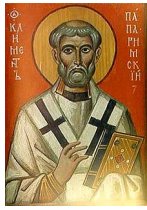


Ways of dealing with conflict



This is offered in gratitude for the work of Saint Clement of Rome (100) and Saint Benedict of Nursia. (540)



Assessments such as this are not for the purpose of defining reality or making judgments. They are best used to begin structured and disciplined forms of parish conversations. This assessment offers a particular perspective grounded in the field of organization development and systems theory and incorporating a theological view of the parish church.

Head off conflict by shaping a healthy parish

Healthy parishes keep disagreements in a range where they add to the parish’s vitality—disagreements are problems to solve or opportunities to engage. There are differences and some tension, but in the end it’s fruitful energy. When tensions are not maintained at this level they will almost always move to a higher level (become more serious), or the parish will develop an emotional flatness to avoid the uncomfortable feelings generated by the unaddressed tension. Following are some of the elements that contribute to keeping disagreements manageable and productive.

1. Clergy need to use their authority. But they need to use it wisely. Use it with humility, “with the head bowed down.”ⁱ Use it to facilitate listening and appropriate responses to that listening. Use it to nurture competence, responsibility and flexibility in the parish community.ⁱⁱ Use it to shape a healthy sacramental life in liturgy and community.

The clergy use of authority in this parish is (circle those that apply):

Angry	Avoiding	Internally conflicted	Mostly wise in using authority	Usually wise in using authority
Humble	Facilitates listening and responding	Nurtures competence, responsibility, flexibility		Shapes healthy parish life

2. Active formation of adults. This involves shaping the parish by grounding the people of the parish in the faith and practice of the church. That is a broad and wide-ranging task; it includes helping people understand what it is to be Christians in this particular tradition and the nurturing of a community of people given to kindness, gentleness, humility, perseverance, and courage.

The degree of awareness of spiritual practices and proficiency among regular attendees (circle one)

No idea	15% of the adult average Sunday attendees are aware of the core spiritual practices and few are proficient	40% of the adult average Sunday attendees are aware of the core spiritual practices and 5% are proficient	80% of the adult average Sunday attendees are aware of the core spiritual practices and 30% are proficient
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3. Conversations & No Grumbling: two things to be held in tandem. First, there’s a need for conversations that are structured and disciplined – that make use of methods we know will promote fruitful discussion and useful engagement with one another. Second, the Benedictine norm of no grumbling, no murmuring, no complaining – we need to give ourselves to making it work. The two go together. A norm of “no grumbling” will not be accepted if there are not regular and frequent ways of having needed conversations. The two need to be working in conjunction with each other.

a. We have regular and frequent structured communal conversation

Not at all				Regular and frequent
1	2	3	4	5

b. When the rector introduces something new the overall response is usually:

Annoyance and resistance				Cooperation - people trying to make things work
1	2	3	4	5

4. Emotional and spiritual maturity and the center. Something that inclines a parish to destructive conflict is when those of a more mature faith, and those with a stronger ability to manage their emotions, stay to the side and don't claim the emotional center of the parish’s life. In some cases this creates a vacuum causing a lackluster life, a life that isn't as purposeful and healthy as it might be. It can also result in an inversion in which the most anxious, the most agitated, and the most angry and frustrated end up controlling the emotional center of the parish’s life.

The spiritual and emotional center of parish is set by:

The most anxious, agitated, and angry OR those least competent in the spiritual life				Those with a high degree of self and social awareness; a strong capacity for emotional self management, <i>and</i> those generally proficient in the spiritual life.
1	2	3	4	5

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ⁱ From “Leading with the Head bowed down: Lessons in Leadership from the Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia” by Corne J. Bekker

ⁱⁱ Benedict wrote: “He should not be restless and troubled, not extreme and headstrong, not jealous and over suspicious... He should be farsighted and thoughtful... He should be prudent and moderate, extolling discretion, the mother of all virtues.”