

The Spirit and Skills of Negotiation

The GTPP recently co-sponsored, with St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Tacoma WA, an extensive course (three 4-hour sessions) entitled "The Spirit and Skills of Negotiation: Collaborative Planning and Cooperative Problem Solving," taught pro bono by William F. Lincoln, renowned conflict resolution practitioner and recipient of the 2006 Greater Tacoma Peace Prize.

The seminar provided a unique opportunity for the 26 participants to acquire skills they would use in both in their everyday lives and in their business and community activities. They learned theory and skill for practical applications in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict via informal and formal utilization of negotiation and approaches. There was no fee for the course.

After the seminar, one participant wrote the following:

At the beginning of the second day of the mediation course given on three successive Saturday mornings at St. Mark's Lutheran Church by the Narrows, Bill Lincoln startled his audience by stating that mediation is really very easy. Just bring a machete to mediation, ask each party what its position is, and then chop it in half with the machete.

He illustrated this approach with an example (as he did throughout the seminar). Two children were arguing over who should be able to have the sole orange left in the home. Each child had valid arguments for the right to the orange. What is a fair parent to do? Cut the orange in half and give each child half, right? But each child wanted the whole orange, so the father asked for a little more information – why did each one want the whole orange? It turned out that the daughter was hungry and thirsty, and thought the orange would be perfect to satisfy both of her needs. The son, on the other hand, was planning to make a spice cake and wanted the whole orange because he needed all of the peel to make orange zest for the cake. Because of his willingness to ask questions and really hear what each child needed, the father was able to give the son the whole peel and the daughter the whole flesh, and they both got more than they would have gotten by simply dividing the orange in half. This was a perfect example of the power of mediation.

Principles taught in the course, such respect for the needs of others, seeking to find harmony by insuring that the needs of both sides are protected, and deep and careful active listening, deeply resonate with our Christian faith and can provide a wonderful road map to reduce stress and prevent conflict in our personal lives, in our jobs/businesses, and in our congregations.

In each of the four-hour sessions the 26 participants (pastors, medical workers, parishioners, other community members, and business people) learned the principles of mediation in a step-by-step process, illustrated by many fascinating cases successfully mediated by Bill during his long career as a negotiator. The course participants found the principles immediately useful, and at the final session, many were able to give examples of their own successes using the techniques learned in the course. The course was helpful, practical and of immediate benefit to all.

A few other comments from the participants:

"Course exceeded my expectations!"

"Unique perspectives. I appreciate the depth of Bill's knowledge and experience."

"I intend to use aspects in my organization immediately."

"I would never have guessed that such an analytical analysis of negotiations was possible."

"I understand now the importance of setting ground rules before negotiation can begin."

Mr. Lincoln has worked for peace through mediation since 1973: as the former Executive Director of CRI (Conflict Resolution, Research and Resource Institute), as a member of the American Arbitration Association, as a member of the National Center Associates, and currently as President of the Lincoln Institute (<http://thelincolninstitute.cc/>).