.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13

Listening to Understand

Our approach to difficult conversations is one of patience and seeking to understand the other person. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us how to respond well to each other and James 1:19 is an encouragement to listen:

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,” James 1:19

Trust Leaders

There are occasions when the church staff will assist those experiencing conflict. As Christians, we are called to trust the leadership God has appointed, acknowledging their responsibility to guide and protect the body of Christ. It is important to thoughtfully consider and respect the guidance offered by our staff as they seek to lead our church faithfully. As the writer to the Hebrews says:

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. Hebrews 13:17

The Apostle Paul involved himself in conflict resolution as he exhorted two members of the church in Philippi to resolve their dispute:

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” Philippians 4:2

Leaders to have servant heart

The Bible teaches that true leadership is marked by humility, service, and a willingness to listen - especially when challenged by those with less power. Jesus said, “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,” (Mark 10:42-43).

God hears the cries of the vulnerable and models what love for others looks like - and expects leaders to do the same: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people... I have heard them crying... and I am concerned about their suffering” (Exodus 3:7). Godly leaders reflect His heart by listening with compassion, responding justly, and making space for every voice to be heard.

When the prophet Nathan confronted King David, David responded with repentance, saying, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:13). Godly leaders follow this example by listening carefully and admitting fault when needed.

A process for conflict resolution

Jesus outlines a process in Matthew 18:15–17 for engaging in a particular situation where someone has clearly sinned. Whilst not the same as most conflict situations, it can be helpful to have a process for having, what can be, difficult conversations.

A helpful model is to first address issues privately with the person involved, then, if there is difficulty coming to a resolution, then with another trusted people. If the matter continues to be unresolved, or is more complex, then it may come to a member of the church ministry staff to listen to both parties and determine the best course of action, with the possibility of professional help being sought to help the process. This approach provides a pathway for restoration even when matters get ‘stuck’, aiming to maintain unity in the body of Christ.

The abhorrence of violence

At times, individuals may respond to conflict with violence or abuse. Such behavior is unacceptable and contrary to God’s will. If you are experiencing violence or abuse, we urge you to seek help and protection immediately by speaking with someone you trust. It is important to understand that violence or abuse may not be constant, but regardless, no one should have to endure it. Our church community is committed to supporting your safety and wellbeing.

The apostle Paul teaches us:

“Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.” 1 Timothy 2:8

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:31-32

In summary, we want our church to be a community marked by peace, grace, humility, and mutual trust - a place where grow together in what it means to follow and be like Christ.

5. Suggested ‘Phases’ for Conflict Resolution

Shaped by elements of Matthew 18:15-17 and patterns of responding in godly ways, we have a policy which follows a ‘staged’ approach to conflict resolution:

Phase 1 - Initial Reflection and Response

Phase 2 - Personal Conversation (with possible support person)

Phase 3 - Assisted Conversation

Phase 4 - Staff Member Help

Phase 5 - Assistance by a Christian counsellor

A flowchart of the processes is on the following page.

Phase 1 - Initial Response

Goal

To avoid responding in unhelpful ways to conflict.

To move quickly to speaking to the person or just letting the issue 'go'.

When to Use This Step

- As you are working out how to respond to a situation and before you make any decision just to 'let the matter go'.

Biblical Basis

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." Matthew 18:15

1. Reflect on what is happening

1. Pause and think clearly about what's really going on. Ask yourself: What are the specific issues at the heart of this conflict? What exactly happened, and why did it affect me this way?
2. Try to avoid generalisations like "they always" or "they never," which can blur the real issues. Instead, focus on clear examples and the impact they had on you and your relationship with the person.
3. Taking a few minutes to jot down some notes can help you organise your thoughts and stay focused - keeping your concern centred on resolving the issue.
4. Try and consider the situation from the point of view of the other person - what might be happening for them? Why might they have acted as they did?
5. Pause and reflect. Ask yourself: Am I reacting emotionally or responding thoughtfully? What assumptions have I made? Am I experiencing the other party doing something wrong or unwise, or just something I don't like?
6. Check your motives - am I seeking peace or just trying to be right? Consider your own part in the issue, be willing to listen, and speak the truth with love.
7. Pray, seek God's wisdom in how best to respond to the situation.
8. In a domestic situation - is this part of a cycle of unresolved behavior and so actually more serious than I realise? Do I feel unsafe? Should I be reaching out for help?

2. Usually Avoid Delay

In most cases, it is wise to address conflict without unnecessary delay. Prompt conversations can prevent misunderstandings from growing and help maintain trust. However, if strong emotions such as anger are involved, or if someone lacks the emotional or practical capacity to engage well at that moment, it may be more helpful to pause and allow time to process before responding.

That said, delays are usually avoided because it:

1. **Prevents Escalation**
 - Ignoring the issue doesn't make it go away - it often makes it worse.
 - Emotions may build up, leading to stronger reactions.
2. **Reduces Misunderstandings**
 - Delays can lead to greater assumptions or confusion.
 - Early communication helps keep the facts and feelings clear.
3. **Encourages Honest, Timely Dialogue**
 - Addressing things promptly shows respect.
 - It's easier to talk about something while it's still fresh.
4. **Preserves Relationships**
 - Acting early can protect trust and prevent long-term damage.
5. **Minimises Stress and Disruption**
 - Ongoing tension affects well-being and focus.
 - Resolving things quickly helps everyone move on.

2. Avoid Distancing yourself

It is easy to want to avoid conflict and distance yourself from the other person. Dealing with conflict can be confronting and often requires difficult conversations. Make a decision not to avoid conflict but engage properly in it. Work out how you are going to approach the person you have conflict with so the issue has the chance to be resolved. Distancing isn't helpful since:

1. **Distancing Breaks Communication**
 - prevents mutual understanding.
 - It blocks opportunities for dialogue and repair.
 - Without talking, people are left to guess what's wrong.
 - This can lead to false assumptions, hurt feelings, or blame.
2. **Distancing Damages Relationships**
 - Avoidance can feel like rejection or abandonment to the other person.
 - Over time, it erodes trust and connection.
3. **Misses the Chance to Learn and Grow**
 - Conflict, when handled well, can lead to stronger relationships and personal growth, while avoidance shuts down this opportunity.

3. Avoid Gossip

Why It's Good to Avoid Gossip in a Conflict Situation

- 1. Gossip Spreads Misinformation**
 - Details can be exaggerated or misunderstood.
 - It distorts the truth and complicates the original issue.
- 2. Breaks Trust**
 - Gossip makes others feel unsafe or betrayed.
 - It damages trust with the person you're in conflict with and those around you.
- 3. Involves People Who Aren't Part of the Solution**
 - Gossip pulls in bystanders who can't help resolve the issue.
 - This adds unnecessary drama and confusion.
- 4. Escalates the Conflict**
 - Talking behind someone's back can make the conflict bigger and harder to fix.
 - If the person finds out, it can lead to even more hurt or anger.
- 5. Prevents Direct Communication**
 - Gossip is a form of avoidance.
 - It stops people from having honest, respectful conversations that could solve the problem.

4. If appropriate, seek Godly counsel

- There are times when it can be wise and helpful to seek the perspective of a mature, trusted Christian - particularly when you're unsure how to respond to a conflict. This is not about involving a third party inappropriately or creating division (commonly referred to as triangulation, see below), but about ensuring that you are thinking clearly, prayerfully, and in a godly manner.
- In the midst of conflict, it can be easy to overreact, misjudge motives, or become clouded by emotion. A wise and godly friend can help you reflect more objectively, consider the heart issues involved, and respond with grace and truth.
- This kind of counsel is most helpful when it aims to support reconciliation, not fuel resentment or gossip.

5. Avoid Triangulation (see Appendix B)

What is Triangulation?

Triangulation happens when a person brings a third party into a conflict between themselves and someone else, instead of addressing the issue directly with the person involved. They might be engaged to provide sympathy or support, but, often unintentionally, make things more difficult to resolve. The

person with the difficulty often feels better because they have been able to talk things through with someone, but the matter is left unresolved, the relationship remains fractured and the 'triangulated' person's relationship with the other party is undermined.

Example:

Instead of speaking directly to another team member about a disagreement, a person goes to a friend to complain about the other team member.

Why is Triangulation a Problem?

1. It avoids direct communication.
2. It creates confusion and spreads gossip.
3. It can escalate the conflict instead of resolving it.
4. It pulls others into the issue unnecessarily.
5. It often leads to taking sides and damaging relationships - even whole networks of relationships.

How to Avoid Triangulation:

1. **Talk Directly**
Speak to the person you have the issue with before involving others.
2. **Encourage Others to Speak for Themselves**
If someone relates their conflict situation to you without seeking to resolve the issue, gently encourage them to go directly to the person involved. You need to recognize when to step back and allow others to handle their own conflicts. Assist a person in developing their problem-solving skills rather than solving problems for them.
Say: "Have you talked to them about it?"
3. **Use a Mediator Only When Needed**
Bring in a neutral third party only if direct attempts to resolve the issue have failed.
4. **Use a 'Support Person' Only When Needed**
Bring in a Support Person only if you feel it necessary. A Support Person shouldn't be drawn into the conflict, they are present to make it easier for the vulnerable person to share (see more in Appendix D).
5. **Foster a Culture of Direct Communication**
Encourage open, respectful dialogue in your team, Connect Group, or congregation.
6. **The problem of positioning yourself as a 'rescuer'**
When someone tries to involve you before they have spoken to a person, it is easy to step in as a 'rescuer' (see Appendix B). The rescuer's actions, though seemingly helpful, can lead to:

- a. the dependency of the person who is experiencing conflict, by, keeping the person reliant on their assistance as they position themselves as indispensable.
- b. prolonged conflicts since issues remain unresolved as direct communication is bypassed
- c. an escalation of conflict as it effectively involves another party
- d. increased stress, frustration and emotional exhaustion of the parties involved as conflict remains unresolved
- e. the missed opportunity for growth as it prevents individuals from developing their own problem-solving skills and taking responsibility for the relationships in their life

7. **How to ask for help**

If you are seeking advice in a conflict situation, instead of saying “can you tell them I’m upset?”, ask “can you help me figure out how to talk to them directly.”

6. **Avoid gathering ‘allies’**

- While it is easy to search out people who will ‘side’ with you, don’t involve others to take sides or validate your point of view. The goal is to have a conversation with the person with whom you are having conflict.
- gathering allies drags uninvolved people into the conflict, forcing them to feel they need to take ‘sides’ and can make the other person involved in the conflict feel ‘ganged up’ on.

7. **If appropriate, seek a Support Person (see Appendix C)**

- There are circumstances where a Support Person can be helpful - particularly where there are power differences involved and/or the person feels vulnerable.
- A Support Person would be someone who is present in the conversations with the parties experiencing conflict.
- More details on what it looks like to support a person in conflict without being drawn into the conflict can be found in the appendix on managing power differences.

8. **Forgive from the heart if you choose to ‘let it go’**

If you do choose to let an issue ‘go’, then truly forgive the person and genuinely do not hold that thing against them. While it is critical to forgive someone who asks for forgiveness (Luke 17:3), it is also true that you ought forgive someone who hasn’t asked for it:

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Mark 11:25

If you have genuinely 'let go' of the issue then you won't avoid the person nor let it adversely affect your relationship with them. Of course, the situation may arise again and, if it does, may need a different approach.

CAUTION: Don't use 'letting it go' just to avoid conflict that really needs to be dealt with. Often even a small conversation helps everyone move past an issue. It helps to clarify matters that might have been misunderstood and builds pathways of communication.

Phase 2: Personal Conversation

Goals

- to love the other person and see the relationship improved or restored
- to handle the conflict privately, directly, graciously and in a timely manner.

When to Use This Step

- When you feel hurt, misunderstood, or in disagreement with another person and the issue feels significant enough that you're unable to move on from it.
- When you notice tension or division in a relationship.
- When you avoid a person because of an unresolved issue.

Biblical Basis

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;”
Ephesians 4:2-4

The Process:

Step 1. Pray First

- a. Before anything else, take time to pray. Ask God for wisdom, humility, patience, and love. Pray for the other person involved and for the restoration of the relationship.
- b. pray for courage: not ‘to win’ but to be vulnerable and willing to be shown to be wrong
- c. pray the Holy Spirit will work in the situation and that he might bring a positive outcome
- d. pray that you would strive to love the other person and treat them with genuine respect.

Step 2. Raise the Issue Wisely and Respectfully

- a. Instead of complaining to others, aim to speak directly with the person involved. Do this in a timely manner to prevent resentment or misunderstanding from growing. It's important that both people recognise there is an issue worth addressing.
- b. Raising the issue may feel awkward, so here are some practical tips:
 - i. *Pick the right time and place: Choose a private, calm, and neutral setting – not just before church or during a busy moment.*
 - ii. *Consider sending a message first: If face-to-face feels too difficult, a gentle text can open the door. For example: “Hi! I’ve been thinking about what’s happened between us, and I really value our friendship. I’d love to catch up and talk things through – not to lay blame, but to understand*

each other better and hopefully restore things. Let me know if you'd be open to that."

- iii. *Be clear about your intent: Start with something like, "I want to talk about something because I value our relationship and want to work it out together."*

Step 3. *Arrange a Time to Talk*

- a. Where possible, meet in person, as delicate conversations are best had face to face. Avoid texts or emails for resolving conflict.
- b. Choose a setting that's quiet, private, and free from distractions.
- c. Set expectations: both people should be able to speak and be listened to respectfully.
- d. Reassure the other person that your tone will be respectful and your goal is reconciliation.

Step 4. *4. Meet and Listen Carefully*

- a. *Greet each other warmly and, if appropriate, pray together before you begin.*
- b. *Give the other person time to share their perspective without interruption.*
- c. *Listen actively: not just to respond, but to understand. Ask clarifying questions to ensure you're hearing them accurately.*

Step 5. *Share Your Perspective*

- a. Speak honestly, using "I" statements (e.g., "I felt hurt when..."), rather than accusatory language (e.g., "You always...").
- b. Focus on your own experience rather than the other person's character.
- c. Be willing to acknowledge your own contribution to the situation. This demonstrates humility and helps de-escalate tension.

Step 6. *Identify the Root Causes*

- a. Work together to clarify misunderstandings.
- b. Try to look beyond the surface issues to uncover what's really going on — assumptions, unmet expectations, or different perspectives.

Step 7. *Offer and Ask for Forgiveness*

- a. Forgiveness is central to the Christian life (Ephesians 4:32).
- b. Be open to being shown to be wrong or partially wrong
- c. Even if the fault is shared, be quick to confess your part and extend forgiveness where needed. This helps break down barriers and open the way to healing.

Step 8. *Generate Solutions Together*

- a. Shift the focus from blame to collaboration.
- b. Ask, "How can we handle this differently next time?" or "What would help us move forward?"
- c. Work together to evaluate solutions that are fair, practical, and promote restoration.

Step 9. *Agree on a Way Forward*

- a. Either of you may need time to consider what has been said – be open to giving each other time by arranging another meeting without pushing for a solution or finality in this meeting
- b. Decide together on any next steps or actions you'll take – it may involve catching up again.
- c. Stay in contact and check in to ensure things are improving.
- d. Continue to pursue peace, not just once, but as a pattern of grace in your relationship.

If things don't go well

- a. If you feel that the conversation is headed in a direction that isn't helpful, then politely suggest that you think it would be helpful to have someone aid your conversation.
- b. A suggested way to do this would be to say something like:
 - i. "I really want to work this out well – would you be open to having someone we both trust help us talk it through?"
 - ii. "I value our relationship, and I think a third person could help us hear each other better."
 - iii. "I'm struggling to move forward on my own – maybe we could ask someone neutral to guide the conversation?"
 - iv. "Would you feel okay if we invited our team leader to sit with us and help us sort this out?"
 - v. "I think a fresh perspective might really help – would you be willing to talk with someone together?"

Phase 3: Assisted Conversation

Goal

Invite trusted, spiritually mature members to help mediate.

When to Use This Step

- When the one-on-one conversation has not brought clarity or healing.
- When you feel unsafe or unsure of how to proceed alone.

How to Proceed:

- 1) *Choose the Right Person to assist the conversation:*
 - a) Select a person or people who are respected, prayerful, neutral, and discreet.
 - b) If the issue has come up because you serve on the same team, it might make sense to ask the team leader.
 - c) Avoid involving people who may be biased or too close to the situation.
 - d) Find one (or possibly two people) who both parties are happy to have help
- 2) *Ask for Help Humbly:*
 - a) Approach your chosen support person with humility and a desire for reconciliation, not vindication.
 - b) Make it clear that you are wanting their help to aid your conversation and solve the conflict (and not bringing them into 'triangulation')
 - c) Example: "Would you be willing to help us talk through a conflict in a godly way?"
- 3) *The Mediator Helps with the steps outlined in Phase 2*
 - a) The mediator helps arrange the meeting, keeps the conversation focused and constructive and may ask questions to facilitate the conversation.
 - b) The mediator isn't there to 'pick sides', but to help the two people with their conversation.
- 4) *If things are more complicated and don't work out*
 - a) Sometimes, when two people are in conflict, it becomes clear that help from a member of the staff team and possibly a trained counsellor is needed. This is especially true when conversations have stalled, emotions are very strong, or there's a history of deep hurt or unresolved issues.
 - b) If someone feels unsafe, overwhelmed, or the conflict is affecting their wellbeing or faith, a member of the staff team, or maybe a trained counsellor, can provide the care and tools needed to move forward.
 - c) Seeking help in this way isn't a failure - it's a wise and loving step toward healing and reconciliation.

Phase 4: Church Staff Help

Goal

Seek pastoral guidance to help restore peace.

When to Use This Step

- When attempts at personal or assisted resolution have not succeeded.

How to Proceed:

- 1) *Submit a Request to a member of the staff team:*
 - a) Contact the Rector or Assistant Minister in writing or in person.
 - b) Share a summary of the situation and what steps you've already taken.
- 2) *Pastoral Discernment:*
 - a) A member of the staff team will meet with each party individually to understand the issue.
 - b) The staff team may direct the matter for professional help depending on the situation. While this might be more involved than anticipated, it is offered as a way to help rebuild a broken relationship with someone who has skills beyond those of the church staff.
 - c) The matter will be handled with care, prayer, and discretion.
- 3) *Professional Mediation:*
 - a) A professional counsellor will be found by the staff member and contact each party to determine the best way forward, OR
- 4) *Church Staff Mediation:*
 - a) The member of the staff team will lead a meeting, focused on listening, reflection and reconciliation as described in Phase 2.
 - b) The goal is transformation, not just behavioural compliance.
- 5) *Spiritual Accountability and Restoration:*
 - a) Church staff may recommend next steps such as prayer, mentoring, relational boundaries, or team reassignment if ministry roles are involved.

Phase 5: Assistance by a Christian Counsellor

Goal

Provide professional support for resolving the conflict

When to Use This Step

- When the conflict has deep emotional layers, trauma, or longstanding tension.
- When spiritual care and biblical counsel from our staff team alone are not sufficient to untangle the issue.

How to Proceed:

1) *Pastoral Referral:*

- a) The staff team may recommend that a trained Christian counsellor help with the situation.
- b) This is not a sign of failure, but a sign of wisdom and care.
- c) Engaging in this process is an important part of the health of our church and greatly appreciated.

2) *Counselling Support:*

- a) The church will offer a list of trusted counsellors.
- b) In some cases, the church may subsidize a limited number of sessions which may involve meeting with the counsellor privately and with the other party.

3) *Ongoing Prayer and Community Care:*

- a) While counselling happens privately, the church community will continue to support individuals through prayer, friendship, and discipleship.

Appendix A – helping two people with conflict as a mediator

You may have been asked to help two people in a situation of conflict. They may be two members of your team or Connect Group, or just two people who both know and trust you. These are a few directions to help the two parties.

1) Avoid being part of the problem

- a) Ensure you aren't being 'recruited' as a 'rescuer', an 'ally' or just someone with whom the person wants to gossip
- b) Ensure they have already tried to talk it through, or found it difficult to get to that point, and so are seeking help in their conversation
- c) Be committed to reconciliation, not 'taking sides'

2) Prepare with Prayer and Humility

- a) Pray beforehand for wisdom, grace, and for God's peace to guide the conversation (James 1:5).
- b) Approach the role as a servant of reconciliation, not a judge or problem-solver.
- c) Check your own heart-ensure you're motivated by love and unity, not a desire to control the outcome.

3) Set the Tone and Create a Safe Environment

- a) Choose a neutral, private, and calm setting for the conversation. Avoid public or stressful environments.
- b) Ensure both parties know the purpose of the meeting in advance and agree to the discussion.
- c) Begin by praying together if appropriate, inviting God into the process.

4) Clarify Your Role

- a) Make it clear you're there to support healthy communication, not to take sides.
- b) Affirm that your goal is to help them understand each other and move toward peace (Matthew 5:9 – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”)
- c) Remind them that the aim is reconciliation, not to determine who's right.

5) Establish Ground Rules

- a) Encourage respectful dialogue. This will include listening to each other without interruption.
- b) Speak honestly but gently (Proverbs 15:1 – “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”)
- c) Listen to understand, not to respond.
- d) You might say: "Let's each aim to listen well, speak with kindness, and work toward understanding."

6) Facilitate Listening and Understanding

- a) Allow each person to share their side without interruption.
- b) Use active listening techniques:
- c) Paraphrase what you hear: "So what I'm hearing is,"
- d) Ask clarifying questions: "Can you explain more about how that made you feel?"
- e) Encourage the use of "I" statements rather than accusations (e.g., "I felt," vs. "You always,").

7) Guide Toward Personal Responsibility

- a) Gently help each party to own their part in the conflict (Matthew 7:5).
- b) Model humility if needed by sharing a relevant example of owning your own mistakes.
- c) Encourage them to confess their part and extend forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32).

8) Keep the Focus on Resolution, Not Blame

- a) Shift the tone from blame to problem-solving: eg "What would a way forward look like for each of you?" and "How can this relationship be restored?"
- b) Aim to identify shared values and goals, especially those rooted in Christ-like community and love.

9) Encourage Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- a) Remind them of the grace we've received from Christ and the call to forgive one another (Colossians 3:13):
"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13)
- b) If forgiveness is offered or requested, take a moment to acknowledge its significance.
- c) Emphasize that reconciliation takes time, but this is a step toward healing.

10) Close with Prayer and Clear Next Steps

- a) End by committing the situation to God in prayer.
- b) Agree on practical steps forward:
- c) Will there be a follow-up conversation?
- d) Do boundaries or changes need to be implemented?

11) Know When to Escalate

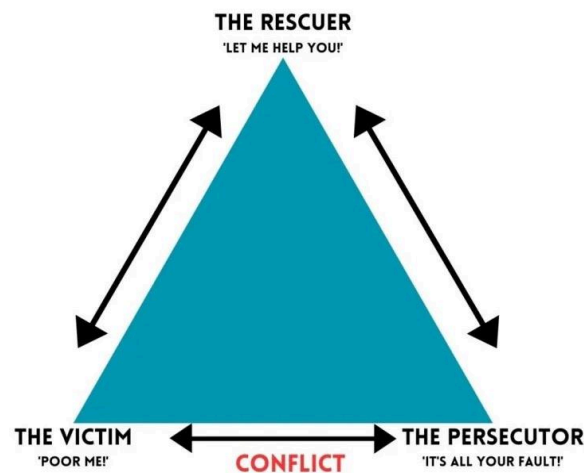
- a) If the conversation stalls or becomes harmful, pause the process and suggest the involvement of a member of the staff team (Process 3). The member of the staff team may involve themselves or involve an experienced Christian counsellor – particularly if deeper issues are present (Process 4)
- b) Assure both parties that seeking help is a strength, not a failure.

- c) You could say something like this
 - i) “I wonder if having a trained person could help us work through this more clearly.”
 - ii) “It feels like we’ve tried a few things, and maybe it’s time to involve someone with more experience in this area.”
 - iii) “What would you think about talking to a Christian counsellor together? It could really help us get unstuck.”
 - iv) “I care about resolving this well - and I think a counsellor might help us do that in a healthy way.”
 - v) “We don’t have to figure this out on our own – God provides people with the wisdom to help in situations like this. How do you feel about talking with the staff team about getting some professional help?”

Appendix B – Understanding Triangulation

Roles in Triangulation

Triangulation involves a dynamic where three individuals assume specific roles in a conflict. The model below, developed by Dr. Stephen Karpman in 1968, illustrates how people can become stuck in unhealthy relational dynamics by unconsciously adopting one of three roles:



- 1. The Victim**
 - Feels powerless, helpless or wronged.
 - Seeks a rescuer to "save" them, often avoiding solving the conflict themselves.
 - May create multiple triangles across various relationships to get more support.
- 2. The Persecutor**
 - Blames, criticizes and often dominates
 - Viewed as the source of the problem and victim's distress.
 - May act in a controlling, critical, or blaming manner.
 - Their behavior reinforces the victim's sense of oppression.
- 3. The Rescuer**
 - Operates under the belief, "Let me help you!"
 - Steps in to assist the victim, often without being asked
 - May enable the victim's behavior and prevent them from taking responsibility for speaking to the 'persecutor'

These roles can perpetuate dysfunctional interactions and hinder direct conflict resolution.

Since conflict has many layers to it, a person can assume both the role of 'victim' and 'persecutor' in the same conflict and more than one 'triangle' can be formed. For example, someone might start by presenting themselves as the **victim** ("I can't believe how unfairly I'm being treated"), but then **turn into a persecutor** by lashing out, blaming, or criticizing others in response ("This is all your fault! ").

What to do if you find yourself in a triangulated relationship?

The goal in conflict resolution is to step out of the triangle and engage in direct, responsible dialogue instead. The rescuer needs to become the 'coach' of the 'victim', enabling them to engage with the person they feel has wronged them. The 'victim' needs to learn new ways of engaging in conflict directly. The 'persecutor', instead of blaming and controlling others can encourage growth, seeking the truth and mutual progress.

Appendix C: Understanding Power Dynamics in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is not only shaped by theological, personal, or cultural differences, but also by the presence of power dynamics - the ways that authority, influence, and vulnerability operate in families, between individuals and among groups. We want to recognize these dynamics so healthy conflict resolution can take place.

The Nature of Power in Church Communities

Power can take many forms - formal authority (e.g., staff team, ministry leaders), informal influence (e.g., respected long-term members, charismatic individuals), social positioning (e.g., due to age, sex, financial status, or educational background) or physical attributes (eg. physical size and strength, dominance of voice, appearance, height). These forms of power are not inherently negative; they can serve the good of the community. However, when power is misused, it can shut down genuine dialogue, cause harm, and stand in the way of reconciliation.

Principles of Christlike Power

Jesus modeled a different kind of power - marked by humility, service, accountability, and the protection of the vulnerable. In church-based conflict resolution, all parties - especially those in positions of power - are called to reflect this attitude..

For Those in Positions of Power

When navigating conflict, individuals with formal or informal power have a heightened responsibility to:

- **Practice Humility:** Be open to feedback, admit fault when necessary, and listen without defensiveness.
- **Create Safe Environments:** Make it easier for others, especially those who feel vulnerable, to speak openly and honestly. Avoid interrupting, dominating, or dismissing concerns.
- **Use Power Responsibly:** Do not use authority to silence, intimidate, or pressure others. Refrain from manipulating outcomes to preserve control or reputation.
- **Seek Accountability:** Invite others to speak into your blind spots. Be transparent in decision-making and include diverse voices in the process.

- **Acknowledge Impact:** Recognize that your words and actions carry greater weight, and that even unintentional harm should be addressed with care and responsibility.
 - **Model Grace and Repentance:** Be the first to apologize, seek forgiveness, and demonstrate a commitment to growth and reconciliation.
-

For Those Who Feel Vulnerable

Individuals who feel disempowered in a conflict may struggle to voice concerns or fear consequences for speaking up. Nonetheless, a healthy process involves:

- **Speaking Truth with Courage:** As able, express your experience honestly and respectfully, trusting that your voice matters in the body of Christ.
 - **Assuming Good Intent (When Safe to Do So):** While being cautious of harm, enter the conversation appreciating that others may not fully understand their impact but may be open to change.
 - **Holding Boundaries:** Know that it is okay to say no, to step away temporarily, or to ask for support when the dynamics feel unsafe or overwhelming.
 - **Engaging in the Process:** Participate as fully as you can in the resolution process, with the hope of being both heard and reconciled.
-

When It Is Appropriate for a Person to Seek Support?

Seeking support is healthy when:

1. **There's a Power Difference**

If the person is experiencing conflict with someone in a position of authority (e.g. a minister, leader) and fears reprisal, dismissal, or intimidation, it's wise to involve a trusted third party for support, safety and fairness.

2. **The Person Feels Unsafe or Overwhelmed**

If there's emotional distress, fear, or past trauma making it hard to engage directly, a support person can help navigate the situation without taking over the conversation.

3. They're Seeking Wisdom, Not Alliance

Asking someone for clarity, prayer, or perspective without trying to win them over or create 'sides' is a sign of healthy support-seeking.

4. The Third Party is Part of the Resolution Process

Involving a trained mediator, pastoral team, or conflict resolution facilitator is not triangulation - it's inviting accountability and structure into the process.

How to help by being a Support Person

When supporting someone who feels vulnerable in a conflict, it is important that the support person remains a steady and impartial presence, rather than becoming entangled in the conflict themselves.

Their role is not to take sides or act as a substitute voice, but to provide encouragement, clarity, and emotional steadiness so the individual can engage in the difficult conversation with as much confidence and calm as possible.

Being drawn into the conflict - whether by being asked to speak on the person's behalf, to pass messages, or to take a stance - risks unhealthy triangulation and ultimately undermines both the support person's role and the growth of healthy, direct communication between those in conflict.

When Support Can Become Triangulation

Triangulation occurs when:

1. The Third Party Becomes a Substitute for Direct Communication

Instead of addressing the issue with the person involved, the individual talks to others to vent or gain sympathy, avoiding the actual conflict.

2. They're Trying to Build a Case or Create Sides

If the intent is to gather allies, sway opinion, or subtly damage the reputation of the other person, this is unhealthy triangulation.

3. The Conflict Is Talked About but Not Addressed

If multiple people are being told about the issue without any movement toward resolution or accountability, it becomes gossip, not reconciliation.