



## **Building Healthy Conflict Practices into Membership Vows by Jonathan Arnpriester**

I have always struggled with the presence of seemingly unnecessary conflict in congregations. Some unhealthy behaviors, such as control issues and gossip, can be seen as individual personality problems. Yet, they can result in a systemic illness for the entire congregation. So how do we create conditions that encourage naturally occurring conflicts to be handled in a healthy manner?" or "How does a healthy church incorporate conflict?"

I found part of the answer in the questions of membership. We have actually incorporated questions about healthy congregational behaviors into "The Meaning of Membership at Mosaic." Positive conflict values are part of membership training and are lifted up in worship every time we receive new members. The membership vows are in four parts: Prayers, Presence, Gifts, and Service. Notice the vows for Prayers:

### **Prayers**

- We will pray for each other in all situations of life.
- When there is conflict we will follow the direction of Jesus in Matthew – we will talk directly with the person with whom we have a problem. No triangulation.

It actually works. People will come and talk with me about their disagreements, often mentioning the membership vows. It also enables me to confront those who vent concerns behind the backs of the people with whom they are unhappy. I always begin the encounter by acknowledging that their concerns are linked to their love of the church and authentically recalling the specific ways their love of the church is made manifest. In each case, the person has apologized and we have been able to work to a resolution that is truly a blessing. Some of the persons I have had to confront have become my biggest supporters.

I have learned that God's will for good can be done if leaders are willing to be vulnerable, trust people, see God in all people, and believe that all things can work for good.

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