

DRAFT Revised 1/5/16
Order of Ecumenical Franciscans

Norms for Communication and Conflict Transformation

Discussion of our Norms for Communication and Conflict Transformation includes: I. Our Essential Principles II. Biblical & Franciscan Context III. Our Process Framework

I. Our Essential Principles

Our essential principles for communication and conflict transformation are:

1. A Commitment More Than a Method. Communities that fail and communities that abide both spend a large percentage of time on conflict resolution/transformation. The primary difference is whether these important and even difficult conversations are wounding or healing in nature. There are methods that declare winners, and there are methods that pursue reconciliation; we strive for the latter even if it takes time, effort and temporary pain.
2. Plain Speech. We speak clearly, simply and for ourselves. We name our thoughts, our feelings and our own needs and avoid the temptation of guessing at other's thoughts, feelings and needs. We also avoid muddying our speech with unnecessary religious or theological jargon. *From Matthew 5:33-37*
3. Active Listening. We strive to understand the difference between listening to learn and listening as a way of waiting for our turn to speak. We long to hear the plain speech of our sister or brother, as represented by our ability to restate their thoughts, feelings and needs clearly.
4. Peace Which Comes from God. We are always free to pause a conversation for prayer and silence. We are always free to admit to God and to one another that we are stuck and don't see a way out. We are always free to ask for help from a loving God.

II. Our Biblical & Franciscan Context

These norms are based in our "Community Covenant for a Supportive and Affirming Order of Ecumenical Franciscans." They also reflect especially Principle #14 of our Order Principles: "In obedience to our lord Jesus Christ and the example of St. Francis, we are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly. We are compelled to seek out ways of resolving conflict through non-violent means, trusting in the presence of the divine soul in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon."

Matthew Chapter 18 comes at a point in Jesus' story where he and his friends are beginning to turn towards Jerusalem and Jesus' passion. Jesus responds to the question of "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" by inviting them to consider a small child as the image of trust and simplicity that is necessary to perceive the Kingdom.

Jesus speaks of a fourfold process of reconciliation and offers us a reminder that we are either bound together in woundedness or freed by forgiveness for healing.

In summary, we are all children of our Heavenly Father (parent) and as such each one of us, while broken, is an integral part of the Kingdom and an integral part of OEF. As such, through thoughtful

conversation, conversion and transformation, we can build up the body of Christ.

III. Our Process Framework

Given (1) our diversity, (2) the dispersed nature of our relatedness, (3) our humanity, and (4) our woundedness, misunderstandings and conflict within our midst are likely inevitable. So we seek guidance for times when misunderstandings, hurt, and conflict erupt between our beloved members. We commit ourselves to the process, trusting that God will give us the strength to see it through, even if it takes more than one attempt.

In the spirit of “going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel,” we recommend that we agree to be guided by Spirit, using the “process” outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-22 [a set of “teachings” which was perhaps in response to conflict among the disciples over the question, “Who is the greatest?” (Mt. 18:1)]:

1. If I as an Order member have a disagreement/misunderstanding/conflict with another member, I agree to go directly to the member with whom I disagree—for conversation, listening, and respectful dialogue. And if there is mutual understanding, we will each have “regained the brother/sister” (vs. 15).

This isn't always easy, sometimes we have no idea how to start the conversation or feel so estranged from our brother or sister that we are afraid of what they will say or what we will say. We can contact a member of the Listening Team (see #2 below) who can help us to clarify our thoughts and feelings. We can even practice saying the difficult things we need to share with our sibling. The Listening Team member will reflect what they've heard so we can discern our role in the conflict and how we can approach taking Step 1.

2. If needed, I/we will invite two or more other members into our listening (vs. 16). As an Order, we will develop and support trained Listening Teams, based in the training of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (www.lmpeacecenter.org). Designated Teams will be trained in listening deeply both to the members, and for the guiding of Spirit—for “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (vs. 20).

3. If it is discerned that the conflict relates to a major issue within the Order, we will take the issue to the Council for devising ways that the issue can creatively come before the Order as a whole (vs. 17).

4. If the conflict between/among members continues, we will put the conflict and members “where Jesus is” (vs. 17: Jesus ate with tax collectors, and healed the daughter of a Gentile woman)—and we will ask—and pray—and forgive—and let go—and pray.....

In all of this process, we will ask, and ask, and ask (vs. 19); we will forgive, and forgive, and forgive (vs. 22: 70 times 7—!); and we will trust that Spirit will show a “way through,” even where there seems to be “no way”—

And Jesus also says, “Love one another—as I have loved you.....”