

Cultivating a Culture of Peace

(from Appendix F, *Cultivating a Culture of Peace in Your Church*, in *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande)

Levels which churches have identified on the way to a culture of peace:

Level 1 – A Culture of Disbelief: People lack practical training in resolving conflict and doubt that the church can do much to help them resolve their differences. This church is like a tree that is missing some of its sweetest fruit.

Level 2 – A Culture of Faith: People begin to understand God's peacemaking commands and promises and to believe that his ways will work in today's culture. This church is like a tree blossoming in the spring.

Level 3 – A Culture of Transformation: People want to put off worldly ways of resolving conflict and are taking steps to learn how to respond to conflict biblically. This church is like a tree that is being pruned and cultivated for greater productivity.

Level 4 – A Culture of Peace: People are eager and able to resolve conflict and reconcile relationships in a way that clearly reflects the love and power of Jesus Christ. This church is like a tree producing a rich harvest.

Level 5 – A Culture of Multiplication: People delight in expanding God's kingdom by showing other people and churches how they too can be peacemakers. This church is like a tree that is reproducing by spreading its seed.

Characteristics of a culture of Peace:

- *Vision:* ...eager to bring glory to God by demonstrating the reconciling love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ... sees peacemaking as an essential part of the Christian life.
- *Training:* ... knows that peacemaking does not come naturally... trains leaders and members to respond to conflict biblically in all areas of life.
- *Assistance:* ... church assists [members] through in-house, trained reconcilers, for a myriad of issues.
- *Perseverance:* ... church works long and hard to restore broken relationships.
- *Accountability:* ... [when necessary] church leaders get directly involved to hold members accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness.
- *Restoration:* ... church gladly forgives and fully restores members who have genuinely repented of serious and embarrassing sins.
- *Stability:* ... relationships are valued and protected, leaders serve fruitfully year after year and members see the church as their long-term home.
- *Witness:* Members are equipped and encouraged to practice peacemaking so openly in their daily lives that others will notice, ask why they do it, and hear about the love of Christ.

How to Transform a Church Culture

First, gain support from church leadership. Church leaders must officially support and lead the effort. [Senior] pastor must see peacemaking as vital to the well-being and fruitfulness of the church.

Second, form a core support group. This team is responsible for guiding educational and reconciliation activities within the church. Church leaders spearhead, then add lay members with gifts for peacemaking.

Third, educate the entire congregation in peacemaking. God's peacemaking principles are like yeast. An ongoing effort to teach peacemaking to every person in the church is required. Two stages are possible: Preaching series to stimulate interest and commitment; small group studies in various settings for every possible member of the church.

Fourth, train gifted people within your congregation to become reconcilers. Gifted members are trained to help through conflict coaching and mediation. These reconcilers can help with a wide variety of conflicts.

Fifth, upgrade your church's organizational documents to support peacemaking and reduce legal liability. Upgrading church bylaws and adopting special policies for counseling, confidentiality, conflict resolution, and church accountability can substantially reduce exposure to legal liability.

"Some churches can make substantial progress in all of these areas in two years. Others will take four or five years to overcome deeply engrained attitudes and traditions. Yet even small initial efforts can produce noticeable fruit." (*The Peacemaker*, p. 295)