Constructive Approaches — It helps to separate and address all three aspects of a conflict:

♦ Persons: Recognize that each person involved has their own viewpoint, a need for respect, and emotions that can be intense. If there is a power imbalance, it should be recognized — it may help to empower the "underdog." (see 1 Cor. 12:20ff)

♦ Process: Avoid the pull to use guilt or blame to justify your perspective: "you made me angry..."; learn to use "I" statements that convey observations, feelings, and needs without blame or demand. (see Matt. 7:1-5). Use the insights of Nonviolent Communication, over.

♦ Problem: Conflicts are harder to solve when the focus is on stances or positions. Learn to focus instead on needs; learn to express yours and hear the needs of others. Look for win/win solutions which meet the needs of both parties. (see Rom. 14:10-13)

Consider visualization techniques, role-play, puppets, etc. to enable participants to step back and see beyond their own viewpoint; to see the emotional as well as the rational side of the conflict.

Mediation

Mediation by a third party can be used at any time. It may be the best alternative when the parties involved have failed to resolve the conflict on their own or when violence or communication breakdown has prevented them from doing so. (see Matt. 18:15-20)
Steps for Win/Win problem-solving

Common sense suggests that you don’t have to lose for me to win. Unfortunately, our culture fosters habits that tend to be competitive rather than cooperative. Most of us need to make an extra effort at building trust and empathy and avoiding “win/lose” habits. Here’s how:

1. **Identify the problem** — Listen with an open mind. Look for the facts with honesty and without pre-judging or blaming; listen like a journalist or counselor.

2. **Identify the feelings** — Listen carefully without judging, blaming or demanding. Speak for yourself without blaming or criticizing. It works better to use “I” messages.

3. **Identify unmet needs** — And note: it helps not to mix in requests in these first three steps.

4. **Brainstorm solutions** — Encourage conversation that is spontaneous and creative. Think of a variety of options, without evaluating; express them as requests, not demands.

5. **Choose a solution** — Evaluate the options and choose one that everyone feels good about.

6. **Agree to act** — Schedule a time to evaluate how well the problem is being resolved. End with a positive gesture like a handshake, smile, or hug. Implement your plan.

Adapted from Help Increase the Peace Program Manual, American Friends Service Committee, www.afsc.org

Nonviolent Communication can help

Nonviolent Communication is based on the idea that conflict is caused by unmet needs and can be resolved in a cooperative rather than aggressive manner. We feel much better and are more successful when we rely on empathy and honesty rather than fear, blame, or guilt. We avoid language that triggers mistrust or resentment... We discover the power of compassion.

Most efforts to resolve conflict get stuck when, through habit, the parties jump to blaming and making demands. Nonviolent Communication, in contrast, seeks to build respect, safety, and consensus. It shows love by seeking out observations, feelings, and needs of others... and by expressing our own clearly and thoughtfully. Once these are clear, solutions begin to emerge; it is most helpful to express them as requests, which fosters empathy in others:

- **(in speaking)** Honestly expressing how I am without blaming or criticizing:
- **(in listening)** Empathically receiving how you are without hearing blame or criticism:

1. **Observations** (not evaluations)
   - 1. The concrete actions you observe (see, hear, remember...) that contribute (or not) to your well-being:
   - "When you see (hear you say) __" "When you see (hear) __?"

2. **Feelings** (not judgments)
   - 2. How are you feeling in relation to these actions:
   - "I feel __" "Do you feel __?"

3. **Needs** (not requests)
   - 3. The needs, values, desires, expectations... that underlie my feelings:
   - "I am needing __" "Are you needing __?"

4. **Requests** (not demands)
   - 4. Clearly requesting that which would enrich my life without making any demand:
   - "Would you be willing to __?" "Would you like me to __?"

Nonviolent communication makes sense — show love in listening and in speaking — and it works. For most of us, though, it takes an extra effort to change old habits and learn new skills. But what a difference it makes! We connect more deeply, understand more clearly, feel more powerful, and discover what it can mean to be a Christian when there is conflict.

Adapted from Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg. See www.cnvc.org

Group leader tips

1. Begin with prayer and introduce the topic with a few insights from page one.

2. Share several examples of conflicts; pick 1 or 2 go through the steps of Win/Win problem-solving; use Nonviolent Communication to build respect, trust, and empathy. It may help to switch sides to gain perspective.

3. Read a few texts, e.g. Rom. 2:1, Gal. 6:1-2, Matt. 18:15-22; talk about how Win/Win and nonviolent communication (NVC) can help us apply these biblical truths in our lives.

4. Use a second session to practice Win/Win and NVC skills. (These insights can also help explore conflict between groups or countries.)

Preparation: Make copies of the left hand side of this page (or the whole resource) for participants. Bring several examples of conflicts; practice using Win/Win and NVC beforehand.

LPF’s Peace Points resources include

- Peace Points Starters, What Is Christian Peacemaking? Hosting a Hunger Awareness Meal, Wall of Hope, Peace Worship, It’s Time to Talk, Just War, and Reclaim the Season...
- Single copy free by mail, or at: www.LutheranPeace.org

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