



PWOC

Protestant Women of the Chapel

Materials:
- Index cards for
Point #1

WORKSHOP: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

by Michelle Archer

LEADER'S GUIDE

RELEVANCE: Amazing, talented, beautiful servants of Christ can disagree. Feelings can be hurt. Words can be misunderstood. Not all conflict is sinful; sometimes we're just dealing with simple differences of opinion. We may think conflict should not exist in a Christian organization, but it most certainly does. God made us each unique and so it follows that we have unique preferences and points of view which can easily become contentious. This lesson seeks to help us recognize difficult relationships and to approach them with grace and prayer.

CONTEXT: Conflict is part of the human experience. This lesson can be adapted for any PWOC audience, but is especially essential for the Local Board that needs to work together in unity for the best ministry to take place.

TIME: 60 minutes

HOOK YOUR AUDIENCE: (5 minutes)

The following is a tongue-in-cheek scenario about conflict. People may think you're serious at first- play it up, try to keep a straight face as long as possible. Use your own story if you have an idea that will be better for your group.

Before we get started today, I just need to take a minute and vent. I am really pretty ticked off! I just talked to one of our leaders and found out that she is going with Astro Blue paper with Times New Roman for our fliers. I thought I was very clear about my preference to use a Neon Yellow paper with Freestyle Script for the



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font. I am going to have to confront her about her sin and set her straight. And it gets worse- she's letting someone else actually create the flyer- she says it's delegation; I say it's pure laziness. If you want something done right, you just have to do it yourself. This stinks. Now I'm going to have to spend part of MY day dealing with this mess.

Hopefully everyone is smiling by now.

What is wrong with my story?

Turn to a partner and share what you think is wrong with my story. After partners have shared, allow the group to share out. Use their sharing to incorporate some of the ideas listed below:

- It's not a sin to use a different font or color of paper- just a preference
- It's not laziness to delegate- I need to "assume good will"
- I obviously did not ask the leader *why* she made the choices she did
- I am gossiping about it

Let your participants pick your story apart and come up with their own ideas. This will give them ownership and will help them feel invested right up front. You will be more likely to keep their attention if they feel like their contributions are valuable.

Give me some ideas of other things we might disagree about in PWOC, that do not necessarily involve sin.

Below are some items that may be mentioned:

- Budgetary decisions
- Retreat locations
- Program themes
- Childwatch decisions
- Welcoming newcomers
- Changes to the schedule

Bottom line: Differences of opinion \neq Sin



MAKE YOUR POINT 1: Matthew 18 Model (10 minutes)

Our focus for this session is to explore what we can do when there is conflict that is not easily resolved but does not necessarily involve sin. The biblical model for dealing with conflict caused by sin is found in Matthew 18:15-17. We need to be careful NOT to apply this model when sin is not involved in the first place.

Often times, when we try to use this scripture as an approach to a disagreement, the conflict is escalated and ironically sometimes even leads to sins like gossip, slander, selfish ambition, etc. If we instruct our ladies that Matthew 18 is our only model for resolving conflict, then when a disagreement arises (when there is no sin) the person who initially perceives the conflict or 'takes offense' goes through a thought process something like this:

Consider using three volunteer readers, one for each point. Put the points on index cards for easy use.

Using volunteers to read creates an auditory jolt that can help regain your listeners' attention, plus it directly involves one or more participants and gives those volunteers a sense of participation and buy-in.

- 1- Tami doesn't allow us enough time for praise songs in our meetings. I have made her aware of this problem but she doesn't agree with me so I am in conflict with her.
- 2- When we have conflict, we are supposed to use Matthew 18:15-17 as our model to solve it. Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV) says, *If your brother sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*
- 3- Using this scripture, I see now that Tami must be sinning. Tami's sin is that she isn't allowing our ladies the time we all need to sing praises. I've already pointed it out to her. Now I will get some other people on my side and go to her and get her to change her mind so that we don't have to kick her out of fellowship.

What's wrong with this picture?

Allow your ladies to respond to this example.



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Perhaps allow a few people to share a similar experience (being careful not to name names). Come to a consensus on the incorrect application of the passage in Matthew 18.

Better to let your participants draw their own conclusions than to supply them with the "correct" response. Ask guiding questions that help them think deeper but stay on course. "What do you think the ramifications would be for Tami? for the worship team? for the PWOC body?" "Could mishandling what is really a difference of opinion have serious consequences? Talk to me about that."

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS 1: Matthew 18 Model (5 minutes)

Work with a partner. Take a few minutes and look at Matthew 18:15-17. Answer the following questions:

1- How could this passage be misused?

Bottom line: 1) by inventing sin where there is none and 2) assuming that if you can't agree, one of you has to leave the group 3) building coalitions against the person with whom you disagree

2- What are some principles found in Matthew 18 that you can follow in any conflict?

Bottom line: 1) Talk to the person directly 2) seek wise counsel

Allow the partners to share out. Try to draw the "bottom line" out of the discussion for each question.

MAKE YOUR POINT 2: Ephesians 4 Model (5 minutes)

We are not called simply to be in unity with other Christians; in Ephesians we are called to seek unity with the Spirit and then, since there is one Spirit, we will find unity with each other. Let's take a look at Ephesians 4:2-6 (NIV). Read it out loud with me:



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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; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

These verses charge us to, "Keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." How do we do that? What are some practical things we can do? What have you found that works to tear down walls between you and those with whom you may disagree?

Allow some popcorn responses.

Some of the responses may be very different from the list below; that's OK, as long as the focus stays on God. Allow lots of leeway and do your best to be comfortable with the messy process of discussion. When you allow people to share, they begin to fathom what this looks like in real life- what this looks like in THEIR life. Without the discussion, participants may draw an incorrect conclusion or no conclusion at all.

Their responses may include:

- Pray for each other; Pray together; Pray again- prayer breaks down walls
- Stay objective and avoid becoming reactive; exercise patience
- Examine your motives
- Seek God's glory and not your own- keep the focus on HIM
- Assume good will
- REFUSE to gossip

Bottom Line: *Be sure to highlight prayer as the quickest way to both prevent and resolve conflict.*



ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS 2: Conflict in Ministry Teams

(10 minutes)

Divide your participants into small groups (3-4 people per group). Have them read one of the passages and answer the questions. There may be more than one group working on the same passage.

1. Paul and Barnabas: Acts 15:36-41
 - How would you describe the conflict?
 - What hints do 2 Timothy 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 9:6 give about the outcome?
 - How well do you think Paul and Barnabas applied the principles of Ephesians 4:2-6?

2. Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:1-3
 - How is the ministry of these two women described?
 - Describe what Paul asks them to do?
 - What does Paul talk about immediately following these verses?
 - How do verses 4-7 apply to verses 2-3?

Give the ladies a chance to share their findings.

Bottom line: Conflict calls for prayer and a gentleness in thought and action.

MAKE YOUR POINT 3: E-mail = Conflict Resolution Disaster

(5 minutes)

E-mail is relentless at taking simple misunderstandings and turning them into giant, hurtful conflicts at the speed of, well, at the speed of cyberspace.

Conflict resolution should NEVER be handled via e-mail. It is tempting because it gives you the time to think everything through, edit it, and write exactly what you intend to say. Don't do it! It is FAR better to talk in person. If you benefit from writing out your thoughts, then write them out ahead of time and read them to yourself before you meet.



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E-mail nearly always escalates the problem. Even the most well-intentioned, clearly written e-mail is sure to be *negatively* misinterpreted if there is already conflict between you and the recipient. **Knowing this, if you are the recipient, be VERY slow to negatively interpret anything sent to you via e-mail.** Assume good will; err on the side of grace.

The majority of our communication is non-verbal (tone, body-language, facial expressions) and if we rely on written communication, we deprive the recipient of the true spirit of our message. Words that clearly mean one thing to you can *so easily* be misinterpreted by another. If the misinterpretation occurs during a face-to-face meeting, it can be quickly corrected. If it happens via e-mail, the other person *may* give you a chance to correct it, but she will more likely retreat because she will feel wounded. As she replays the misinterpretation in her mind, it will become worse.

Some people find boldness when writing to someone via e-mail that they do not have in person. This can create a very unhealthy dynamic and prompt them to say something mean or insensitive in an email because it seems less real.

If a conflict arises, refrain from sending a long e-mail and instead, pick up the phone and set a time to meet. If circumstances dictate that you must respond to a "conflict e-mail," write something to the effect of, "I would like to discuss this with you in person; when can we meet?"

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS 3: E-mail Scenarios (10 minutes)

If you have had personal experience with failed conflict resolution via e-mail, share your experience with the group. Be sure to protect identities and to speak in kindness and with grace. Invite other people to share their experiences as well. Caution them to speak kindly and to protect identities. After a few people have shared, have everyone work with a partner to examine the e-mail scenarios below.

1. *You are the local PWOC President. Margee, a PWOC attendee, sent you an e-mail detailing an event that occurred at last week's PWOC meeting. In it she describes another member of your board as being rude and as a 'poor ambassador' for the organization.*

What are your next steps?



2. *You are the on the Local PWOC Board and another board member has just sent you a very long e-mail describing how you are trying to take over her position. You are upset because she is clearly wrong and you were only trying to help out...maybe she should do her job better if she doesn't like help...you have a few items you'd like to share with her, as well.*

What should you do next?

3. *The message you received from your PWOC Titus 2 Advisor was hurtful. How could she say that we need to strive harder and work 'with all of our hearts'? Doesn't she see how hard we are working already? We're worn out!*

How do you respond?

Allow partners to briefly share out. Their responses should include elements of the Bottom line below.

Bottom line: The bottom line for all of these is that they should be handled with prayer, in person, and as full of grace and kindness as possible.



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APPLY IT TO LIFE: (10 minutes)

Recap/ Tool for application: S-T-O-P

See her: *literally and figuratively*

- *Literally:* Don't avoid her and don't let it fester. Set up a time to meet and prepare your thoughts and your heart ahead of time. If a one-on-one meeting is too threatening, consider inviting a mutual friend, the Titus 2 Advisor, a neutral board member or a chaplain who can help with perspective.
- *Figuratively:* Be sensitive to what is going on in her life. Is she hurting or asking for understanding?

Think it through

- Why would a well-meaning person say or do what she has? Don't jump off the ledge of being offended...try to see the logical steps from her side.
- Don't invent sin. Do not attempt to follow the steps of putting a sister out of fellowship simply because you disagree.

Objectivity:

- What is my contribution to this conflict? Have I been insensitive (intentionally or unintentionally)? Have I allowed a misunderstanding to grow?
- Am I so attached to my opinion or idea that I am placing it above the relationship? What are my motives here?

Prayer:

- Pray not only for resolution, but also pray earnestly for the other person. Pray blessing over their life in general and pray specifically for your relationship with her.
- When you start to pray for someone, you begin to care about what happens in her life and your feelings toward her will change. The Holy Spirit will work between the two of you to restore harmony.
- When you catch yourself rehearsing the scenario, **STOP!** Pray right then and there.



PERSONAL APPLICATION:

The #1 take-away regarding conflict prevention and resolution is to spend time daily in prayer. Pray for your PWOC- the board, the ministry teams- pray specifically for unity and peace between your ladies.

As we have been working through this topic of Conflict Resolution, have you had someone in mind? What is the nature of your conflict? Is there sin involved? What is the next step you need to take? Before you take any action, pray vast blessing over that person. Pray for them, pray for them, pray again for them! Ask God to pour out His grace and mercy on them. Ask them to pray for you. Examine your own heart and allow the Holy Spirit to point out any discord. Let God give you HIS great heart towards that person.

Pray: Let's take a moment to talk to God silently about anyone that came to mind.
After 30 seconds or so, close the session out in prayer.

