

# Being Together

## Study Notes



**St Nicholas Church Australind**  
**2019**

## Being Together – Introduction

God our creator has made us to belong – to be valued, loved and accepted. Ideally, we all have places and people to whom we belong - in our families, friendships and communities. The good news in Jesus is that all of us, once far from God, can be reconciled with Him and then with one another. We can be adopted into His family, welcomed as His children, and know one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.



In every Christian community where we aspire to welcome, bless, value and love one another. But like most families and communities, we are not perfect, and we do not always manage to live up to our ideals. What then? This series is written to help explore that question.

A church community is a broad one – it includes people of all ages, stages of faith (including no faith) and backgrounds. People of all races, genders and sexuality are welcome to join in and explore faith in Jesus together. Our intention is that all will be blessed and have a sense of belonging. This does mean that not everyone in our community will know and understand what the Bible teaches about how to live and love one another well. This in turn means that things can look and feel very messy at times.

The ‘Being Together’ Code of Conduct, produced by the Anglican Church in Australia General Synod, is a description of expectations of each other in our Anglican Church community (see the next page). It is part of our commitment to Safe Church and it is important to think about these expectations and work out how to live them out. In these studies, we commit to take seriously what scripture says. We will look at what the Bible teaches about living together in community – how we relate, communicate, deal with differences and respond to conflict. Some of us will find it easier than others to do this, depending on our own experiences so far in our lives – but this is an area where we can all learn and grow.

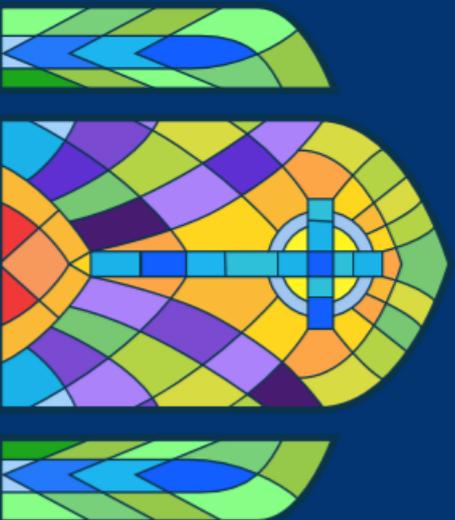
The church should be a safe environment for us to practise Godly ways of speaking and listening to each other, especially where there are differences of opinion or conflict that needs resolving. We want to encourage each other to do these things well and to gently challenge each other if necessary. This is new to many of us as we come from cultures that do not necessarily know how to do this well. As we will see, sometimes we have grace to forbear (for example, if someone inadvertently hurts our feelings), for ‘love covers a multitude of sins’ (1 Peter 4 v8). At other times, inappropriate behaviour needs to be addressed – and we will learn from Jesus and the early church how to do this well.

The studies which follow can be done in small groups or privately at home. *It’s not necessary to answer all the questions in each study and its important in a group setting to allow time for questions or discussions that are raised by group members.*

Yours in Christ Jesus

Jamie and Verity Murray

October 2019



# Being Together

## Expectations of behaviour in our church community

Jesus told us to love one another as he loves us.

As Christians we know our life together is strengthened when our behaviour is consistent with our faith.

However, our experience of being together can be difficult, particularly when there are differences. So, it is important to be clear about how we will behave towards each other.



### Being a community

- ✓ We will value the wellbeing and safety of others, particularly children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will encourage each other to participate in the life of the church.
- ✓ We will consider the impact of our behaviour on others.



### Relating to each other

- ✓ We will guard the safety of all, especially children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will treat each other with respect and dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or contribution to the church.
- ✓ We will act with integrity and honesty in our interactions with each other.



### Communicating with each other

- ✓ We will communicate respectfully with others, and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
- ✓ We will speak with integrity and honesty, and refrain from speculation and gossip.



### Acknowledging difference

- ✓ We will respect those who are different from us and not isolate or ridicule them.
- ✓ We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.



### Responding to conflict

- ✓ We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict.
- ✓ We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict.



## Being Together – Week 1: Being a Community

1. What is a Christian Community? How would you define or describe it? Brainstorm your ideas as a group. To get started, it might help to think about what you like about *this* church family.

### Read John 15 verses 1-17

2. How does Jesus describe the church (his disciples)? List as many ways as you can.
3. What expectations does Jesus have of his disciples' behaviour?
4. Look at your answers to 2 and 3 above. How do they compare with your own understanding or experience of what church is and what it means to belong? What, if anything, surprises or confronts you?
5. Jesus talks about bearing fruit and loving one another. What do you think this look like in practice in a Christian community? (There are many possible answers).
6. Discuss in pairs: In what ways do *you* participate in the life of the church? How are you producing fruit? Where do you give and receive love?



### Read Philippians 2 v 1-4

7. What sort of behaviour does the Apostle Paul ask of the Christians in Philippi?
8. Why do you think 'remaining in Jesus', "the vine" (John 15 v 5), is so critical? (see also Philippians 2 v 6-8)

### For further reflection:

- There are many ways of belonging to a church community and not everyone who belongs is necessarily a Christian – "in Christ". What is *your* connection to the Church and what gives *you* a sense of belonging? Are you 'in Christ', a branch in the vine, or a member of the community who attends certain events or groups but is not yet 'in Christ'? (See 2 Corinthians 5 v 16-17). If you are not sure about this, talk it over with a trusted friend.
- Would you like to be more connected to your church community? If you are interested in participating in any of the other ministries of the church, talk to the leaders of those ministries about how you can get involved.

## Being Together – Week 2: Relating to Each Other

Last week we considered Jesus' description of the Church as branches in a vine – rooted and established in Jesus himself and his love. The apostle Paul takes up this idea in the first few verses of our reading from Ephesians and then explains in very practical terms how to live this out.

### Read Ephesians 3 v14 through to Ephesians 5 v 2

#### Unity in the Body of Christ

1. What gives us unity in our life together? (Chapter 3 v14, Chapter 4 v 4-6?)
2. Why then do we need to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace?' (Chapter 4 v 3)?
3. In what ways are we different, according to Chapter 4 v7, 11-13 (please ignore for this question verses 8-9 as Paul goes off on a tangent here)?
4. We all have different gifts that are *needed* by the Church (the body of Christ). What implications does that have for each one of us? (see also 1 Corinthians 12 v 12-27)



#### Living as Children of the Light

Paul charges us to live differently to those who are not yet 'in Christ' (4v17) and in fact, to the way we ourselves lived before we were 'in Christ'. Paul tells us to 'put off' old ways of relating and 'put on' new ways (4 v22-23). The chart on the next page lists the old ways and new ways of living described in this passage.

5. What questions or challenges arise as you look at this list of 'dos and don'ts'?
6. Have you seen a change in the way you relate to others since you became a Christian? Do you or others see a difference in the way you live?

'Old Ways' of Relating (Before you were 'in Christ')	'New Ways' of Relating (As members of the Body of Christ)
Ignorance of God and his ways Telling lies Holding onto anger Stealing Unwholesome talk Bitterness Brawling, slander, malice Indulgence in impure living	A renewed mind Speaking truthfully Letting go of anger Working for what you have; sharing with those in need Speech which builds others up Forgiving one another, as Christ forgave us Being kind and compassionate Being imitators of God; living a life of love, as Christ loves us.

7. Chapter 4 v 13 reminds us that we have not yet 'become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ'. We all have room to grow in living out our new selves. This study has been book-ended with Christ (Chapter 3 v 17-20 and Chapter 5 v 2) Why do you think it is important that we keep coming back to Jesus?

**For further reflection:**

- How are *you* doing with the 'old' and 'new ways' of relating? Are there behaviours that you still need to 'put off' or 'put on' – at least occasionally? Are there any particular problem areas for you (eg forgiveness)?

Take time to pray about anything that arises for you and ask Jesus to give you his grace, love and power to live differently.



- What gifts has Jesus given *you* to share with the Church? (see also 1 Corinthians 12 v 7-11). How are you using them? Is there something new or more for you to do at this time? If you are not sure, talk this over with a trusted friend.

## Being Together – Week 3: Communicating with Each Other

Our focus this week is on how we communicate. Communication is at the heart of every relationship. When we communicate well, we build good relationships that bring honour to our Father in heaven. When we communicate badly, it has the potential to cause great destruction in our relationships and community. However, it is incredibly difficult to control the tongue. As the apostle James says, says “If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man” (James 3 v 2). Communication involves both the person speaking and the person listening. It’s worth being aware that all of us can have filters that make our interpretation of communication challenging. Recognising this in ourselves is a helpful starting point. While we acknowledge that we will stumble in our speaking and listening on many occasions, it is important to keep on trying to get better at it. The goal of this study is to find practical ways to do this.

### The Being Together framework says:

- We will communicate *respectfully* with others and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
- We will speak with *integrity and honesty* and refrain from speculation and gossip.

If you can, divide into 4 groups to answer the questions below. Group 1 – Qs 1 and 2, Group2 – Qs 3 and 4, Group 3- Qs 5 and 6, Group 4 – Qs 7,8,9. Write your ideas in the grid on the next page. Feedback your ideas to the whole group and discuss Q 10 together if you have time.

### Groups 1 and 2: Read Ephesians 4 v 25 and v29

1. How can we communicate *respectfully* to one another, in ways that ‘build one another up’? Give some practical examples
2. In what other ways can we build one another up with our speech?
3. What is integrity? How is it different from honesty? Have you ever found it difficult to be honest and speak with integrity in this community, or in other situations? What makes it difficult?
4. What can we do about these difficulties so that we can be honest and speak with integrity?

### Groups 3 and 4: Read James 3 v 2-12 and verses 17-18

5. In what ways can we belittle, threaten or humiliate others? Sometimes we can do this unconsciously. Give some practical examples.
6. What ways of communicating can we use to avoid belittling, threatening or humiliating others?
7. Speculation and Gossip: What do these two words mean? Why is it so easy for us to fall into these temptations?
8. Listening to gossip is also wrong (see Proverbs 17v40, Proverbs 18 v 8). What can we do when we find ourselves listening to gossip? Please keep it practical.
9. What can we do when we catch ourselves in the act of gossiping?

10. How should we respond when we, or others, have got it wrong with our communication?  
(Ephesians 4 v 32 and James 4 v 17-18)

**For further reflection**

Try to put into practice one or some of the ideas you have written down in the grid below this week. What do you learn about yourself and others as you do this?

Q1 Ways we can speak respectfully to others	Q2 Other ways we can build each other up in our communication
Q3 Things that can make it difficult for us to speak honestly and with integrity	Q4 Practical ideas to help us to speak honestly and with integrity
Q5 Ways of communicating that can belittle, threaten or humiliate	Q6 Practical ways to avoid this
Q7 Why are we tempted to fall into speculation and gossip	Qs 8 and 9. Practical ways to handle situations where we catch ourselves gossiping or listen to gossip

## Being Together – Week 4: Acknowledging Difference

One of the beautiful things about the body of Christ is that anyone and everyone can belong. We share the same faith, same baptism and the same Lord Jesus, Heavenly Father and Holy Spirit. Yet the differences between us are many and complex, bringing both life and challenges.

- As a group (or in smaller groups), brainstorm the points of difference you see in our church community eg old and young, married and single....
- What tensions and issues can arise from these points of difference?

### The Being Together framework says:

- a) We will respect those who are different to us and not isolate or ridicule them
- b) We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.

*You may wish to break into two groups here. Group 1 to study Qs1-4 and Group2 Qs5-9 and then feedback to each other. Each set of questions relate to one bullet point from the framework.*

### Read James 2 v 1-9 (Bullet point a))

1. How do we actively try to create a community that is accessible to all and where everyone is equally valued at our church? (eg think about how we value the well-being and safety of the more vulnerable members such as children and seniors)
2. Is there anything else we could do as a church community?
3. What could each one of us do on a personal level to support and encourage those who are different to us? How can we reach out to those who may feel isolated or unvalued?
4. Is there anything we could avoid doing which might cause people who are different to feel isolated, ridiculed or unvalued?

### Read Romans 14 v 1-6 and verses 13-21 (Bullet point b))

5. Paul refers to two particular differences in thought and practice here: vegetarianism and marking certain days as sacred. What other beliefs, opinions and practices do we not all share? (There are many so just brainstorm a few – and resist the temptation to get into debate!)
6. How does Paul advise his readers to manage these differences?
7. How can we put this into practice?
8. Why is taking time to listen and understand the beliefs and opinions of others so important?
9. How good are we at this? Is there anything we could do better or differently?



## Being Together – Week 4: Acknowledging Difference Continued

### For further reflection

Take time to prayerfully reflect on the questions below and ask the Holy Spirit to help you become more self-aware. If we are willing to recognise our own shortcomings and invite the Holy Spirit to help us then the potential for positive change is huge.

- In what ways might my behaviour or speech inadvertently cause others to feel isolated or ridiculed? What could I do differently?
- Have I ever chosen to isolate myself because I felt different or unvalued? What prompted me to do that and what could I do differently in the future?
- How good are my listening skills? Do people find me interested, genuine, focused, caring, or detached, self-absorbed, careless with their feelings? Do I tend to give answers before I've heard the problem? Am I too dominant in conversation, not leaving space for others, or too reticent, failing to encourage others to open up? What could I do differently?
- Who among your friends and family gives you the best attention? How does that show itself and what is the consequence for you? Is there someone you could give this kind of close attention to?

*Recommended Reading: Living Faithfully by John Pritchard, especially Part 4. (see attached extract from John Pritchard's book, 'Living Faithfully' for some practical pointers)*

LOS ANGELES TIMES

### PEANUTS CLASSICS By Charles M. Schulz





## Extract from “Living Faithfully: Following Christ in everyday Life”

by John Pritchard

### Chapter 12 ‘Being Attentive’

- It may sound terribly pious, and I certainly don’t always do it, but it helps before meeting someone to pray for a moment that you’ll be able to see Christ in them and to see *what’s really going on* in the conversation you’re about to have. This doesn’t mean that every functional encounter we have needs special prayer, but such prayer before conversations that have some substance puts the exchanges into a bigger context and opens them up to a three-way engagement (me–you–God) and a richer outcome.
- A really useful approach to take to any encounter like this is to ask the question beforehand: ‘What’s likely to be uppermost in this person’s mind, or life, at the moment?’ This flips the meeting over so that we enter it wanting to make contact with the other person’s concern rather than simply our own agenda. We all carry so much emotional freight, and so many pressures and concerns, that the likelihood is we’ll see our encounters through the lens of our own needs, with the result that we know at the end of the conversation that something was missing and we didn’t quite meet each other. We find ourselves uneasy – but quickly move on to the next ‘not quite right’ encounter. Setting out to see the meeting through the eyes of the other person is a very useful corrective to this self-absorption.
- When talking to others, eye contact often means heart contact. Nothing is more reassuring to someone we’re talking to than that we look at them. This doesn’t mean staring at them unblinkingly, which may make them afraid of undisclosed homicidal tendencies, but it does mean we’re staying with them and following their mind and their mood. And it’s not just a technique; it also means we’ll pick up clues that help us to understand what’s going on and to be more receptive and responsive. For some of us this has to be a learnt skill because it doesn’t come naturally, but it’s distinctly worthwhile.

### *Being attentive*

- We give off messages very early in a conversation. Our smile, hand-shake, warmth, interest, use of the person’s name and so on give off important messages that put people at their ease and open up possibilities. It’s all part of being attentive to the other and seeking their good. We then continue to try and ‘read’ the conversation, to be aware of both their responses and ours, so that there’s reality and depth, openness and integrity in the exchange. Small things matter.
- The careful and gracious use of questions is a very significant way of valuing people and making a meeting with them both enjoyable and constructive. Jesus asked questions constantly. To the troubled demoniac: ‘What’s your name?’ To blind Bartimaeus: ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ To the religious elite: ‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath?’ To the disciples: ‘Who do you say that I am?’ To a lawyer: ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ To the couple trudging to Emmaus: ‘What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?’ Questions show interest, open up engagement and put the other person in the driving seat. They give value to the other person and enable us to get in touch with that person’s reality rather than our fantasy about him or her. Of course it can be overdone and can pin the other person to the chair. It was once observed to me by a colleague that my questions over lunch had left him feeling like an onion being progressively peeled away, while giving nothing of myself. It was a salutary lesson, but born of genuine interest. I try to be more balanced now, but questions remain a generous way of giving attention to the other person and learning how to care.

### **They said this**

We find it so difficult to become inwardly gathered, intent and still. Because we are for ever whisking through the present moment we almost never live in it. We are like champion sprinters in the hundred metres race, leaning forward, pushing our centre of gravity several

## Being Together – Week 5: Responding to Conflict Part 1

### The Being Together Framework says:

- We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict
- We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict

We will be thinking about 'Responding to Conflict' over 2 weeks. This week we are focusing on recognising our own part in conflicts and in fact, recognising that with some careful self-examination and the right attitude, we can prevent some conflicts from developing.

### Read Matthew 7 v 1-5 and Philippians 2 v 3-4

1. What sort of conflicts are Jesus and Paul talking about?
2. What remedies do they give?

### How does this apply in practice?

Some conflicts are not about right or wrong although they may seem that way to us at first. By carefully looking at the 'log in our own eye' we may notice that behind our emotions of hurt, anger, disappointment etc, there is often something else at work, which in fact may begin and end with us and not anything to do with the other party in the conflict at all (or only a little 'speck'!). We may discover that the initial event that causes our upset reveals more about us than the other person and that the matter can be resolved quickly and easily if we can deal with our own 'log' (eg pride, ambition, sense of entitlement). Some examples of these types of conflicts are listed below

- **Conflicts over preference** - eg Some people like hymns and others like more modern songs to be sung in church. We are each entitled to have preferences, but we are not entitled to have our own preferences preferred!
- **Conflicts over personality** eg two strong willed characters may clash
- **Conflicts over good v better** – you may consider your idea is better and yet an inferior one is adopted eg sticking with an internet provider which has an inferior deal to avoid the trouble of switching to a new company.

3. When we get upset because our good ideas are ignored, our preferences are disregarded, or someone 'rubs us up the wrong way', what may be really going on inside us?

4. How could these sorts of conflicts be resolved?

## Taking Offence

There are several definitions of offence (see definitions below).

### Definitions of Offence

1. A breach of a law or rule; a thing that constitutes a violation of what is judged to be right or natural (an injustice)
2. Annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult to or disregard for oneself.
3. The actions of attacking someone or something

In the church, offence as described in the first two definitions occur most often. The first – a breach of a law, or rule or an injustice needs to be dealt with face to face, sometimes with the help of an intermediary. We will look at how we do this in next week's study.

***This week, we will focus on the second definition: "an annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult or disregard for oneself".*** We often refer to this as 'taking offence' Taking offence can be very destructive, and, as we learn from Proverbs, relationships can be destroyed as a result.

### Read Proverbs 17 v9, 18 v19 and 19 v11

5. What problems does the author of proverbs suggest can arise when people take offence?
6. How does he recommend we deal with offence?

### Read Matthew 13 v 53-58

7. Why did the people in this account take offence at Jesus?
8. How did Jesus respond?
9. Look at the scenarios on the next page. Each scenario takes place in a fictional church called St Grace. In small groups of 2 or 3, discuss for each scenario:
  - What kind of conflict is this? (right v wrong, preference, personality, good v better, taking offence, different beliefs)
  - What's really at the root of the person's upset?
  - Has a sin been committed? Is forgiveness required?

- Is it important that this conflict is dealt with face to face or can the offence be overlooked? Why or why not?
- How could it best be resolved?

**Trouble at St Grace's Church! (All characters and scenarios are fictional! )**

<p>Mavis has recently joined St Grace's church after moving into the area to live near her daughter. She enjoys the services and has found everyone very friendly and welcoming. She was looking forward to the annual church fete next Saturday until she learned that there is going to be a raffle and the prize is a case of red wine. Mavis was taught in her previous church that gambling (including raffles) and drinking alcohol is inappropriate for Christians. She is not sure whether to say something about this to the minister or whether she should go to the fete or not. The whole thing is making her feel very uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Pritpal and her husband Pravesh are relatively new to the church and are looking to make new friendships. They invited Ira and her husband Phil to dinner on Friday to get to know them better. When Pritpal extended the invitation, Ira asked if she could let her know on Thursday whether they would come or not, as she wasn't sure yet what their plans for the weekend might be. Pritpal can't understand why Ira is prevaricating – do they want to come to dinner or not? Or are they hoping a better offer might come along? Pritpal is finding it very hard not to get offended by Ira's off-hand response.</p>
<p>Natalya and Saira are part of the same Bible study group at St Grace's. They get on well, although they don't have a close relationship. Saira has just heard from Jane, another member of the study group, that Natalya is having a party and Jane has been invited. Saira has not received an invitation and Natalya hasn't mentioned the party to her. Saira is upset that she hasn't been included and decides to cross Natalya off her Christmas card list. She's wondering why Jane has been invited and not her and in fact is wondering if everyone else in the group has been invited. Perhaps she should leave the group if she is not wanted?</p>	<p>Fred and Reg are both on the parish council. At the last meeting the council discussed what to do at the annual fete. Fred suggested an auction of talents and Reg suggested a raffle, with the prize being a case of red wine, which Reg was willing to donate. The council decided to run with the raffle as it was easier to organise. Fred is annoyed, as he thinks his talent auction would have raised more money and given other people the opportunity to serve the community, not just Reg. Fred could not afford to donate something as expensive as a case of red wine and he is cross that Reg is flaunting his wealth in this way.</p>

**For Further Reflection**

Pay attention to what annoys, upsets or offends you this week. Try to work out what is at the root of your upset. Has a sin been committed against you or is there something else going on? Is it an issue of preference, personality or good v better? Are you taking offence and if so why? What's really going on inside you? Has a sensitive spot been knocked? Is it your own sin that is rising to the surface? What's the best way to deal with this upset?

This level of self-analysis can be hard to do and is often best done in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to show you what's really going on.

Over time, you may see a pattern in your own responses and get better at spotting and dealing with your own issues. This will take the power out of perceived offences and free you from hurt and resentment.

### **Letting go of Offence**

We may recognise the need to 'let an offence go' but sometimes our emotions can be slow to follow. Often we need the help of the Holy Spirit to do this. Below is a suggestion for how to deal with annoyance or resentment brought about by a perceived insult or disregard for oneself in prayer:

1. Recognise that you are feeling offended. Tell the Lord how you feel and why.
2. Forgive the person who has hurt you, if necessary (they may not have actually sinned, so this is not always necessary)
3. Ask God to forgive you if you see sin at work in yourself (eg pride, envy)
4. Ask God to give you grace to let go of anger, resentment etc
5. Ask God to bring healing where you are hurt
6. Pray a blessing on the person who has offended you.

You may need to keep going through these steps until you are free of the offence. Some hurts go deeper than others and take longer to heal.

#### **Wisdom from Proverbs**

Proverbs 17 v9 – He who overcomes an offence promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates friends

Proverbs 18 v19 – An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel

Proverbs 19 v11 – A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offence

## Being Together – Week 6: Responding to Conflict Part 2

**The Being Together Framework says:**

- We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict
- We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict

This week we are focusing on how to resolve conflicts where there is a clear case of right and wrong (a breach of a law or rule) and/or inappropriate behaviour.

**Read Matthew 18 v15-17 and v 21-35**

10. What four steps does Jesus outline for resolving conflict (v 15-17) (Note – ‘tell it to the church’ in v 17 doesn’t mean a public dressing down – it means to refer it to the leadership of the church)
11. What else is important and why (v 21-35)?
12. Read Matthew 5 v 23-24. How is Jesus’ instruction here both similar and different to the teaching in Matthew 18?
13. What can we conclude from both these passages together about resolving conflict?

### The Role of Leaders in Resolving Conflict

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5 v 12-13 and Hebrews 13 v 17**

**1 Thessalonians 5 v 12-13:** Now we ask you brothers [and sisters] to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live at peace with each other

**Hebrews 13 v 17:** Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men [and women] who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

There are different levels of authority in the church. Eg If you are a member of the op shop team, then the op-shop co-ordinator has authority over you as leader of the op shop team. The priest in charge has

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authority over the op-shop co-ordinator and the bishop has authority over the priest. We also have a church warden and Safe Church co-ordinator who can advise and support us with more serious issues.

14. What is the benefit to us of this authority structure in the church and how can it help us in dealing with conflict?

### How does this apply in practice?

1. Look at the two scenarios overleaf from the fictional St Grace's Church, which involve Shaun and Steve and Sally. In pairs discuss:
  - What is the nature of each conflict? Has a rule been breached? Is there inappropriate behaviour?
  - What steps would you recommend for resolving the conflicts?
  - If you could offer advice to each of these characters, what would you say?
2. Share your ideas with another pair or the whole group. Did you come up with the same advice or different approaches?

### Trouble at St Grace's Church! (All characters and scenarios are fictional! )

<p>Shaun leads the youth group at St Grace's church. It's a large, successful youth group and it has been difficult for Shaun to find enough adult helpers to assist him. Shaun was really excited when Steve offered to help. Steve is great with the teenagers and is a real asset to the team. When he first got involved with the youth, Shaun explained to Steve that he would need to get a police check and working with children's check clearance done. Steve agreed to this but every time Shaun asks him about it Steve says "he hasn't got round to it yet". Six months has now passed and Shaun is wondering what he should do about Steve's lack of response to his repeated requests to get these checks done.</p>	<p>Sally leads the Sunday School at St Grace's. She loves the programme that they follow and feels it's a good fit for their mixed-age group of children. Sally was pleased when George offered to join the roster of helpers. George is reliable and helpful and has got all the necessary safe church checks done. However, George constantly makes little comments, which, while not outright criticisms, seem to imply that Sally could be doing a better job. George always seems to have a suggestion for a better way of doing something and this is starting to wind Sally up. In fact, if George says one more time, "In my last church we did it like this . . ." Sally thinks she will explode!</p>
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### For Further Reflection

- Look at the notes on the next page headed 'Some Dos and Don'ts of Conflict Resolution'.
- Which 'Don'ts' do you have a tendency to fall into?
- What positive experiences of conflict resolution have you had? What helped the experience go well?

- Would you add anything to these two lists and why?
- Are you currently involved in a conflict? What can you take from this study and apply to your situation? Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and help you resolve it successfully.

### Some Dos and Don'ts of Conflict Resolution

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your own failings (the 'log in your own eye') and give you wisdom about how to resolve the conflict.</li> <li>• Communicate face to face with the other person or people involved.</li> <li>• Listen carefully to the other person or people; try to understand their viewpoint or position.</li> <li>• Be willing to accept your own part in the conflict.</li> <li>• Be open to correction.</li> <li>• Be willing to learn. Be open to new information and different perspectives.</li> <li>• Be gentle in your communication. Try to stay calm.</li> <li>• Use open body language and, if culturally appropriate, keep eye contact as you talk.</li> <li>• Focus on the problem not the person (the sin not the sinner)</li> <li>• Respect those in authority and the rules or frameworks that have been put in place.</li> <li>• Repent where necessary for mistakes or sins you have committed.</li> <li>• Ask forgiveness from those you have hurt or sinned against.</li> <li>• Forgive those who have hurt or sinned against you.</li> <li>• Persevere in resolving the conflict (with periods of 'time out' if needed). Keep the conversation going and bring others in to help if necessary.</li> <li>• Listen to those in authority and respect their judgements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gossip about the conflict with others who are not involved</li> <li>• Speculate about what is going on in the minds or motives of the other person or people involved in the conflict.</li> <li>• Try to resolve the conflict via email or other form of electronic messaging. This can lead to more confusion and misunderstanding.</li> <li>• Seek revenge (Romans 12 v 19)</li> <li>• Bring up old hurts from the past when dealing with a conflict. Focus on the matter at hand.</li> <li>• Isolate yourself from the situation or refuse to play your part in resolving the conflict.</li> <li>• Be led by your emotions. Anger, fear and hurt may be very real and valid emotions but don't let them drive your decision making. Ask for help from trusted friends or others in the church to help you work through your emotions.</li> <li>• Ask someone else to talk to the person for you, unless it's a very serious problem. Try to resolve it yourself first. Ask for help from others as a second step if a one-to-one conversation fails.</li> <li>• Avoid dealing with a conflict where there is a clear case of right and wrong. It does not help yourself, the guilty party or others when wrong behaviour is not addressed and often leads to worse problems in the future. Seek help if you are not sure what to do.</li> <li>• Don't give in to the natural response mechanisms of 'fight' or 'flight'. If you have already done so, then return to the conflict when your emotions are calmer and persevere until its resolved.</li> </ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow Safe Church procedures for more serious issues.</li> <li>• Accept that not every conflict can be resolved, despite your best efforts, especially if the other person or people are not willing to work through it with you. (Romans 12 v 18)</li> </ul> |  |
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## Being Together – Week 7: Celebrating Being Together

If you have made it through the previous 6 weeks of this study – well done! These studies are challenging and demand some degree of self-examination. Hopefully they have helped bring some clarity to the Being Together framework and have given some practical ideas about how to live it out well. Now it's time to celebrate the joy of being together as a community or small group.

### Read Philemon v 1-7

1. How does Paul encourage Philemon, Apphia and Archippus? What words and phrases does he use?
2. Take time to encourage one another now. There are many ways of doing this. Some ideas are given below. You could choose one or some of these or choose your own idea. The goal is to build one another up and give thanks to God for each other.
  - Sit in a circle. Write the name of each person in the group on top of a piece of paper. There should be a piece of paper for each person in the group. Give each person a piece of paper but not one with their own name at the top. Write a word of encouragement on the paper for the named person, thanking them or encouraging them for their own particular attributes and qualities. Only write positive comments! Then fold the paper over so that the comment isn't visible and pass the paper onto the next person in the circle to write their comment. When you receive the paper with your own name, don't look inside it, pass it onto the next person until everyone in the group has had the opportunity to write something encouraging for each person. When this has been done, everyone receives their named piece of paper.
  - Similar to the above but simpler and quicker. Get into pairs. Each person writes a thank you card for the other person in their pair. Again, the words should be encouraging and up-building and specific to that person. Exchange cards. Pray a blessing on each other.
  - Share communion together. Take time over the sharing of the peace. Look one another in the eye as you shake hands. Perhaps serve one another the bread and the wine (Talk to your priest first if you would like to share communion).

- Have a time of sung worship together, which includes songs about being together (eg 'Bind us together').
- Read Psalm 133 together. On a large sheet of paper brainstorm all the blessings of your shared life together. Pray out your prayers of thanks.
- Share a meal together or have a party. Invite other friends and family to join you in a relaxed, fun time of celebration.