

## **Confrontation and Conflict are NOT the Same Thing**

One of the services ConSpirita Consulting Network offers is in the area of parish communication. Often, for a variety of reasons, parish leaders are unskilled in the areas of confrontation and conflict. As a matter of fact, parish ministry tends to appeal to people who want to avoid confrontation and conflict. Just as it was not possible for Jesus, nor desirable for his mission, it is not possible or desirable for the mission for parish leaders to avoid confrontation or conflict either. So, if it is not possible to avoid them, perhaps it is best to befriend them, starting with understanding the difference between the two.

What is confrontation? According to the Princeton University online dictionary, confrontation has the following definitions: a bold challenge, discord resulting from a clash of ideas or opinions, or a hostile disagreement, face-to-face. Parish ministers tend to think of confrontation in the third instance: a hostile face-to-face encounter. It is this most want to avoid, at almost all cost, including the cost of discipleship and mission. However, confrontation is a necessary communication skill, especially when it is considered as having to do with the bold challenge of being a follower of Jesus and the resulting discord that Kingdom values will have with some of the culture's values.

Confrontation as a communication skill occurs when two or more people, sharing the same mission or set of values, disagree. That disagreement may be around performance, around communication, around commitment or even around consistency. In a parish, leaders in the parish should begin by presuming that all parishioners are working from the same value system: the values of Jesus Christ as articulated in the teachings of the Church and the Scriptures. A confrontation can occur when, holding the same values, there is a disagreement. Sometimes the disagreement arises in how well someone is giving outward sign to their belief in Christ. For example, someone who is a catechist may be heard or seen saying that they do not hold to much of the Church's moral teaching and so do not do those chapters with their learning communities. A confrontation is called for here between those responsible for seeing this takes place and the catechist who is supposed to hold the same values. Might it become hostile? Might there be some high energy? Might it be necessary to ask for a change in behavior? Yes, to all of those. And it might come to light that there is a need for more conversion to the values both leader and servant seek to live. This is a confrontation.

So if that is a confrontation, and not a conflict, what is conflict? Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines it first as fight, battle or war. Conflict can also be defined as competitive, opposing actions of incompatibles; an antagonistic state or action as of divergent ideas, interests or persons. Conflict can also be defined as a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands. Do conflicts arise in ministry? Of course. Jesus had them. They were often with the forces of Evil, or with those whose power, prestige and position prevented them from hearing his message. Clearly, toward the end of his earthly ministry, he had conflicts with those who saw his message and his works as threatening to them.

In every parish there are people who are there, perhaps serving in leadership positions, who hold views divergent from those of the gospel. They may or may not hold to the way of Jesus, and they may well have created for themselves in the parish, zones of influence or seats of

power. Parish leaders who hold to the truths of Christ and the teachings of the Church will find themselves facing conflicts with these folks. It is not possible to have a confrontation, because it begins with a shared value system. A conflict emerges when the value systems are not shared and so there is not a common mission and perspective from which to work.

Conflict communication requires differing skills than confrontation communication. ConSpirita Consulting Network can assist you in skill building in both areas, necessary for effective parish ministry.

References:

<http://www.misspelled.com/words/query.cgi?confrontation> Accessed 4/11/10.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conflict> Accessed 4/11/10.

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