

## Let's hang out!

"Let's hang out", said the leaders at the end of the fourth conflict transformation session in this multicultural church, where they've been struggling for years to work through their differences. These were very honest and difficult conversations, where words such as, "we need equality and a sense of belonging; we want to be together, but how do we do it if there are these challenging barriers between us?" have been uttered. Painful emotions were shared, ranging from anger and disillusionment, fear and despair. These same leaders were overcome with joy at the end of the fourth session, because the almost impossible started happening. They were listening to one another...and connecting at a very deep level.

Several things occurred during this process. Firstly, the veil lifted, and everyone in the room was able to express themselves freely in a safe environment. Very complex emotions and stories stemming from long ago were shared. These were everyone's truth telling moments, speaking from the head and heart. Secondly, hurtful experiences were acknowledged by the ones who did the hurting, and gracefully accepted by the ones who experienced the hurts. And finally, there were moments of compassion with one another, where the hearts connected, and the yearning was expressed to be in relationship with one another, to be together, to work together. As one leader described it so powerfully afterwards, "God is knitting our hearts together".

All of this happened when these individuals were given the opportunity to share their truths in a safe, listening environment, without feeling judged; and when the same individuals expressed the willingness to go through this truth telling and reconciliation process.

This was hard work for those involved, as they became incredibly vulnerable in each other's' presence, letting go of their own defenses in order for a new path to emerge...a path of forgiveness and belonging. This is the path that made them echo, "Let's hang out with one another!" They did not want this hanging out to mean analyzing various aspects of each other's differences or peculiarities, but rather enjoying each other's presence, like old friends would do...playing games, relaxing over a cup of coffee, or enjoying a good plate of food!

And I was thinking...maybe during their hanging out(s) there will be a pause, and a look that says...this feels really, really good! What a beginning of great things it would be!