

# Conflict in Monthly Meetings: Crisis or Opportunity?

New York Yearly Meeting  
Committee on Conflict Transformation

Orchard Park Monthly Meeting  
October 20, 2012

# Workshop Objectives

- To reframe conflicts in Quaker meetings by seeing them through a transformative lens.
- To recognize how Quaker responses to conflict can be either *constructive* or *destructive*.
- To strengthen skills in deep listening and begin to develop a collaborative approach to conflict.

# Overview

- Part One: What Is Our Experience With Conflict in Monthly Meetings? What Are Its Consequences? How Does the Transformative Model Apply to Our Condition?
- Part Two: How Do Friends Deal With Conflict in Meetings? What Approaches Help and What Approaches Hurt?
- Part Three: Identifying Opportunities to Transform Our Meetings

# Introductions

- Name
- Meeting
- What prompted you to join us today

## Community Expectations: The Chatham House Rule

"When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed".

# Small Group Discussion

- How do you experience conflict?
- How does your meeting experience conflict?
- What examples do you have of your meeting moving through conflict creatively? Any examples of conflict causing hurt or harm to the meeting?

# Themes and Concerns

- Turtle
- Varies if vulnerable or unstable/unreceptive
- Varies if head, heart or gut
- Confrontational
- Worry, fret, anxiety for future
- Firm, stubborn

# “The” Question:

- How does our Meeting’s (instinctive, culturally-dictated) response to conflict contribute to either the constructive or destructive path that conflict goes down?
- Why do we respond the way we do?



# The Conflict Transformation “Lens”

## Two Questions:

1. How do we deal with this person so we can go back to the way we used to be? (Conflict Resolution)
2. How do we change the way we deal with each other so this doesn't happen again? (Conflict Transformation)

## Four Dimensions of Conflict

- Personal
- Relational
- Structural
- Cultural

# Personal: How Do We Respond When We Experience Conflict In Meeting?

- Walking away
- Shutting down
- Passive-Aggressive (Sanctimonious)
- Sarcasm
- Defensiveness
- Critical Nit-Picking
- Instructions and Assertions: “You’re wrong, I’m right”
- Belligerent Battle
- Suppress Feelings – “Get On With It”
- Jokes
- Delaying
- Avoiding
- Out of control
- Confronting
- Indirect/Triangulate
- Seize up/freeze
- Hurt
- Fear
- What’s Really Going On
- “Accumulated Collective Karma” (ACK)
- Baggage

# Relational

- How do people relate to one another?
- Level of contact?
- Level of collaboration and cooperation?
- What can be done to build trust? Broaden perspectives? Open dialogue?

# Structural

- How are decisions made in Meeting?
- How is information shared within Meeting?
- Openness, accessibility of Committees, Overseers, etc.?
- Hidden and unintentional patterns of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism – marginalization?
- Do the Meeting's existing structures meet the Meeting's existing needs?

# Cultural

- What are our perceptions/understandings about the “proper” ways to communicate, express feelings, engage or avoid open conflict?
- What are our shared views on “proper” process, representation, consensus, dialogue, healing, etc.?
- What are our unspoken views on age/gender/race -- how are they revealed in the Meeting’s decision authority and decision-making?
- Let’s acknowledge that we are shaped by Western/US culture and by Christianity

# What Can the “Lens” Show Us?

What can this transformative lens reveal about conflicts in Quaker meetings? What would this approach require us to strengthen, or to change, about the way we approach or respond to conflict?

Overlapping Ovals

# Role Play

LUNCH!!!!



# Behavioral Approaches to Conflict

- Two Axes: Assertiveness and Cooperation

# Contexts of Conflict

- How do you, as an individual, respond to conflicts:
  - In your family of origin?
  - In your marriage/central relationship?
  - At work?
  - In your Quaker Meeting?
- How does your Meeting, as a body, respond to conflict?
- How do these responses enable or discourage the growth of conflict and its impact on Friends and on the Meeting as a whole?

# Consequences of the “Axis” Exercise

- Why do we behave differently in different contexts?
- “A constructive process of conflict can be identified with a cooperative social process; a destructive process has the social and psychological characteristics of competition.”
- What is the mind-set that yields Avoiding?  
And what are its consequences?

BREAK!!!!

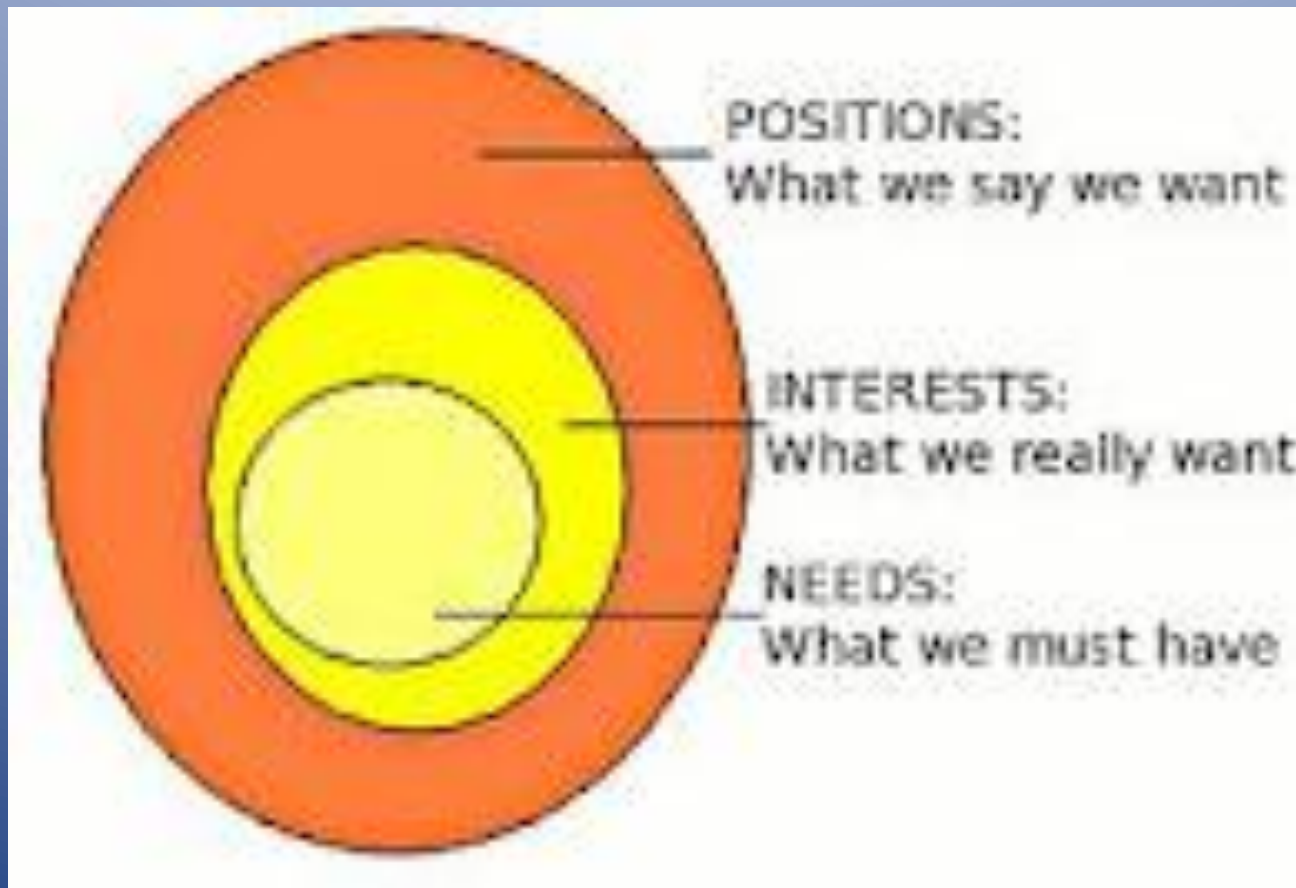
# Learning Compassionate Listening and Building Skills in Collaboration



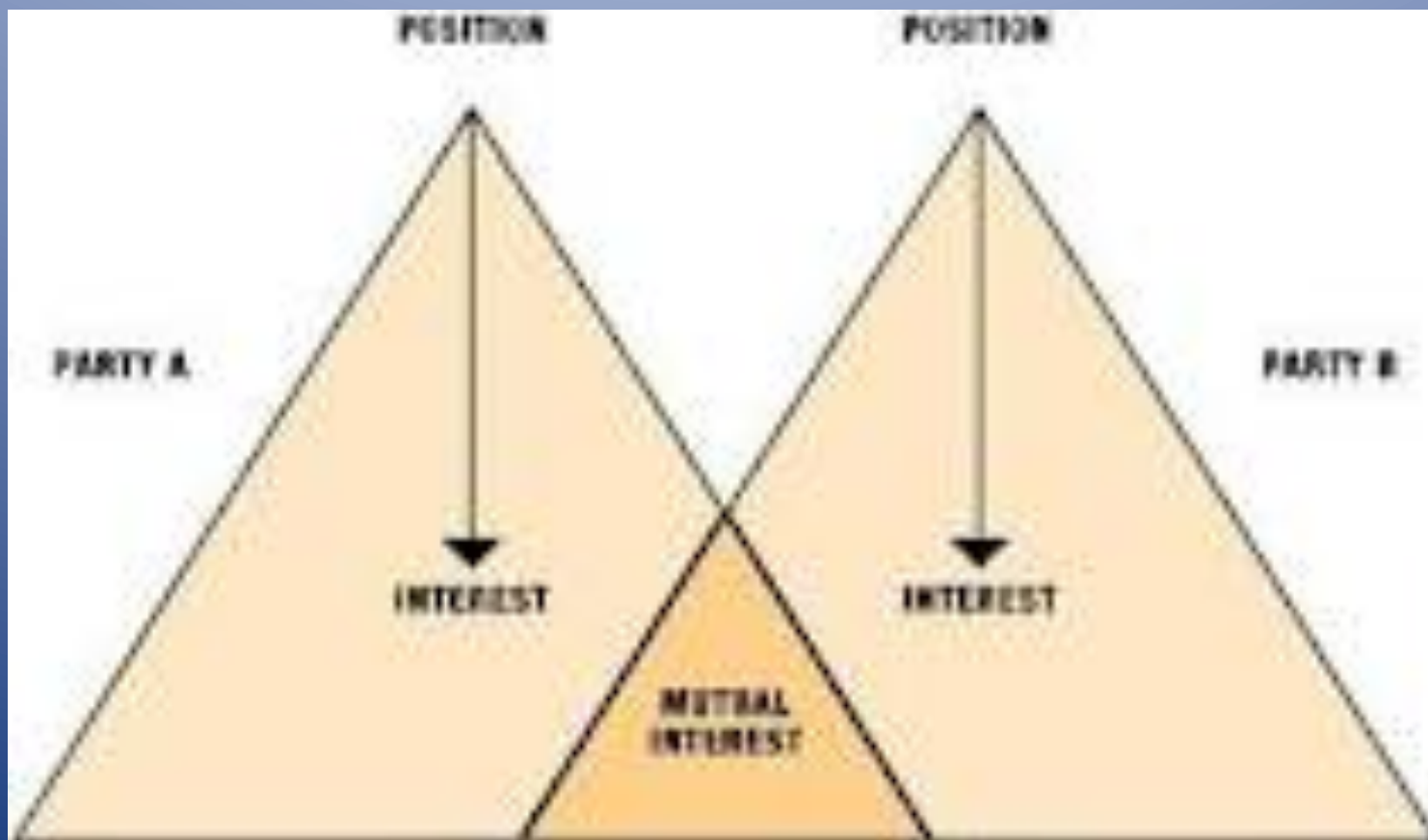
...That is to Say:



...Or:



# Mutuality, Not Compromise





The “Right” Questions to Ask:

What Does That Person  
Need That They Are  
Not Getting? What Is  
My Responsibility?

# Role Play

Revisited

# Summing It Up

- Listening to See
- Limits to the Transformative Model
- The Role of Ministry and Counsel (*Faith and Practice* page 118)
- The Role of Eldering (*Faith and Practice* page 144)
- The Body as the Object of Our Concern

# Summing It Up

- Conflict is inevitable and uncomfortable.
- Conflict presents an opportunity: It invites us to learn how to live with it.
- It invites us continually to change and to transform in response to the lessons it requires us to learn.