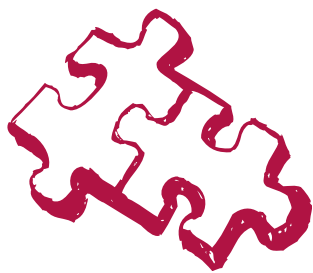
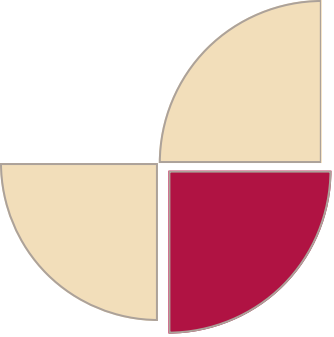


THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD
PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL

HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

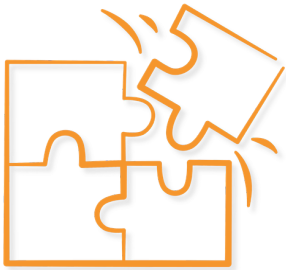
TIPS FOR LOCAL SYNOD FACILITATORS





Introduction

This paper is the result of a collaboration between the General Secretariat of the Synod and PaxChristi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. It is intended to offer some tips and tools for local synod facilitators and help them to manage tensions and conflicts in their communities during the synodal encounters.



WHAT is a conflict ?

CONFLICT IS NOT NEGATIVE.

Conflict is not negative. It is natural and to be expected in relationships between different people. Each person perceives the world differently and has needs, interests, feelings, emotions, backgrounds and experiences that shape their different views and approaches to reality.

The important thing is **how we manage** nonviolently these natural differences and achieve peaceful methods of coexistence, dialogue, restoration and healing in order to go walk together. Facilitators can help to build nonviolent experiences of participation and encounter allowing the synod gatherings to become **Houses of peace**, an unarmed and disarming peace.

Facilitators should also recognize their own vulnerability and interdependence and ask for help when needed. **Facilitators' role is not to solve conflicts**, restore relationships or heal traumas but they can contribute to those possibilities and they can suggest the participation of experts and professionals like mediators or counsellors when necessary.



HOW

to prevent conflicts

PREVENTING CONFLICTS BY PREPARING A PROPER ENVIRONMENT



SPACE

Physical spaces generate behavioral dynamics, so it is important for the facilitator to design a welcoming, warm, and friendly space. It is advisable to seat people in a circle or semicircle. If possible, this should be done without furniture that interrupts visual interaction, in an open space where everyone can see and communicate with each other.

For this reason it is important that the number of people attending a conversation remains appropriate. A number of twelve people (or less) plus the facilitator appears to be a good compromise.

Light and noise can also be factors of stress.

BE SURE THAT THE FACILITY IS WELL
ILLUMINATED AND THERE IS ENOUGH SILENCE
SO THAT EVERYBODY CAN HEAR ONE ANOTHER EASILY



EMBODIMENT

Space is also our body. Communication between people **is not only verbal** but mainly nonverbal. Our gestures, our smiles, the way we sit, the way we use our arms and hands to welcome others, the way we actively keep eye contact to listen to people or our movements are all elements that help to create a welcoming atmosphere.

THE FACILITATOR SHOULD TRY TO WELCOME EACH AND EVERY PARTICIPANT WITH THESE EMBODIED GESTURES. FACILITATING IS A FULLY EMBODIED ROLE.



TIME

Time management is key in any group interaction.

To generate greater willingness to participate in the process, it is important that the facilitator specifies at the beginning **how long the meeting** will last and even the structure and time of the session.

This helps to generate a sense of control, reduces anxiety, and allows for planning. The way the facilitator communicates (with words and body) should be relaxed and kind so that stress and time anxiety are avoided.

TIME MANAGEMENT IS KEY
IN ANY GROUP INTERACTION.



PREVENTING CONFLICTS by using a proper methodology

THE CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT SPIRITUALITY | LISTENING



THE CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT AS A NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION METHOD.

The facilitator should briefly explain in what consists **the method of Conversation in the Spirit**, the way in which we want to treat each other during the dialogue (with respect, valuing each contribution, with kindness, gratitude, welcome, a conciliatory tone, seeking a shared path, respecting turns to speak, not judging, etc.).

This will allow the facilitator to remind participants of these “rules” if any of them are not followed. The facilitator should also mention that each person will have the same opportunity and time to express his/her point of view. Training on nonviolent communication would be really helpful to develop the facilitator role.



SPIRITUALITY: PRAYER AND SILENCE.

Conversation in the spirit is a **spiritual process**. It is essential to begin and conclude with a prayer and to have several moments of silence. The facilitator should offer a prayer that allows the Holy Spirit to be present and the group to focus here and now in a spiritual attitude of listening and communication.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMIND THE PARTICIPANTS THAT
THIS IS NOT A PRAYER BEFORE A PROCESS BUT THAT
THE WHOLE PROCESS IS PRAYERFUL.

The **time of silence** included in every stage of the conversation in the Spirit can be a proper time to ask the Holy Spirit to welcome what has been heard **without prejudices and with empathy**. People can feel uncomfortable with silence (where to look, what to do,...). Facilitators need to help in entering a proper time of silence: soft music, use of symbols and rituals, etc.



LISTENING FIRST, THEN SPEAKING.

Communication begins with silence, with listening, not with speaking. **If we do not listen, there is no communication.** Active listening is the ability to listen well with attention and understanding. Through it, we become aware of what the other person is saying and what they are trying to communicate to us. Through it, we tell the other person that we are really paying attention to what they are saying. We are telling them that we care, that what they say is important. **Listening is an act of human recognition.** To do this, we must let them speak we cannot listen if we are talking—build trust by helping the person feel free to express, show interest, eliminate distractions.

DO NOT INTERRUPT, GIVE HIM/HER TIME,
DO NOT CRITICIZE OR JUDGE.

Some keys to practicing active listening would be:

- 🎯 Look at the speaker attentively and respectfully.
- 🎯 Lean slightly toward the person you are listening to.
- 🎯 Do not interrupt
- 🎯 Do not talk too much . . .
- 🎯 Nod your head and use brief expressions to show that you are listening: I understand, please, go on...
- 🎯 At the end, summarize in your own words what you understood from the message: If I have understood you well,

The facilitator should give each person in the group a turn to speak about the situation or topic being discussed. Each and every member of the group should speak, and the facilitator should ensure that **nobody monopolizes the conversation** while others remain silent but that all of them are equally important.

It is good that the facilitator reminds at some moments the spiritual dimension of the whole process and the rules of communication if necessary.



Introduction/Welcoming

At each meeting, the facilitator should invite each and every participant to introduce themselves. The facilitator should also introduce themselves, explaining their role and pointing out that if at any time the group needs another facilitator for any reason, they should simply propose one.

It does not matter if the group already knows each other; it is important to have an introduction at each session because, even in these circumstances, it allows people to introduce themselves in different ways and add aspects that were not mentioned in previous introductions. Ultimately, the aim is to build relationships, get to know each other, and create a **process of humanization and bonding**.



Nonviolent communication.

To avoid polarization, the facilitator will invite each person to begin with the phrase “**From my point of view**”, “**From my experience**”, or “**From my perspective**”, avoiding presenting opinions as facts. It is also important that participants are able to express how they feel and not only what they think.

The facilitator will help each participant to avoid “closed words” like “always”, “never”, “they”, “us” and use “open words” like “maybe”, “perhaps”, “sometimes”, reframing sentences when necessary^[1].

sometimes
never
they maybe
us
perhaps always
closed words
open words

● Closed words
● Open words

^[1] If you want to know more about nonviolent communication, you have a book suggestion at the end of the document.



When the conflict happens, what to do..

CONFLICT IS INHERENT
IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.

Conflict is inherent in human relationships. Conflict is bound to arise; it is not an exception or an anomaly, but an intrinsic part of coexistence among the richness of diversity. We should not avoid it, but rather face it with serenity of spirit, trust in people, and faith.



Unity in diversity:
Separate the person from the conflict.

Relationships deal with difficult and sometimes conflicting issues. The facilitator should help **separate issues from people**. A person is not his or her position in the conflict or his or her idea, no matter how vehemently or committed they are to it.

People are more than their ideas and positions. **People are not issues.** We must not allow difficult and conflicting issues to damage people and the relationship among them.

When issues and positions are identified with specific people in the group, the facilitator will help to identify exactly what those positions are, separating them from the people who defend those positions. The facilitator will invite other people in the group to defend and argue those positions.

Likewise, they will invite the people who are “opposed” to sit next to each other during the discussion, rather than sitting opposite each other. It is useful to use a flipchart to record the different ideas and arguments.



De-escalate tensions.

Every gesture helps. A smile, a greeting, an invitation, active listening. Conflicts. De-escalating conflicts involves deconstructing them, climbing down each step that took us up the conflict ladder. Now we must make our way back down.

THIS PATH CANNOT BE TAKEN ALL AT ONCE.
WE MUST DESCEND EACH STEP, BRINGING THE
“OPPONENTS” TOGETHER, REPLACING CLOSED
WORDS WITH MORE OPEN ONES, RECOGNIZING
PEOPLE AND SEPARATING THEM FROM THEIR
POSITIONS, GETTING MORE PEOPLE TO
PARTICIPATE AND CONTRIBUTING TO
BROADENING PERSPECTIVES...

Training on the use of the **conflict ladder** and the **conflict map** tools would be really helpful to develop the facilitator role.

Consensus-building

Conflict transformation, as conflict scholar and practitioner John Paul Lederach writes, “begins with two pro-active foundations:

- 1) a positive orientation toward conflict, and
- 2) a willingness to engage in the conflict in an effort to produce constructive change or growth”.

Thus, building consensus, if it is understood as achieving an outcome, is not the main goal and should not be an obsession. This would lead to trying to avoid discrepancies and different perspectives, which are necessary.

Consensus should be understood as not leaving anyone behind. Consensus-building must be understood as a process, as a method by which a group of people can work through differences together where even it is possible to include seemingly contradictory ideas.

The Synodal Church walks together and must do so with differences and diversity. *Synodality is the process, not the result.* Each step of the journey taken together is already consensus building. In this process, people are able to meet each other, to talk peacefully about their differences, and to build relationships. Each member’s contribution is valued.

Facilitators must be aware of this and promote it. We are working to promote the growth of community and trust.



One way this can be approached is to begin by understanding that no person possesses the entire truth. We each have a piece of the truth. When a conflict arises, we strive to hear one another's differing pieces of the truth.

Consensus is built first by listening to each participant piece of the truth and then with each **Yes** from each and every member of the group. No matter how small each yes may seem to us. The first **Yes** can be just to agree to meet and keep on meeting.

Facilitators must build small '**Yes**' throughout each meeting and invite each person to express that **Yes** aloud. Each meeting can end with the question, "Do you want us to meet again?", regardless of the differences, disagreements, or conflicts that may have arisen.

From a spiritual and theological point of view, reaching consensus is understood as **a gift of the Spirit** that brings harmony and an expression of Christ's presence. In this regard, we can also recall what is stated in the *Final Document* (28) of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

WHEN DEFINING WHAT IS
SYNODALITY THE DOCUMENT STATES:

"IT ALSO INVOLVES REACHING CONSENSUS
AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHRIST RENDERING
HIMSELF PRESENT, HE WHO IS ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT."



FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE



Tensions or conflicts are often presented as a single, given, finished reality, rather than as a set of elements (relationships, needs, interests, feelings, values, time, narratives, positions, etc.) that shape a way of perceiving the situation and a process. It is important in an ecclesial community to remind the participants that **what unified us** is not our thoughts or behaviours, but **the Person of Jesus** and our relationship with Him, with each other and with the whole Creation, interconnectness, shared vulnerability, knowing that we are all creatures, children of God, the strength of knowing that we are loved.

PEACE DOES NOT MEAN TO HAVE THE SAME PERSPECTIVES OR THE 'VICTORY' OF AN IDEA, A MOST SHARED PERSPECTIVE ON ANOTHER ONE.

It is acknowledging the difference, the diversity. It is at the end the willingness to make space for others, to walk together. **Peace is not a singular concept but a plural one.** Conflicts are not resolved or ended, but rather managed and transformed to help our relationships and our faith grow.

The problem is not conflict itself, but rather the nonviolent management of conflicts. The mission is not to end conflicts, but rather to learn to manage them in a nonviolent way, creating nonviolent experiences of participation, houses of peace.

Nonviolent experiences of participation

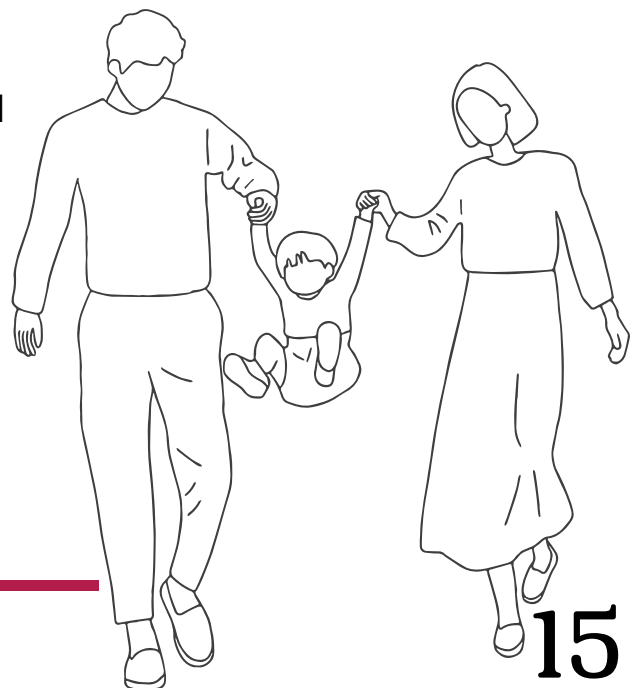
Nonviolent experiences of participation take many forms, from local community engagement to global movements. In everyday life, this can include neighborhood engagement, where residents address disputes and make joint decisions, or school councils where students, families and teachers discuss rules and projects together.

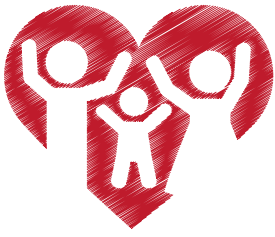


Family is indeed the first nonviolent experience of participation for many children. When this is not the case, we need to help those children and their parents learn how to build nonviolent houses of peace.

Within our Church nonviolent participation appears in many ways like in parish councils, where lay members collaborate with clergy to plan liturgies, social outreach, and education programs, ensuring all voices are heard respectfully. Synodal processes exemplify this on a larger scale, encouraging dialogue among bishops, clergy, and laity worldwide, emphasizing listening, discernment, and consensus building. Other examples include prayer groups, charitable committees, and parish planning meetings, where participation fosters community, resolves conflicts peacefully, and empowers members to contribute without fear.

In all cases, nonviolent participation creates the physical, ethical and spiritual spaces and times that allow differences to be addressed constructively, **building unarmed and disarming** peace at an everyday level and contributing to broader social, cultural and international peace.





Houses of **PEACE**

Houses of peace can be understood as local synodal groups that intentionally commit to becoming visible spaces of unarmed and disarming peace, where conflicts are addressed without violence, domination, or exclusion. Rooted in Gospel nonviolence, they understand peace as a spiritual gift but also a shared responsibility that calls for formation, action, and resistance to all forms of dehumanization.

As a spirituality and way of life, Gospel nonviolence shapes how members listen, speak, decide, and act together. Houses of peace therefore commit to supporting and developing nonviolence within the community through concrete practices: regular formation in nonviolent communication and conflict transformation; and shared discernment rooted in the Gospel. The cultivation of habits that protect human dignity build relationships, and foster participation.

This commitment also extends beyond the group itself. Houses of peace make Gospel nonviolence public and visible by engaging in nonviolent action and resistance: organizing prayerful vigils in times of social tension, supporting victims of violence and injustice, collaborating with schools and civic groups on nonviolent education, and advocating peacefully for policies that uphold human dignity.

They practice constructive resistance by refusing language, structures, or decisions that rely on fear, coercion, violence, injustice and exclusion.





Houses of **PEACE**

In this way, Houses of peace embody unarmed and disarming peace as a path for personal, cultural, and social transformation where Jesus' nonviolent response is lived and practiced at an everyday level. By uniting contemplation, education, and action, they offer Gospel nonviolence as a credible, lived spirituality, ethic and response—one capable of speaking across religious and cultural boundaries, and of contributing to a more just and peaceful world.





HOW TO CLOSE A MEETING when tensions happen ?

SOMETIMES WE ARE REACHING
THE END OF THE MEETING,
BUT THAT IS PRECISELY
WHEN TENSIONS HAVE
ARISEN.

WHAT do we do?

This is often a difficult moment for facilitators. **What do we do?** How do we facilitate the end of the meeting without leaving a feeling of tension that makes people leave with a bad impression and even makes it more difficult to meet again?

The Gospel method

Some episodes of the Gospel and some biblical references can be of help when the tension is so strong not to allow the continuation of the dialogue.

Here you have some key tips to take into account:



“The Kingdom grows in its own time.” - (Mk 4:26-29).

*Pretending nothing happened makes it worse.
Try to name the tension calmly and not try to fix things.*

Example: “I feel there is tension here and this may need more time. I don’t want to stop the conversation because this is really important. Precisely because of that, I think we should have time to address it allowing everybody to bring his/her own perspective.

I think we should schedule another meeting and address this issue at the very beginning. Could someone take note of this for our next encounter?”



“You cannot bear it all now.” (Jn 16:12)

Do not try to solve but to hold. Name what remains unresolved. Closure doesn’t require resolution.

Example: “I notice that not everything has been resolved today, and that’s okay. Let us hold the questions and concerns that remain, so we can return to them with calm hearts and careful reflection.”



“Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19)

Lower your voice and speak slowly with pauses.

Calm behavior regulates the room more than words do.



“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” (Matthew 7:1)

Summarize neutrally. Do not mention who but just what, and open possibilities.

Example: “We have heard different concerns and perspectives. And probably there are even other points of views that haven't been heard yet. The time until our next meeting may be a good opportunity to bring more perspectives too”.



“Take only one day at a time.” (Mt 6:34).

State and confirm the next safe step and entrust it to God.

Example: “We’ll revisit this after everyone has time to reflect in our next meeting. Let us schedule that encounter now”



“Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19)

End with a grounding ritual reaffirming shared purpose

Remind people why they are in the room together: mission and relationship. Give people some minutes to be in silence, inviting them to breathe deeply and to have a moment of gratitude. Facilitators should express that gratitude to the group loudly, thanking people for staying engaged, not for agreeing. Example: “Thank you for showing up honestly today, for speaking truth and doing it with love, for bringing the richness of each perspective. Thank you Lord Jesus to help us understand that discernment needs disagreement but also for your help to deal with those disagreements within love and brotherhood”

This is a time to help people to make a transition out of tension.
End with a short prayer.

At some moments it could be useful to share some specific episodes of the Gospel. This could be done, for example, at the beginning of the session.



The follow-up

Time to time, the conversation in the Spirit reveals tensions and conflicts that could be rooted in something (trauma) deeper in the life of the community or the person.

In those situations, the facilitators and the whole community should start thinking about other processes such as circles of reconciliation or trauma healing processes including those people of the community who are affected.

Leading those processes is not the role of the Synod facilitators and they must ask for expert help to start those processes. However, identifying that need if it happens would be really helpful.



SOME BOOK recommendations:

[Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World.](#)

Available in [English](#)

Available free in [Spanish](#)

Available in [German](#)

Nonviolent communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg.

Available free in [English](#)

Available free in [Spanish](#)

At times, synod facilitators may encounter situations involving serious conflict or personal or community trauma. You are not alone. There are many organizations and professionals available to help in these situations, including Catholic organizations around the world with extensive experience and sensitivity.

If a facilitator identifies or senses that this may be happening in their group, it is important to reach out for help. Asking for and seeking help is the first big step, and facilitators can be excellent bridges to other processes.

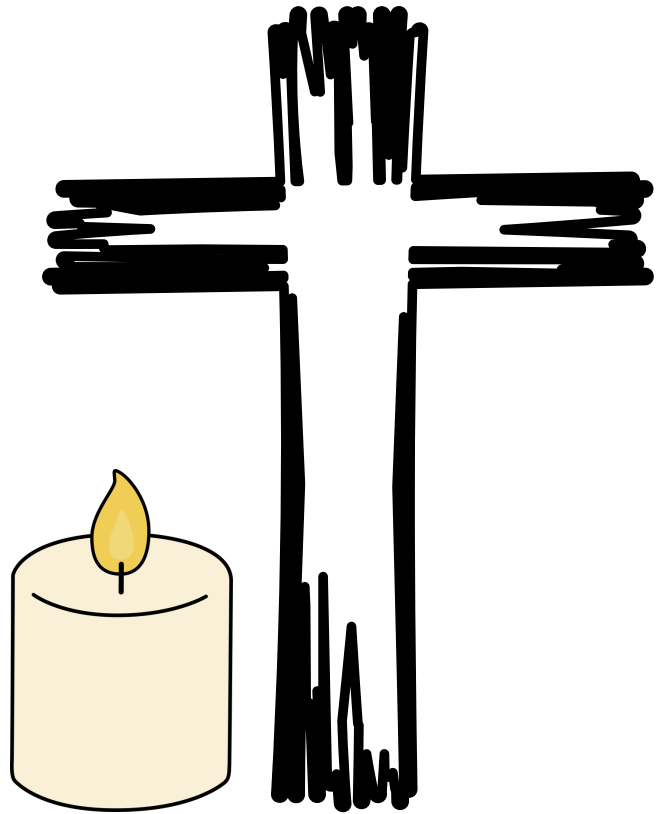


Pax Christi's Catholic **Nonviolence Initiative**

Pax Christi's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is a global movement dedicated to promoting active nonviolence as a core principle of the Gospel. Its Catholic Institute for Nonviolence mission is to make nonviolence research, resources, and lived experience more accessible to Catholic Church leaders, communities, and institutions in order to deepen Catholic understanding of and commitment to the practice of Gospel nonviolence.

You can contact Pax Christi International if you need more information about how to advance nonviolence in your own local synodal group, learn more about how to facilitate synodal gatherings, learn how to deal nonviolently with conflicts. You can also look for Pax Christi national or local sections in your country to contact.





The Ritual

OF THE
CANDLE &
THE **CROSS**

The Symbols:

A crucifix and several candles



The crucifix represents Christ who absorbs conflict without returning violence



The candles symbolize Christ as the Light and the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding truth and humility.



Together, they remind the group that the whole synodal process is spiritual.

HOW THE RITUAL IS DONE (STEP BY STEP)

Setting the Space

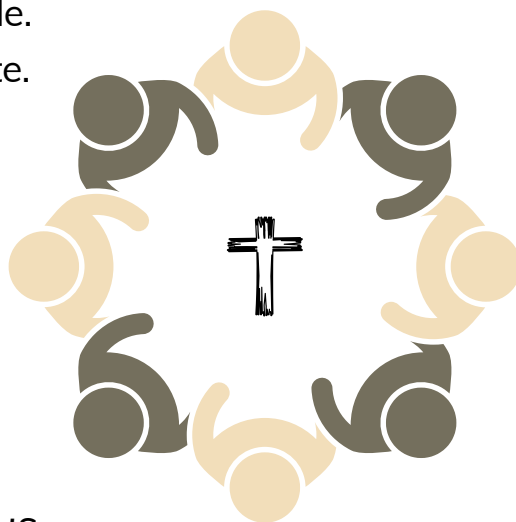
- The group sits in a circle.
- The crucifix is placed at the center, with a single candle lit beside it.
- Each person is given an unlit candle.
- Silence is kept for about one minute.

Opening Prayer

A short prayer is prayed aloud.

Suggestion:

“Lord Jesus, you are present among us. Send your Spirit so that we may speak the truth in love, listen with humility, and build bridges even when disagreement appears. Lord Jesus, help us to keep your light among us”





Examen of the Heart (silent reflection)

Each person silently asks:

- How am I going to contribute to this group?
- Where have I failed to listen or love? How will I improve this?

No one speaks yet.



The Candle Is Held

- The lit candle in the center is brought to a person in the circle who will light their candle from the light of the first candle.
- The person with the lit candle may speak and express their hopes for the process and the group.

When holding it, the person speaks in the first person **only**:

- “I hope...”
- “I ask forgiveness for...”
- “I commit myself to...”

- No interruptions are allowed.

- The person lights the candle of the next person on their right, and the process is repeated until the end. If the person does not wish to speak, they can simply pass the light on.

Response of Silence

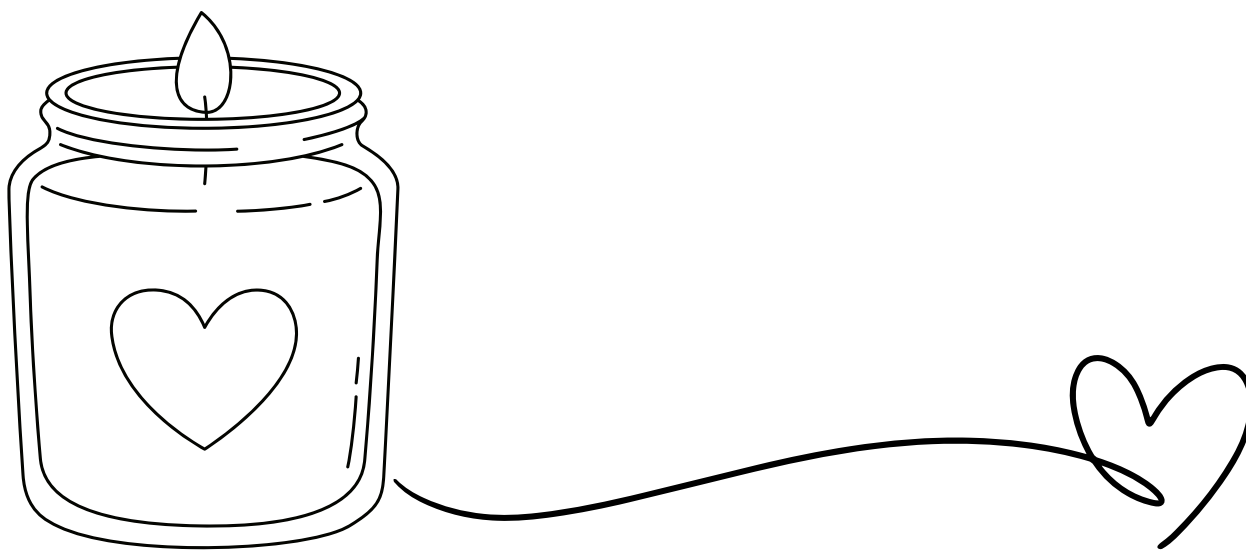
- After each person speaks, the group remains silent.
- This mirrors the respect given in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Praying together

Once all who wish to speak have done so, the group prays together:

Sign of Peace

- The facilitator invites the group to place the candles in the center surrounding the first candle and then exchange the sign of peace: a handshake, eye contact or an embrace if appropriate.
- One minute of silence.



Keeping the light in our hearts

- The facilitator extinguishes the candles, saying:
“May what was brought into the light
now rest in God’s mercy and in all of us hearts”

THE CONFLICT LADDER



| A TOOL
TO FACE
CONFLICT IN A
NONVIOLENT
WAY

Several authors like Friedrich Glasl, Fisher y Keashly or Vyniamata among others, have proposed “**conflict ladders**” or escalation models, each highlighting different forces (power, perception, communication, violence) to help us understand how conflicts work and how to deal with them in a nonviolent and effective way.

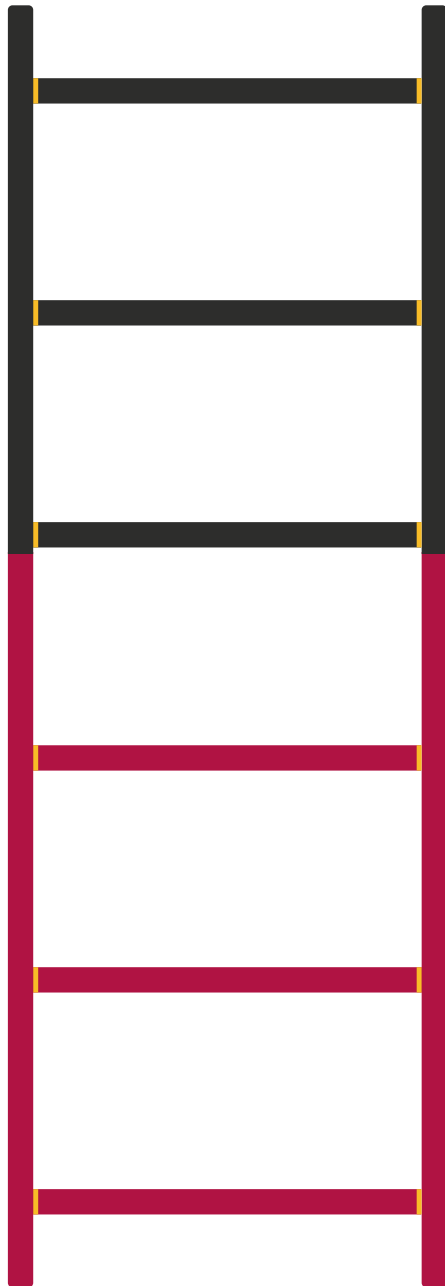
Here we present the conflict ladder as a tool to be used by facilitators. It is an adapted version taking into account different models.

This tool will help us as facilitators to analyze the conflict situation we are experiencing and will allow us to know where each of the people involved, including ourselves, are on the conflict ladder.

To learn how to use the ladder, we must observe — and observe ourselves — in order to place each person on one of the steps. But first, we need to learn to recognize where we are on the ladder and what is happening throughout the situation we are experiencing.

Simply using this tool allows us to “**climb onto the balcony,**” and see the conflict “from above” and not get ‘trapped’ and/or “hooked.” This is essential in order to help people transform their conflicts. If we don't do this, we become part of the conflict or, in other words, part of the problem and not part of the solution.

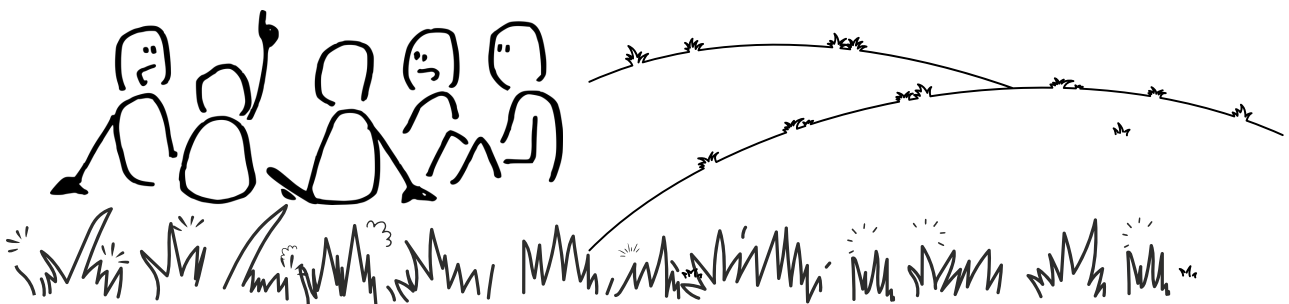
YOU CAN IMAGINE AND VISUALIZE



A LADDER
WITH

6 STEPS

Conflicts do not follow a straight upward line. In other words, conflicts do not cause people to rise progressively up the ladder, but rather “**in leaps and bounds.**” Understanding this is very important because otherwise, we may often fail to understand why a person goes from an apparent state of calm to a much more aggressive one. This means that they have probably been “**ruminating**” on the conflict for some time (climbing steps by feeding their mind with negative perceptions on their own), and an event that in other circumstances would be unimportant now becomes the trigger for a leap.



THE

**TOTAL
CONFRONTATION**

LIMITED
DESTRUCTION

05

FIRST ATTACKS

04

VISIBILITY OF THE
CONFLICT AND POLARIZATION.

03

BEGINNING
OF TENSIONS

02

INITIAL TENSIONS

01

INNER PEACE

00

STAGES
OF **THE**
CONFLICT
LADDER

BEGINNING OF TENSIONS

02

INITIAL TENSIONS

01

I N N E R P E A C E

00

STAGE 0: INNER PEACE

We are focused, here and now. There is no anxiety or tension, only full attention and concentration on the task at hand, whether it is more passive (e.g., sunbathing, watching a movie, reading a book) or more active (e.g., playing sports, sewing, building something).

STAGE 1: INITIAL TENSIONS.

Something has bothered me, although I am not giving it too much importance at the moment. Willingness to talk, although there is some tension or initial discomfort in communication. For now, these are just annoying, uncomfortable, or misunderstood details. These tensions are inherent in relationships.

STAGE 2: BEGINNING OF TENSIONS.

The “them”-‘us’ / “you-me” / “in my country, culture, religion” / “here-there” discourse begins. This is the beginning of the construction of a perception of confrontation or differentiation. Differences in identities. Communication begins to create the perception of two totally different worlds.

LIMITED DESTRUCTION

05

FIRST ATTACKS

04

VISIBILITY OF THE
CONFLICT AND POLARIZATION.

03

STAGE 3: VISIBILITY OF THE CONFLICT AND POLARIZATION.

The conflict becomes more visible and the polarisation language increases. Conflict is presented as a fait accompli. The capacity for empathy decreases. The process accelerates. Simplified images of friend-enemy are created. Misunderstandings and mistrust increase. Aversion increases and one's own identity is consolidated in opposition to that of the “**other**.”

STAGE 4: INITIAL TENSIONS.

Public attacks on the adversary's self-esteem and good name. Specific threats and ultimatums. The first signs of violence appear (usually verbal and gestural).

STAGE 5: LIMITED DESTRUCTION.

The other person is “**the enemy**” and the target of aggression. The damage caused to the enemy is interpreted as a success. Total paralysis of the communication system or communication exclusively to destroy the other person. More violence (psychological and physical).

6

TOTAL CONFRONTATION



STAGE 6: TOTAL CONFRONTATION

The only goal is the destruction of the “**enemy**”, regardless of whether this also involves my own self-destruction. Physical and psychological violence. Combination of all types of total war strategies.



HOW DO WE USE THE CONFLICT LADDER

1. HERE AND NOW

In every relational situation and before initiating communication (whether by phone or in person), I place myself on the ladder: Where am I on the ladder here and now? (0-1-2-3-4-5-6). As a facilitator, I should be on step 0. If I am not, I must do something to get there. Learning to go down the ladder myself and focus my attention on the here and now is key. Taking some seconds to leave aside my own worries, and connect with the current situation and process is a must.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION.

I locate the people with whom I begin to interact in the conflict ladder. What step are they on? (0-1-2-3-4-5-6). Steps 1 and 2 are the natural state of relationships. As facilitators, we should keep ourselves and the group at these steps (or at 0 as the ideal trend) by practicing our work and incorporating the tools of prevention.

Preventing conflicts means acting at levels 2 and 3. At levels 4 and 5, we enter into restorative mediation. Facilitators at levels 4 and 5 will need specific training or the help of professional mediators. At stage 6, we must carry out preliminary pacification work in order to move down to steps 5 and 4, which allow for mediation.

3. EVALUATION

Self-assessment questions for the facilitator:

- After our interaction, have people moved up, down, or stayed on the same step?
- And me: have I moved up, down, or stayed where I am?



4. THE OBJECTIVE: help people move down the steps

Our goal as facilitators is to help people move down the steps of the conflict ladder. After our intervention, people with tensions within the group should have been able to move down. If we have achieved this, we are doing our job well. But to help others move down the steps, I must first learn to move down myself.

WHAT HELPS TO DE-ESCALATE:

1. Simply using the conflict ladder helps us to de-escalate because it places us here and now in the task of exclusively facilitating a process (step 0).

This is the first step in being able to help others. And if I recognize my inability at that moment, it is better not to act and ask others to facilitate.

2. Managing space and time to build a hosting context.
3. Verbal and nonverbal nonviolent communication techniques.

5. SELF-ASSESSMENT: tools of peace and tools of war.

1. **What specific things have I done that have helped to lower the escalation?** These are the tools of peace. The more aware I am of the specific things I do in my communication that help to lower the escalation, the more likely I am to use these same mechanisms in a conscious and technical way. This question allows me to begin a journey of learning in facilitating communication in difficult situations. I can also look at the things that other people do that naturally or professionally help people to climb down the ladder. There are tools for peace that I already have and others that I need to acquire.

2. **What specific things have I done or have other people done that have helped me to climb the ladder?** These are the tools of war. I must learn to identify them so that I can then avoid, minimize, neutralize, or reformulate them in order to build peace.



THE
CONFLICT
Map

THE CONFLICT MAP

	Person A	Person B
KEY PLAYERS Who are the key players in the conflict?		
RELATIONSHIP What is the relationship between A and B?		
FEELINGS How do you think A and B feel?		
TIME In A's opinion, how long has this conflict been going on? In B's opinion, how long has this conflict been going on?		
ETHICAL VALUES What is important to A? What is important to B?		
NEEDS Why they ask for what they ask for?		
INTERESTS What do they want? What do they desire? What motivates them?		
POSITIONS What do they ask for? What do they demand?		
SOLUTIONS What do they propose to resolve it? At first, " solutions " are not solutions, they are positions. Solutions only appear after a process of mutual encounter and understanding.		

The Conflict Map

The creation of a Conflict Map is a fundamental tool to deal nonviolently with conflicts. Conflict mapping is a visual tool that identifies the major actors in a conflict, their relationships, conflict issues, competing interests, feelings, ethical values, time perceptions, positions and possible solutions highlighting the conflict situation in a clear and concise manner. Conflict mapping was first introduced as a comprehensive approach to resolving large-scale social disputes. Currently, it has evolved into a graphic tool that helps to analyse interpersonal and group relationships. This is a tool that can be used by facilitators when they need to deal with conflict situations.

The conflict map can be created mentally throughout the encounter, but it can also be drawn up graphically after the session so that the facilitator can reflect on it and have a clearer perspective for the next meeting. Our recommendation is to draw it up and the first time to do it with the help of someone who has previous experience with this tool.

William Ury (2012), an international mediator, states: “when you embark on a negotiation, just as when you travel, the first thing you need is a map”

Here is our map for conflicts.

The map itself guides the inclusion of certain questions throughout the different meetings or interactions.



THE CONFLICT MAP SHOULD INCLUDE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

1. KEY PLAYERS

In every conflict there are key players who are present but also “**absent.**” This point should allow us to identify who we are specifically working for in this “**here and now**”.

2. RELATIONSHIP

What is the relationship between the key players? The relationship defines the expectations, goals, interests, and agreements to be built.

3. FEELINGS.

The facilitator should try to identify the emotions and feelings of each person in the conflict as well as how they evolve. It is very important to identify fears and anxieties in order to work with them and help overcome them.

4. TIME.

When did the conflict begin, according to each of the parties involved? This is a subjective perception of the beginning and duration of the conflict. The more divergent the perceptions of time are, the more entrenched the conflict is. On the other hand, if they coincide, there is a better chance for de-escalation, reconciliation and agreement.

5. ETHICAL VALUES.

Behind every position in the conflict, each person is defending an ethical value, a principle. We must be able to identify these values, which are always positive, even when their manifestation does not seem so to us or even when the key figures can be showing a violent attitude in their positions. Some values may be: family, justice, freedom, the right to decide for oneself, respect, etc.

THE CONFLICT MAP SHOULD INCLUDE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

6. NEEDS.

Some of the basic needs that appear in many conflicts, for example, are the need for recognition, the need for security, the need for attention, etc. We must be careful not to confuse needs with interests. There is a difference between what people need (needs) and how they express that need in the form of interests (what they want) or positions (what they demand).

7. INTERESTS.

Interests are what we aim to achieve. They tend to be more concrete, specific, or material than needs. Interests are a mobilizing agent; they are what each person wants.

The conflict map also includes the following two elements, which are useful for identification, analysis, and recognition, but they are two elements that we do not work with directly.

8. POSITIONS.

This is the first thing that each person usually expresses in a conflict. These are the demands they make. We must be careful because the key players in the conflict often express their positions in the form of interests or even needs, depending on their strategies for dealing with the conflict. However, they are neither one thing nor the other. Everything the key players tell us when they bring us a problem or a conflict are their positions. In order to move from talking in terms of positions to terms of needs or interests, facilitators must begin to do their work.



THE CONFLICT MAP SHOULD INCLUDE AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

9. SOLUTIONS.

These are the possible solutions to the conflict. This is another element of the conflict map that does not appear in the key players' narrative at the beginning, although it often seems that by telling us about the problem they are providing solutions. These apparent solutions are still positions.

Solutions appear only if we have worked on the other aspects of the conflict map (needs, interests, time, feelings, relationship) and have used other tools like de-escalation on the conflict ladder, identification of strategies for addressing the conflict and creation of possibilities for a win-win situation, use of space and time to create an environment of trust, acceptance, and dialogue...At the beginning, any apparent solution presented by the parties is a position.

Facilitators must not work with positions and solutions. That would be a mistake. Positions only serve to analyze the situation we are facing. And solutions are not truly solutions until the process advances. Helping to prevent and transform conflicts means, among other things, working with relationships, time, feelings, ethical values, needs, and interests. Facilitators' goal in dealing with conflicts is to move each person from their positions towards all these other elements of the map. The conflict map will allow facilitators to stay on track, better analyze the situation, resituate themselves after each meeting, and develop a plan, knowing that they should not work with positions or solutions, but rather with the relationship, time, feelings, values, needs, and interests of the individuals and groups they serve.



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