

Spring Orientation  
2011

# Engaging Difference as Spiritual Practice

*A step towards  
building the Beloved  
Community at PSR*

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"The ultimate aim of Southern Christian Leadership Conference is to foster and create the 'beloved community' in America where brotherhood [and sisterhood] is a reality. . . . SCLC works for integration. Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living -- integration."

--Martin Luther King Jr.

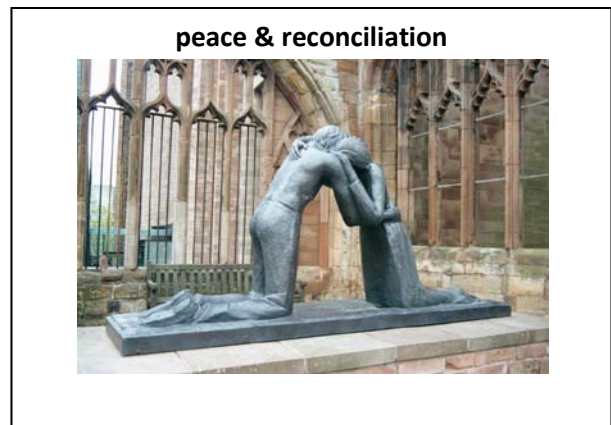
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"Central to the thinking of Martin Luther King was the concept of the 'Beloved Community.' King's was a vision of a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice wherein brotherhood [and sisterhood] would be an actuality in all of social life. Nonviolence is the means to attain it. In his mind, such a community would be the ideal corporate expression of the Christian faith."

-- by Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr.

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**OUR GOAL:** To succeed in our work at PSR, we need embody communication skills that are non-defensive, nonviolent, non-attacking, and non-judging. We need to develop communication skills that lead to



## The War Model of Communication

(by Sharon Ellison)



Attack



Retreat



Surrender

(adapted from PSR Workshop for PSR's "Engaging Difference as Spiritual Practice")

# NON-DEFENSIVE APPROACH IN CONFLICT



We expect others to be like us but they aren't



A cultural incident occurs causing a reaction, that is, a clash of difference especially in the realm of subconscious: example, assumptions, expectations, values, belief, behavioral norms (in the iceberg metaphor, these things reside under the water)



## Defensive



### War Model

We do the following to protect ourselves from becoming vulnerable:

- a. **Attack:** blame
- b. **Retreat:** eject and cut the relationship
- c. **Surrender:** silent but enmeshed



## Non-defensive Communication (Sharon Ellison)

### Recipient of Feedback:

We are consciously aware of our reaction but put them aside for the moment.



We get more information about the meaning of the incident or behavior. We ask as many questions needed to clarify assumed (unarticulated) judgments.



Usually, our reaction subsides, especially when we discover the gem in someone else's judgment about us.



We respond with empathy & understanding towards the person we are in conflict with.

## Nonviolent Communication (Marshall Rosenberg)



### Provider of Feedback:

Process for conscious intention of connecting with people through empathy & compassion.

1. State what you observe (not mixed with evaluation)
2. State your feelings
3. State your needs
4. Requesting

AND/OR

Coach the person you are in conflict with to follow the steps above.



## Practice of Nonviolence through Shenpa (Pema Chodron)

**First**, when your button is pushed, be aware of the spark within you ("shenpa": the quality of

being hooked). When your buttons are pushed, first acknowledge and accept that you are hooked to "negative internal dialogues". BUT you have the choice of not turning the spark into a bonfire.

**Second**, pause and take one to three conscious breaths.

**Third**, do not feed the thought—that is, the storyline of the negative internal dialogue by focusing on your breathing.

**Fourth**, just notice the feeling of being hooked within your physical body, taste the emotions; notice the areas of your body that is tensing and release those tensions.

**Fifth**, accept the feeling with loving kindness: without the storyline, the physical experience of the feeling is just sensation of energies flowing through your body.

**Finally**, let go of the feeling, and go on with your day. You don't have to resist the energy, but you can acknowledge the physical experience of being hooked, and make a conscious decision not to follow the storyline of the negative internal dialogue.

## Creating A Safe Space

*From Alliance CCI Book. Adapted by Patricia St. Onge for workshop, "Through the Lens of Culture: One Step in a Life-Long Journey"*

Discussing about race, class, gender, sexual identity and other elements of our identity are naturally very personal. This makes us hesitant to discuss them. Couple that natural reticence with the fact that we live in a very judgmental, competitive society and it is not surprise that these discussions make us nervous.

There are ways to minimize the discomfort, or at least to "normalize" it, so it isn't as frightening.

**First, it's important to know each other's stories.** Make time for people to tell their stories to each other, in different ways. Some are comfortable telling their story in front of a large group; others prefer a more intimate setting. Some can just speak, others find writing first more helpful. The key is to provide ways for people to tell and hear each other.

**Second, we make shared working agreements for how we will work together in this particular setting.** It is important that we not universalize the shared working agreements. If people are able to agree to behave in particular ways while in this group, it reduces the dissonance that arises when the expectation is that they behave differently in other settings in their lives. The working agreements give clear boundaries for this particular group.

**Third, we affirm that this process of creating safe space is intentional.** We ask participants what they need in order to be safe. During the discussion and activities, we check ourselves in relation to the shared working agreements. Are we complying with them? If not, we are not punitive.

**Fourth, we use a breach of the agreements as a learning opportunity, not a moment for judgment.** We acknowledge that for some this may be a new way of being in the room. If we recognize their interest in learning, we encourage them, rather than judge them.

**Fifth, we understand and acknowledge the difference between safety and discomfort.** Challenging conversations are not in themselves safe. In order to grow and stretch our perspectives, we may feel some discomfort. Affirming it as part of the process is part of the intentionality. It's also empowering for participants to feel their own discomfort or each others and to stay with it, work through it and come out of the other side with a deeper understanding of themselves and those whom they experience as "other".

**Finally, we recognize that this is more art than science.** The role of intuition in creating a safe space, and indeed in the whole enterprise of cultural competency cannot be overstated. This is the work of the heart as well as the mind. Intuition is a key element that we refer to when we say we bring our whole self into the work.

## Shared Working Agreements



- 1) **Confidentiality:** Don't gossip! Gossip is like poison in group settings. It's a form of avoidance (retreat, or surrender; see page 12), creating drama that can snowball into a full blown conflict. Do not talk about the person you have issues with—communicate with him or her directly when s/he is physically present. If you'd like to share someone else's experience, ask permission if you can share the main point of the story that gave you an insight, while keeping the person anonymous.
- 2) **"I" Statements:** Own your statements by claiming your own experience. Do not universalize. Do not assume you know what other people mean by their words. "You" statements make others defensive. It slows down or stops reconciliation.
- 3) **Agree to Disagree:** Respect for differences. Different is not "less than." Different is just different.
- 4) **Share the conversation space:** Intentionally ask others (especially those who haven't spoken up) to share their input, experience, and insights. Take the initiative in being curious and open to what those who haven't spoken have to say. OR use talking object or mutual invitation (page 17).
- 5) **In meetings, debriefs, group activities, TURN YOUR CELL PHONE & BEEPERS OFF!**
- 6) **Commit to not blaming, attacking self or others**
- 7) **Acceptance:** Suspend judgment as best you can (aka "active listening," page 18); be in the spirit of listening & understanding, rather than trying to win an argument.
- 8) **Curiosity:** Seek to understand rather than persuade. (I will not give advice, fix, explain)
- 9) **Clarify / Check for Assumptions:** Paraphrase what you heard (When you said "x", I understood that as ...Did I hear that correctly?)
- 10) **Express gratitude:** "What I appreciate from what you just said is..."
- 11) **OTHERS?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Sharing Conversation Space in Groups

### Mutual Invitation (by Eric F. Law)



### Talking Object (from "Talking Circle" <http://athenwood.com/talkingcircle.shtml>)



## Tool # 1

## Active Listening

Goal: Listening with undivided, focused attention. Learning to suspend one's judgment in the moment of listening to fully understand what the other person is saying.



**SKILL SET:** Listen then echo back to the speaker two things: “feeling” and “content” of what was shared.

**FUN QUIZ** (adapted by Donnel M-M from Dr. Joseph Driskill's work with the Pacific School of Religion's Campus Care Network).

**Rating Scale:**

- 1) Hurtful response; irrelevant response; “fix it” response
- 2) Neutral (keeps the discussion open)
- 3) Respond only with content
- 4) Respond only with feeling
- 5) Respond both with feeling and content

**Situation #1:** Student sitting in the dining hall: “We got our first test back. I’m pretty bummed out about it.”

“You got your first test back today.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“I remember when I got my first test back.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“Sounds like you are pretty disappointed with the results of your first test.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“First year students always need to learn how to buck up and study harder.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“I sense you are feeling really disappointed.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“When were the papers returned?” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

**Situation #2: Student says: “I’m a little anxious about finding enough resources for my paper. I have never used the library before.”**

“You feel anxious knowing you have to locate sources for your paper. Do you know the reference desk librarian can help you?” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“I have always avoided the library as much as possible.” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“There is a lot to learn when you come to a new program, isn’t there?” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

**Situation #3: Student sees campus care network person: “I have just learned that my mother is seriously ill. I feel so far away from home right now and I need to be back there.”**

“That is a lot to deal with. Would you like to talk about it with me?” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

“I sense you are feeling really upset by your mother’s illness. Would you like to talk with me about it?” *Rating scale:* \_\_\_\_

### How to Practice:

When you echo back what you heard, practice these...

- Put it in your own words; say what is natural to you. For instance, “I heard you say is that...” or “What I’m hearing is...” or “I sense that...”  
“you feel **(name the feeling)**... because **(name the content)**...”

## DON’T FORGET nonverbal communication!

When you echo back, speak with empathy and warmth. Research on human communication states that nonverbal communication (eyes, facial expression, physical posture, tone of voice, hand gesture) speaks way more than the spoken words.



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## Tool # 2 Notice Communication Blockers

*(Developed by Dr. Jamie Washington, adapted by Michael Bell)*

“Yeah Buts”

“I Don’t See or Feel That”

“I Know Someone Who...”

“Can’t You Just...”

PLE’s (Perfectly Logical Explanations)

## Tool # 3 Check your Intent vs. Impact

(by Michael Bell; adapted by Donnel M-M.)

If the intent of your words does not match the impact it created on the hearer, it is your responsibility to clean it up.



### A SUGGESTION FOR CLEANING UP *by Donnel M-M*

If the hearer is reacting negatively to the words you spoke...

- a) practice tool #1.
- b) Then pause (that is, don't speed up to fix things—be present to the hurt you've caused). Do not defend yourself.
- c) Then apologize.
- d) Clarify if the hearer is open to this information. If s/he is open to hearing you, explain what your real intent was based on your cultural background. Name the cultural assumption and values shaping your action (that is, the spoken words).

### Caution on the violent cycle

When somebody replies with “What you said was hurtful,” it is natural for us to respond defensively. In fact, we might even feel annoyed or angry at the other person for saying that our words were hurtful; in extreme cases, we may even counter attack and blame the person: “You are accusing me of something I didn't mean. You are the one hurting me.” So then the cycle of the drama of defensiveness and attack begins. Our work is to learn to stop this cycle in its tracks.

*See page 1 on how to stop this cycle: Non-Defensive Approach.*

Tool # 4 Ouch and Educate *(by Michael Bell)*

**When you hear something that does not sound right, or see something that does not look appropriate to you, you need to speak up.**

**Say “Ouch” and then share with others why that was an ouch for you.**



**Why say “Ouch”?**



Saying “Ouch” allows more space for people to be curious about the impact of their words. Imagine how people respond if you responded with “You are insensitive!” or “You are [name a judgment]”. Remember, “you” statements point fingers and makes other people feel blamed, judged, and DEFENSIVE. It’s a conversation stopper.

Tool # 5 (adapted by athletic coach Lily Pagle of Modern Combatives, Berkeley)

## The Sandwich: Providing Feedback to Others



Affirm Strength

+

Point Out Weakness or Growing Edge  
(skills that need improvement)

+

Affirm Strength  
(preferably something different from the first)

**ANSWERS to “Fun Quiz” in page 9.****#1**

- “You got your first test back today.” **Rating scale: 3**
- “I remember when I got my first test back.” **Rating scale: 1**
- “Sounds like you are pretty disappointed with the results of your first test.” **Rating scale: 5**
- “First year students always need to learn how to buck up and study harder.” **Rating scale: 1**
- “I sense you are feeling really disappointed.” **Rating scale: 4**
- “When were the papers returned?” **Rating scale: 2 (neutral) \*Probably won’t stop the conversation.**

**#2**

- “You feel anxious knowing you have to locate sources for your paper. Do you know the reference desk librarian can help you?” **Rating scale: 5**
- Response: “I have always avoided the library as much as possible.” **Rating scale: 1**
- Response: “There is a lot to learn when you come to a new program, isn’t there?”  
**Rating scale: 2**

**#3**

- Response: “That is a lot to deal with. Would you like to talk about it with me?” **Rating scale: 3**
- Response: “I sense you are feeling really upset by your mother’s illness. Would you like to talk with me about it?” **Rating scale: 5**

## Resources

### Contact your specific denomination

(conference, district, etc) for resources on clergy support:  
Example, clergy support groups, accountability groups.

### Spiritual Directors, Counselors & Therapist

**PSR Community Life Office:** [www.psr.edu/campus-resource-list](http://www.psr.edu/campus-resource-list).

### Pastoral Skills in Crisis Situations

**Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE):** CPE is an interfaith professional education program for ministry. Following the action-reflection clinical model of learning, about half of the program brings students into supervised encounter with persons in crisis, while the other half involves 1-1 supervision with a certified supervisor, peer group support & didactics. <http://www.acpe.edu/faq.htm>

### Nonviolent Conversations and Caring Relationships

**Pace e Bene:** Offers tools for nonviolent living that can help transform our lives, communities, and the larger world: cultivating nonviolent relationships, learning the multidimensionality of violence, how to apply in daily practice, centering exercises, exploring personal history of violence, etc. [www.paceebene.org](http://www.paceebene.org)

**Center for Nonviolent Communication:** CNVC's aim is to provide ideas, experience, and support for the living of Nonviolent Communication in community. This is accomplished by providing Nonviolent Communication training, materials, organizational consulting, and projects that develop harmonious and effective relationships. <http://www.cnvc.org/> (*this is the link to the bay area chapter*)

**Powerful Non-Defensive Communication.** We are dedicated to (1) evolving past defensiveness, power struggle, and violence as key forces that shape our individual lives and human destiny; (2) showing that non-defensive communication is a powerful tool for providing the practical skills necessary to immediately begin to create a different way of living, a habit of being that

fosters healing, productivity, and abundance.

<http://www.pndc.com/>

**Untraining White Liberal Racism.** The UNtraining is a provocative and compassionate approach to helping white people become better allies in the fight against racism. It is a forum for exploring what it means to be white, and how this affects ourselves and our relationships with people of color. By focusing on the training we inherit from our white-dominated culture, we are able to better understand the world around us and we are empowered to create change in ourselves and our communities.

<http://www.untraining.org/>

**Seven Generations.** We work with public agencies, non-profit organizations, foundations, academic institutions and congregations. Our approach to consulting is to recognize that much of the wisdom necessary to solve a group's problem rests within that group. We seek to tap into that wisdom and give it breath.

**In Partnership Consulting:** an organizational development and strategic change firm that assesses, designs and delivers programs that foster inclusive environments in which leadership and teamwork can flourish.

[www.inpartnership.com/index.html](http://www.inpartnership.com/index.html)

### Community Organizing

#### **PICO: People Improving Communities Through**

**Organizing:** Helps equip community leaders with the skills they need to reach out into their neighborhoods, identify common concerns, research possible solutions, and work with public officials and private businesses to put those solutions into effect. 171 Santa Rosa Avenue, Oakland, California 94610. Phone: 510 655 2801.

[www.piconetwork.org/ab\\_training.html](http://www.piconetwork.org/ab_training.html)

**Gamaliel Foundation:** Provides training for faith-based community organizers. It is also known as the most assertive of the networks, most closely following the organizing strategies as well as the organizing philosophy of Saul Alinsky. It also has special leadership training for women shaped by women.

<http://www.gamaliel.org/default.htm>

