

Resources for Meetings/Individual Friends in Conflict

Purpose: Provide for Canadian Friends suggested approaches and processes for addressing conflict and acting when a conflict situation is perceived or experienced.

Background: Over the past few years, there have been a number of requests for support and/or resources to help Meetings and Individuals be faithful in situations where conflict is experienced. Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel (CMM&C), Canadian Yearly Meeting has been asked to provide resources, and the Quaker Education Program Coordinator (QEPC) job description includes creating a collection of such resources. There have been pre-gathering workshops and a Quaker Study at Yearly Meeting that offered some learning and reflection on this theme. CMM&C offered a session at CYM 2010, and there was a 3-set Special Interest Group at CYM 2011.

Approach: We are a spiritual community and we aspire to work through conflict in peaceful ways. We believe that Spirit can call to us through conflict and hope that these resources will encourage and support Friends in addressing conflict in ways that welcome a deeper understanding and experience of Spirit.

“Conflict happens and will continue to happen, even in the most peaceful of worlds. And that’s good. Our differences help us to learn. Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow; and I am not sure real change- either political or personal- can happen without it.” Mary Lou Leavitt 1986, Quaker F&P

These resources use a two-fold approach in preparing for, being in and working through conflict

- a. Building capacity through learning and practice sessions
- b. Providing stories that reflect effective approaches and resources that offer guidelines for use when conflict arises.

We encourage Friends to create learning sessions using the resources identified here. It is useful to develop, within Meetings, a common language and approach for dealing with conflict - to practice, before it’s needed, peaceful ways of being with one another during conflict.

Our approach is based on a use of Friends’ historic practices, incorporating some ways used in other communities that seek a peaceful approach to conflict.

Experience has shown that it’s important to be *willing* to engage honestly and respectfully to work through conflict situations. We believe that being faithful to our Quaker practices means being willing to be changed...transformed through the process. We offer some queries and methods for reflection on willingness.

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Resources:

This set of resources includes:

1. Queries and some tools for reflection, assessment, conversation, and discernment when a Friend or a Meeting is led to address or act on a conflict situation. We hope that Friends will be intentional about preparing for conversation when there is conflict
2. An outline for a Worship Sharing/Study about conflict (part of the 'Friends Ways' Curriculum developed a few years ago)
3. Availability of a six-week small group course on a Friendly approach to conflict (6 1-½ hour sessions via SKYPE)
4. Some documents created by various Quaker Meetings/Groups that offer some Friends' experience in dealing with conflict.
5. Some published materials from Quaker sources and from secular sources where the approach fits well with Friends practices

"...Our pains are our share of the world's suffering..."

The holes in our hearts allow us to see more clearly, and provide spaces for a deeper empathy to enter the world. I can- we can – survive the holes in our hearts, and even allow them to bring illumination"

Ann Y. Robinson, 2005,

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Queries – Preparing to address Conflict

(These might be addressed through worship sharing with some friends, with a committee of care, with others who would share responsibility for facilitating or bearing witness during conversations about conflict)

For Individuals

1. What might it take for me to think about this situation differently? How am I open to Spirit, and can I be faithful to what I receive? Am I willing to be changed by what I hear?
2. How do I be faithful?
3. What would love have me do?
4. What tells me that I am *willing* to enter conversation about this conflict?
5. How do I understand my own triggers and defenses, and how will I use this awareness to stay centered?
6. Have I reflected on all aspects of this issue? (See Gift of Lived Experience)
7. What are or have been my needs in this conflict, in this relationship? (See vocabulary of needs.)
8. Am I able to describe my experience in this matter in terms of my unmet needs?
9. Am I able to listen to others, be curious about and strive to understand what their unmet needs are in this issue?
10. Do I recognize that I have only a small part of the truth, and am I open to an outcome that might be different than I have imagined? Do I trust that there is an answer that will meet everyone's needs?
11. When I go home after the conversation, how do I want to remember myself as having been during the process?

For Meetings and Clerks or those Facilitating Conversations

There are Quaker practices, that when used faithfully, can help us work through conflict situations.

1. What Quaker Practices can you identify that will be useful in addressing the struggle that your Meeting/Worship Group is experiencing?
2. Can we hold conversations around issues of conflict in the form of worship sharing?
3. Can we focus relationships out of the realm of conflict and into the realm of faithfulness?
4. How can we support each person being heard so that they will be understood?
5. How can we create an environment where Friends will feel safe? – Can we ask, “What would it take for you to feel safe in this process, in this meeting?”
6. How can we incorporate the knowledge that there is a time to talk and a time to ‘let it be’?
7. What are ways that we can create community - develop and sustain relationships that will be resilient when conflict is experienced?
8. What other tools might be available to us?

Tools for Reflection

The Gift of Lived Experience, Needs Inventory, Feelings Inventory, Justice is Possible (Minute 79, CYM 2010)

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Friends' Experience with Conflict – Resources (Available on Website at

<http://www.quaker.ca/Committees/hmac/blog/learning-resources/walking-through-conflict-together>

Extract from Australian Quaker Practice and Procedure Handbook
Dealing with Conflicts in our Meetings - Article Rob Hughes, Vancouver MM
Conflict Resolution Guidelines Vancouver MM
Pastoral Care Newsletter Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Quakers and Conflict - an oxymoron
CYM Conflict Guidelines For Committees

Other Resources

Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. California, Puddledancer Press, 2003

Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality: The Spiritual Basis for Non-Violent Communication*. Puddledancer Press, 2005

<https://www.cnvc.org/> - Website for the Center for Non-Violent Communication

Kay Pranis, *The Little Book of Circle Processes*. Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2005

Rex Ambler, *Light to live by: an exploration in Quaker Spirituality*. London: Quaker Books 2002 (A printing of the Richard Cary Lecture)

Catherine Whitmire, *practicing peace – a devotional walk through the Quaker tradition*. Indiana: Sorin Books, 2007

Conflict in Meetings - Volume 4 of the Eldership and Oversight handbook series. (QHS, 2000) (Available from Quaker Book Service)