HOW TO MOVE FROM DIVIDED BY TO BOUND TOGETHER BY CONFLICT

PLEASE NOTE: Lasting change from one set of patterns to another will require a shift in culture within your church. Cultural change is a long-term project that requires sustained vision, commitment and stamina. Develop a plan and weigh up the costs before you begin.

ENACT – LIVE A FAITHFUL MODEL

1. **Model effective skills for handling conflict, both personally and as a leadership team**. This will include:
   - Disagreement. Move towards disagreement, not away from it, and work at listening.
   - Destructive behaviour in a spirit of gentleness.
   - Confrontable: allow others to challenge you and to raise situations where they have felt hurt or offended by you.
   - Directly with others, not about them, when you have concerns.
2. **When issues arise, enable a range of voices to be heard**. Remember that summarising and acknowledge strength of feeling does equal agreement. Explore what lies beneath the issues that are raised. "I recognise this is important for you. Can you help me understand why that is?" Invite others to be clear about how they see the issues.

TAKE A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

3. **Recognise that behind tensions and difficult behaviour, there will be an anxious system**. Avoid being drawn into others' anxieties or being triangled. Resist the temptation to try to fix the problem and explore the other dimensions of the issue (process and people). Use tools such as mapping to facilitate a wider perspective on what is happening.
4. **Recognise the impact of history on present-day conflicts**. Give opportunities to grieve (by honouring, recollecting, acknowledging) for significant people, events and "golden eras" now past. Remember also difficult conflicts that were worked through, and major losses that were experienced.
5. **Identify destructive habits for dealing with conflict and disagreement. Agree on constructive habits to replace them**. Encourage churches to develop guidelines or covenants in working together. Remember that the process for agreeing the guidelines, and the collective ownership of them.

TRAIN – EQUIP THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO LIVE FAITHFULLY

6. **Provide skills training opportunities** – for all holding leadership roles in your church, or as group leaders, and look to equip people to work through differences and to handle conflict more effectively and constructively.
7. **Coach leaders at a local level** – build resilience in the system by coaching and developing local leadership through times of conflict. Use informal conversations to pass on learning, or encourage more formal coaching resources and networks.
8. **Draw on your denomination's traditions**. Your denomination may have traditions for dealing with conflict that can be constructive and helpful. Explore what the resources and traditions are, and see how they might be applied or strengthened.

COMMUNICATE

9. **Strengthen reporting and communication mechanisms**.
   - Clear policies for communication particularly on major decisions or strategic issues.
   - A variety of ways for providing comments and feedback on key issues and decisions to widen the responses.
10. **Encourage effective electronic communication and social media** guidelines for the appropriate use of email and social media, and encourage personal and collective responsibility for upholding these.
11. **Preach and teach about constructive ways of dealing with difference**. Preach and write about conflict as a way of normalising it. Use opportunities provided by current events to acknowledge different perspectives and encourage openness in discussing these.

BUILD STRUCTURES – CREATE A FAITHFUL INSTITUTION

12. **Find ways of using meetings effectively and in ways that reflect and develop the culture you want to encourage**. Focus on purpose, timings and planning to enable them to be more effective. Focus on good chairing and good process.
13. **Foresee and plan for major decisions**. This will include:
    - The process at the beginning with all key groups involved and giving time for the process.
    - Several ways for input by members other than just large group discussions, such as small groups, questionnaires and having leaders available at special times.
    - Prepared to initiate conversation with and coax responses from habitual withdrawers, and avoiding having the same few individuals always have the last word or make the final decision for the whole group.
14. **Prepare carefully for leadership evaluation and transitions**. Use outside resources in establishing proper processes, even if your church/denomination has a good history in leadership evaluations and transitions.

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