

## Conflict Affects Us All

Every one of us has experienced conflict in some part of our lives. At home or at work, in church or community, conflict can be a creative force for good; however, it can also be hugely destructive.

The journey of the Ministries Council in understanding conflict in the church began with a piece of research requested by the General Assembly in 2006. In the course of that research, we listened to the stories of ministers and office bearers who had been overtaken by destructive levels of conflict which altered the course of their lives in the church.

- 33% of ministers and congregations have experienced *high level* conflict
- 43% of those in their first 5 years of ministry asked for further training in the management of conflict and change
- 60% of those who still had 10 years to serve had experienced conflict at levels which they were ill-equipped to address

Sadly, we are still receiving high volumes of requests for help; providing continued evidence of the need for further training and support for those struggling to cope with conflict.

**A PLACE FOR HOPE** is seeking to make available the expertise necessary to address these training needs.

## An Illustrative Story

*The Rev A and his Session Clerk fell out over what seemed like a fairly simple matter, but it soon grew into a dispute which divided the congregation.*

*No-one was around at the time to mediate their dispute and it grew until neither could stand the sight of each other.*

*The health of Rev A was gravely affected to the point that he retired on the grounds of ill-health. The Session Clerk's spiritual life was deeply damaged and he no longer attends church.*

- Sadly, this is an all too common occurrence. Our church culture is imbued with decision-making processes which can be confrontational rather than collaborative.
- Our default position is often one where we defend our positions rather than seek help to mediate our differences.

**A PLACE FOR HOPE** will seek to provide trained mediators to work alongside those whose disputes would otherwise lead to unresolved conflict.

## The Theological Divide

Within itself the church continues to wrestle with a broad spectrum of moral and theological issues.

Listening circles offer a safe place for a different form of conversation to take place, such as the current debate on human sexuality as it faces the church. Promoting dialogue in this way offers the opportunity for open and honest sharing of what it means to be the church in a highly diverse cultural context.

## The Sectarian Divide

On a wider front, Scotland remains scarred by its own history and the history of division between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

This deep sectarian divide still needs to be addressed. To some extent, this too is a question of how we live with our differences, but it is also a question about how we conduct our dialogue.

**A PLACE FOR HOPE** will seek to provide a resource which will help us conduct healthy dialogue and, where necessary, learn to live with difference in our churches and in our communities.

## An Ecumenical Initiative

This project could not be contemplated without forging a real partnership with other churches and agencies in Scotland who are already working in the areas of peace-making, reconciliation and mediation.

**A PLACE FOR HOPE** will be an ecumenical initiative, working with other churches and other agencies to help change the culture of our local congregations and communities.

## Current Progress

Since the conference in November 1999 acted as a launch pad for *A Place for Hope*, 2010 ended on a 'high' with a visit from David Brubaker (professor at the Eastern Mennonite University, USA). Events during David's visit included our Accredited Mediators, and other representatives, exploring tools and resources for addressing conflict within congregations.

## Aims for the Future

- establish a live network of people throughout Scotland committed to the work of peacemaking and reconciliation;
- initiate a church-wide realisation of the importance of building communities of peace and reconciliation.

## Training Mediators

10 trained Mediators are now ready for action, and the team is working hard to establish protocols for assessment and intervention in order to help congregations deal with difficulties before they escalate into deep disputes.

Try to imagine a difficult Union of two churches and the need to decide which building to use for worship. Or think about a fallout in your congregation that led to some long-standing member leaving. These and many other difficult situations can be helped by the intervention of a trained mediator.

## £60,000 needed

Professional training of Mediators is hugely expensive. But because the church is organising its own training with the use of Scotland's leading professional teachers we are able to keep the cost within reach. That said, we still have to find almost £60,000 to complete the second phase.

**This is money well spent - if it helps to save one ministry or one congregation from going into freefall, it is worth it! The fact is it will save many, many more.**

**For further information or to arrange a speaker contact Ministries Council:**

Dorothy Davidson:  
[ddavidson@cofscotland.org.uk](mailto:ddavidson@cofscotland.org.uk); or  
Catriona Shehi: [cshehi@cofscotland.org.uk](mailto:cshehi@cofscotland.org.uk)

# The Ministries Council



and

## The Guild



working to create

# *A Place for Hope*

A recent report from a presbytery reads:

*"A congregation which was facing an unsatisfactory state has broken through to a new place of trust, it's like new life being breathed into this congregation's life."*

Church of Scotland, 121 George Street,  
Edinburgh EH2 4YN, Tel: 0131 225 5722  
Scottish Charity Number: SCO11353