

Seeking the Mind of Christ Process (SMCP)

District Conference 2023

Unfinished Business item #1

Full report and process description

Preamble

This process grows out of 2021 District Conference when concern was expressed that an extraordinarily divisive decision had been made in the district without adequate access or involvement from the full spectrum of membership. Conference requested that a process be developed which would (a) be sensitive to circumstances when extraordinarily divisive questions are being considered, (b) receive concerns from members about impending decisions, and (c) have available screening tools to determine when usual decision processes needed to be altered, enhanced, or expanded. The process below is not a mimic nor a duplicate of the denominational special response process. It is uniquely crafted for the Western Plains context. Neither is it a duplicate of our Shalom team, our recently established "reference group," KIPCOR, or similar consultancy agencies. Rather, it is the umbrella policy at the district level which will determine when resources of that kind will be useful in assisting us in decision or communication processes.

Process

A person or congregation with a question shall bring it to the **District Executive Minister** and/or **Leadership Team Chair**. That individual shall alert the **SMCP Team** to receive the question(s) and inform the **Leadership Team** that this step has been taken.

If the **SMCP Team** decides the **Seeking the Mind of Christ Process** will move forward, they will discern whether adding other members to the team with specific skill sets would be beneficial.

Some questions the team might consider as part of their discernment include:

Content

Has the issue been communicated in writing to the **SMCP** and/or Leadership Team?

Is the issue being discussed potentially controversial within the district?

Has this been an issue in the past or could it become an issue in the future?

Is the individual, congregation, or group raising the question open to using a community discernment process?

Constituents

Is the concern pervasive in the wider body of Western Plains?

Are those concerned by the issue an integral part of the Church of the Brethren in Western Plains?

Is the issue best addressed at the congregational level? (Consider calling Shalom Team.)

Is the issue best addressed at the denominational level? (Consider Annual Conference query process.)

Constraints

Is this issue addressed by the Western Plains Constitution & Bylaws?

Do the Constitution & Bylaws need to be revised?

How is the issue related to the Core Values of the District?

Is there sufficient time to use the **SMCP** Process?

SMCP Team will determine if the concern should be handled at the congregational level or denominational level or directly with the Leadership Team or if using the AMCP Process is appropriate.

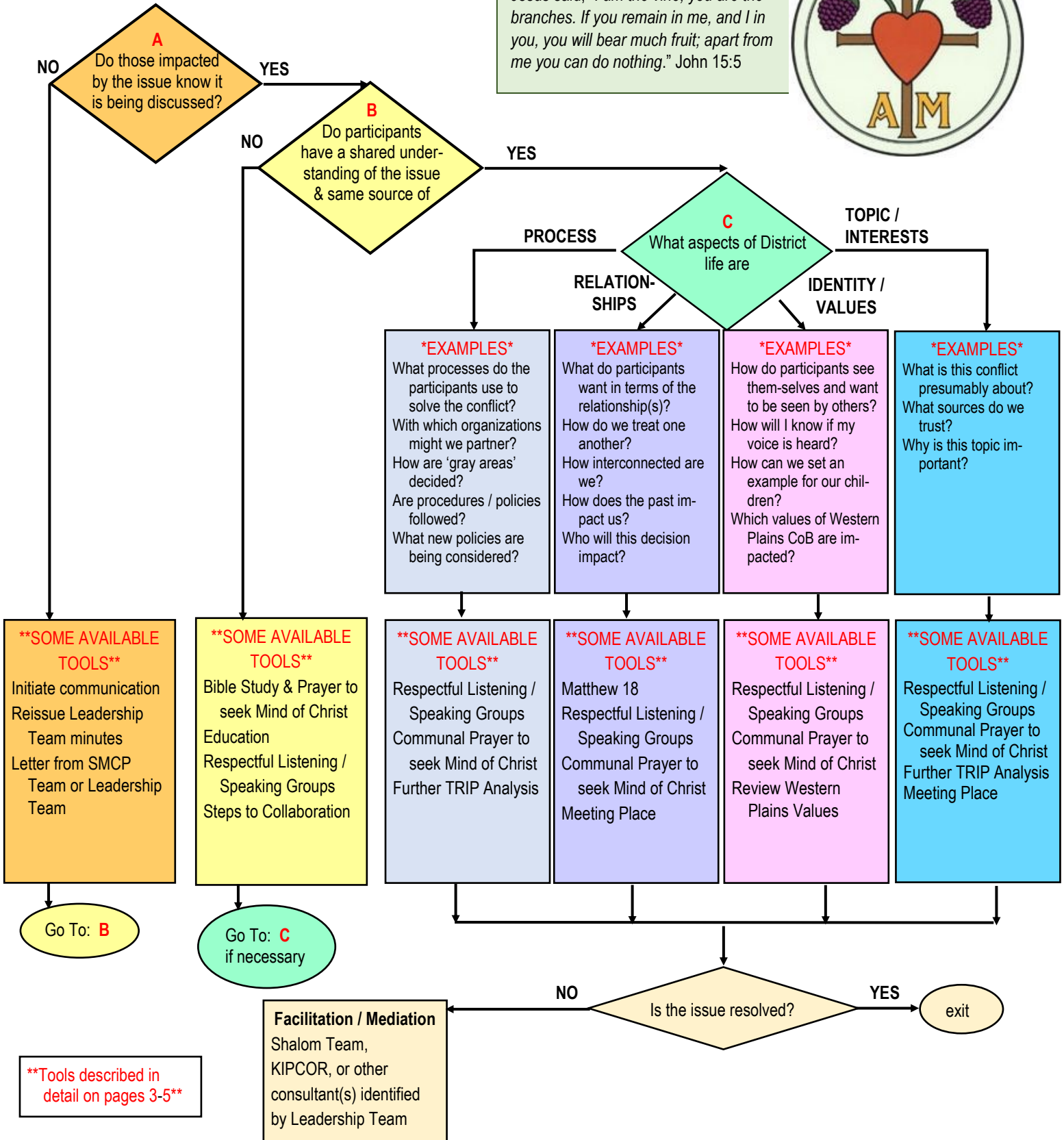
SMCP Team will frame the issue in a way to ask "how do we move forward peacefully, simply, together?"

SMCP Team may utilize the following flowchart to guide their work.

SMCP Team, in consultation with Leadership Team, will reply to the individual or congregation raising the concern explaining their decision.

SEEKING THE MIND OF CHRIST PROCESS

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5



****Tools described in detail on pages 3-5****

For those who desire more detail in the process, more information will be available on the District website.

Some Available Tools

Communal Prayer to Seek the Mind of Christ

Response Team calls interested participants to prayer at the beginning and throughout the process.

Respectful Listening/Respectful Speaking Groups

Implemented by trained Shalom Team members (WPD has 4 trained already; others who have participated may want to train as leaders.)

The hope of the Respectful Listening/Speaking Groups is that we can engage in a learning experience that helps each of us learn things that move us forward. This will not be a time of decision making, but rather a place where your life experiences can be safely shared and your voice can be heard as we attempt to move beyond our current tension as a District. Our focus will include _____ (fill in the blank) issues.

Expectations/Ground Rules can be explored together. The following is a suggested list of possible expectations:

Each person brings compassionate listening and speaking, even when we disagree with another.

Be transparent and honest.

Each person speaks for him/herself.

The conversation is confidential.

The conversation is for those who are willing to stay in Western Plains District.

Use Elements of Dignity

Acceptance of Identity—Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities.

Assume they have integrity.

Recognition—Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas and experience.

Acknowledgment—Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.

Inclusion—Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation).

Safety—Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution.

Fairness—Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed upon laws and rules.

Independence—Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.

Understanding—Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.

Benefit of the Doubt—Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.

Accountability—Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors.

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<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-XryyXMceOhbWVnY2taNTNrTTA/view?resourcekey=0-DUEVpNW8AUEFvZ8miz6a9g>

Matthew 18 Process

Rooted in Jesus' teachings, participants use healthy responses to conflict and pro-active practices for generating understanding in the midst of diverse perspectives. The process offers guidance in communicating with each other.

Meeting Place Implemented by trained facilitators (*Response Team may want training to implement this*)

Participants are assigned to four groups, each group to personify one of four concepts: Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace. The groups meet separately. The first question asked of the groups is: "What are "you" most concerned with in the midst of conflict?" ("You" being Peace, Justice, Truth, or Mercy.) At this point the conflict does not need to be named, but rather discuss conflict in general. Truth, Mercy, Peace and Justice are all very important issues to the people on all sides of a conflict.

To flesh out the question of what are "you" most concerned with, ask the groups to think about:

- what they need,
- who they need it from,
- how they know when they have it,
- who could help them get it, and lastly,
- which of these other people or groups are they most afraid of.

The bottom line is that there are four concepts: Truth, Justice, Peace and Mercy. The solution is what you get when you mediate and negotiate among these four concepts. When all four come together you are at the Meeting Place of Reconciliation.

<https://www.beyondintractability.org/moos/lederach-meeting-place>

Steps to Collaboration offers a series of questions to be considered. (Response Team will implement)

- Have the constituents agreed that there are concerns to be addressed?*
- Have the constituents agreed to work together on issues?*
- Have the constituents agreed on how?*
- Do the constituents have a shared understanding?*
- Do they have the same information sources? Are they equally legitimate?*
- Do the constituents agree on a vision or definition of the problem?*
- Do the constituents have agreement on solutions/strategies?*
- Do the constituents have agreement on a plan for implementing?*

(from Chrislip & Larson, *Collaborative Leadership*, p. 67)

TRIP Analysis Implemented by: Response Team and/or Shalom Team (after trained to be facilitators)

TRIP is a tool for Analyzing what is "driving" the conflict and tools or skills might be needed.

Parsing out conflict: TRIP analysis looks at these ideas separately.

Topic goal: What is this conflict nominally about?

Relationship goal: What do the participants want in terms of the relationship(s)?

Identity goal: How do the participants want to see themselves and be seen by others?

Process goal: What processes do the participants think should be used to solve the conflict?

https://rochester.edu/college/gradstudies/assets/pdf/professional/Conflict_Prevention_and_Management_Presentation.pdf

Facilitation / Mediation can be implemented if a satisfactory solution is not achieved from using other tools.

Facilitation: A facilitator is a mutually selected person who helps guide the process. The facilitator's job is to lead the group process; to help them improve the way they communicate, examine and solve problems, and make decisions.

Mediation is a process wherein the parties meet with a mutually selected person who assists them in the negotiation of their differences.

KIPCOR: In 1999, KIPCOR gathered an interdenominational group of clergy and laypersons dedicated to offering churches better tools for managing change, difference and disagreement through information, consultation, training and intervention.

[KIPCOR - Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution](https://kipcor.org/) <https://kipcor.org/>

Core Values of Western Plains District Church of the Brethren.

(This is a skeleton list. A more detailed discussion is found in the Western Plains District DnA plan)

- Radical love is imperative.
- Root community in scripture and prayer.
- Building bridges among communities.
- Shalom for all creation and all relationships.
- Service
- Living Simply

Seeking the Mind of Christ Process Bibliography

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Chrislip, David D & Larson, Carl E. *Collaborative Leadership*. Jossey-Bass Publishers. San Francisco. 1994.

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Hocker, Joyce L. & Wilmot, William W. *Interpersonal Conflict*. 10th Edition. McGraw Hill Education. New York, NY. 2018.

Lederach, John Paul. *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*. Herald Press. Harrisonburg, Virginia. 2014.

Lederach, John Paul. "The Meeting Place" tool. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/moos/lederach-meeting-place>

Additional Reading

Brooks, Arthur C. *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life*. Portfolio/Penguin. New York, NY. 2022.

Coleman, Peter. *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization*. Columbia University Press. New York, NY. 2021.

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