



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



HANDLING CONFLICT THAT LEADS TO PEACE

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Mindful that they are bearers of peace, which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

OFS Rule, Article 19

Imagine a fraternity or region where there are no conflicts. Everything is hunky dory, and everyone gets along splendidly. There are no disagreements and no differing opinions. Every gathering is filled with sunshine and roses, with the exact same beautiful Tau cross around everyone's neck. Everyone prays the Divine Office in complete sync, no one is faster or louder than another. Everyone is on the same page, using the exact same breviary; with all the ribbons in the right place. The opening hymn is sung magnificently – all the verses sung on key in perfect pitch. Who needs musical accompaniment when you all sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir? Your formation is stellar and everyone has amazing conversion experiences. All the members of the council are on the same page when it comes to formation, fair share and the annual chapter. Yes, can you just picture it? It is all so...

...Boooring! And completely unheard of. If you've heard of it, please let me know!

This little imaginary fraternity or region had me chuckling too. I mean, really! One of the things I love about Holy Mother Church and our Franciscan Order is the diversity — of people, opinions, experiences, personalities, conversion stories and the way we can sing off key and not have our ribbons on the proper page in our breviaries; not knowing where to flip to when there is a feast. Not to mention the folks on the mobile devices who don't know where to scroll when the breviared-people begin with the Antiphon. But that is what makes us Franciscan. That is what gives us our wonderfully unique flair. We are never meant to be like each other except in our beliefs on the tenets of the Church and the Order. We each have our own gift, talent, style and ability. Because of our individuality, conflicts will arise. There will be differences in style of leadership and behavior. We are not cookie-cutter Franciscans. We are all wonderfully and uniquely made by our loving and merciful God, who does have a great sense of humor, I might add.

Conflicts are going to happen, and that is a good thing. If there are ten people in the room with the

same opinion, then nine of those people are unnecessary. Conflicts are inevitable. Destructive conflicts are not. Yes, there are constructive conflicts and destructive conflicts. What is your conflict management style? Is it constructive or destructive? When a conflict arises, do you look for the nearest exit or do you batten down the hatches and go on the attack? Do you tend to avoid conflicts at all costs or do you welcome them, knowing they can lead to new and exciting possibilities?

I invite you to think about your conflict management style. Ask yourself if you practice constructive or destructive conflict management. Our approach to handling conflict is usually not who we are; it is what we have been taught. That means we can learn a better approach to dealing with conflict. We can learn to handle conflict constructively. What happens in a conflict depends on what the people involved decide to do. More often than not, what we decide to do borders on violence – harsh words, hurt feelings, retaliatory behavior. Pope Francis said it best in his 2017 World Day of Peace Message: *“The family is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness. From within families, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society. An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue.”*

Did you catch that last line? Allow me to paraphrase: **True fraternity is based on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue.** Yes, there will be differences; and some of those differences may even lead to conflicts. But we are called to dialogue with respect, not walk off in a huff grumbling under our breath. When a conflict arises, take a few moments and invite the Holy Spirit into the dialogue, that you may truly listen to one another with respect and an open heart and mind.