

Compassionate Conflict

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At young adult group, we talked about the exhaustion of being in an environment where you're the only one with your set of values and in which others do not engage in an open, curious, and compassionate way. How do we live out our values in a sustainable way? How do we balance restoration with building capacity to tackle conflict compassionately? If we are in a privileged position, is it "fair" to take a break once in awhile when marginalized people never have the option?

Recently, the United Methodist Church voted for the so-called "traditional" plan, which prohibits UMC churches from performing gay marriages and from ordaining gay clergy. I grew up in the United Methodist Church and, after attending the same church for 25 years, my parents are out "church shopping." They will finish up the year mentoring their confirmand and fulfilling their role as members of an inter-generational prayer circle, but they won't be greeters at the services. They won't be donating money to the church. They won't be serving communion. Should their church leave the UMC conference, they plan to return, but they don't see how they can stay if it does not.

I am proud of my parents for standing by their values. Knowing how much the UMC's decision affects them means a lot to me. And, at the same time, I feel a sadness at their leaving. The idea of visiting my parents and attending a church that wasn't the one I grew up in fills me with a sense of loss akin to returning "home" to a house that wasn't the one I grew up in.

To whom are we committed to re-engaging in conversation about values when conflict has not felt compassionate? I disagree with many of my extended family members' perspectives on a number of issues, but no matter how many of my buttons they push, I don't think I'd ever want to cut ties. Family runs deep. Perhaps this is why my parents leaving my childhood church has shaken me so much. Growing up, they always referred to our "church family."

I spoke with my mom again today and she told me that she and my dad want to find ways to still connect with the church outside of Sunday service. They are planning to

regularly attend church council meetings and are also thinking about inviting folks who agree with the traditional plan into further conversation.

I'm glad that my parents are finding ways to both take care of themselves by finding a more supportive congregation and to live into their values by helping nudge the church into a more progressive future.

May we all lean in to conflict with compassion. May we notice when our boundaries have been crossed and find space for healing and restoration. And may we recognize that all people are part of our wider human family and return to conflict with our spirits and compassion renewed.