

## Conflict in Your Spiritual Home

by Dr. Rachel Goldberg

Conflict in church can be very painful. Church, Temple, Mosque, is supposed to be a place where you come home to higher things, to certainty, wisdom, and love. However, any group of people will have different pictures of the religious home they want to create, and what makes it feel like home. Unless people have deep, and clear conversations together about what they are creating and what is core to that



creation, they will assume that there is only one correct view (theirs), and be first surprised, then disgusted, and finally angry, at how some people miss the truth of this place, and try and make it something hollow.



Then people get defensive, and can shut down or attack. Relationships can begin to be strained. People come to temple, to church, to come home. Home should be the safest place, the one where you make sense. Most of us have suffered a sense of loss of safety and community at some time in our life, and that pain reoccurs when home feels threatened. Small cracks can build to deep divisions, sometimes balanced on a single program or policy, which is symptomatic of the fact that -- this no longer feels like home.

Sometimes people want to pretend nothing is wrong. They are polite and removed and hope that the conflict will go away. Small conflicts can sometimes be avoided that way. But, the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2000 national survey of 14,301 American congregations found that most congregations have some conflict, and a significant number have serious conflict. FACT also found that “80 percent of congregations that consider themselves to be “vital and spiritually alive” were able to “deal openly with conflict” [and] ...the congregations that are least able to manage their conflict were unlikely to be vital and alive.” (Insights Into: Congregational Conflict, p. 5)

Why? The needs of the group change, the needs of the larger community that supports the group changes, people change. They need different things, or the old things in different ways. How can faith groups respond to conflict in a way that strengthens their relationships? How can you build your home on love?

Martin Luther King, Jr., in his sermon on “Loving Your Enemies,” said: “We should be happy that [Jesus] did not say, “Like your enemies.” It is almost impossible to like some people...But Jesus recognized that love is greater than like.” (King, n.d., A. J. Muste Memorial Institute, p. 6-7)



A loving community takes working together through the differences to see one another as real, complex people. That rebuilds a home.

One way to prevent a lot of conflict is to rebuild a vision together, deliberately, taking time to make sure it really represents us all. The way to build, or heal, a community rooted in love together is the same. Facilitated dialogue and consensus building can help a congregation be in community long enough to see the real people and hear the real needs, learning about each other and what we all need to feel at home.

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