

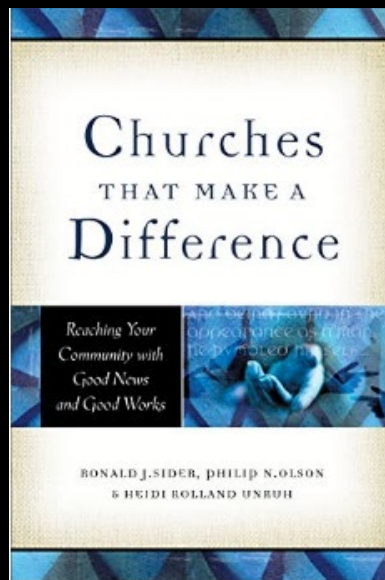
Difficult Conversations—  
A Fresh Start at Building  
Bridges Across Differences



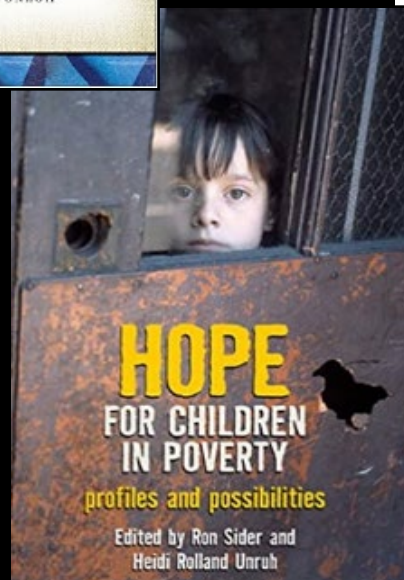
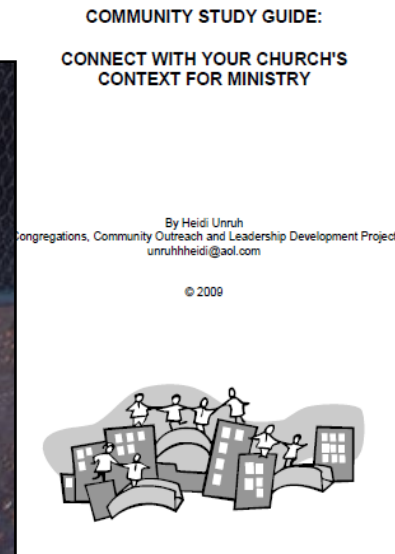
July 8, 2021

*Practical Resources for Churches*

Heidi Unruh UnruhHeidi@gmail.com



## Congregations & Community Outreach Project



*Coming alongside leaders and their good ideas, so good works can shine! (Eph. 2:10)*

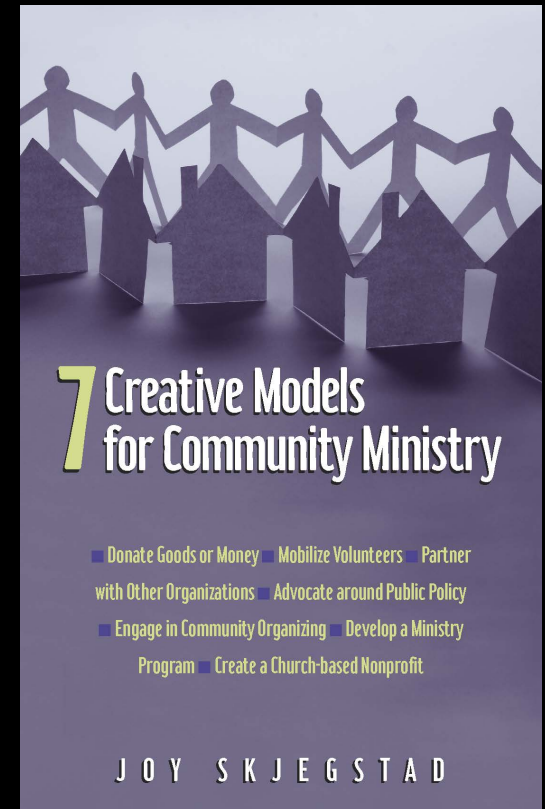
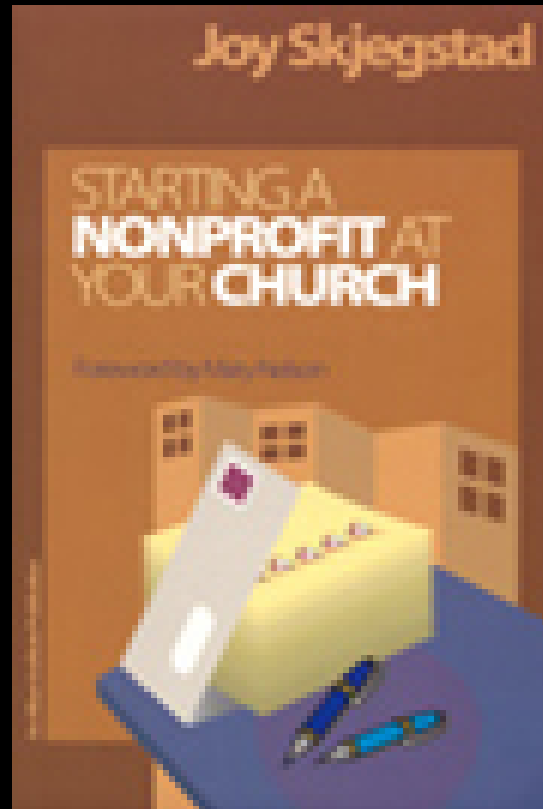
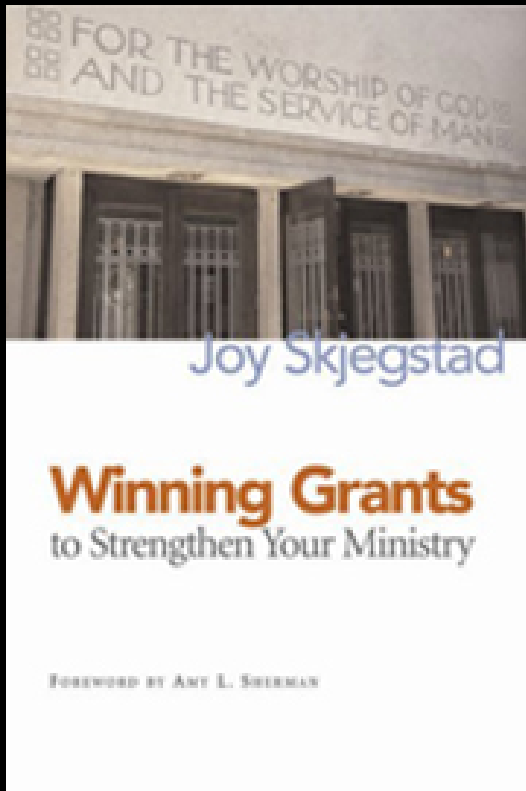


# Joy Skjegstad

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Joy Skjegstad is a national speaker and consultant on nonprofit management and ministry development. She has more than 30 years of experience starting and growing nonprofit organizations, with a special focus on faith-based groups, and youth and community development.



New Book  
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# REAL CONNECTIONS:

Ministries to Strengthen Church  
and Community Relationships



Joy Skjegstad  
Heidi Unruh

# Our Purpose in This Webinar

**Equip you to have difficult conversations  
that bridge differences  
with the goal of deepening connections,  
so that you can model and equip others  
in your congregation**



# Why We Need Difficult Conversations

A polarizing year



# Why We Need Difficult Conversations

Divisions get in the way of relationships  
in our church and community





# Why We Need Difficult Conversations

Not talking makes things worse

*Spiteful words  
can hurt your  
feelings....*

*But silence can  
break your  
heart.....*

# Chat Box Question

*Name one issue that has affected a relationship in your life or in your congregation*

# What We Believe

Christians are called to run toward hard relationships everyone else avoids, creating a picture of hope, unity and care that bridges divisions.



# What Do We Mean by a “Difficult Conversation”?

- One-on-one
- With someone who is not a stranger
- Focused on one area of disagreement
- Goal is building bridge of connection across a difference



# A Difficult Conversation is NOT about ...

- Resolving a personal grievance
- Ending all your differences



# A Difficult Conversation is NOT about...

- Debating to find a winner



# A Difficult Conversation is NOT About...

- Changing someone's mind



# A Difficult Conversation IS about ...

- Really listening to each other
- Telling stories
- Affirming your connection





# A Difficult Conversation IS about...

- Respecting one another as people
- New understanding—maybe acceptance



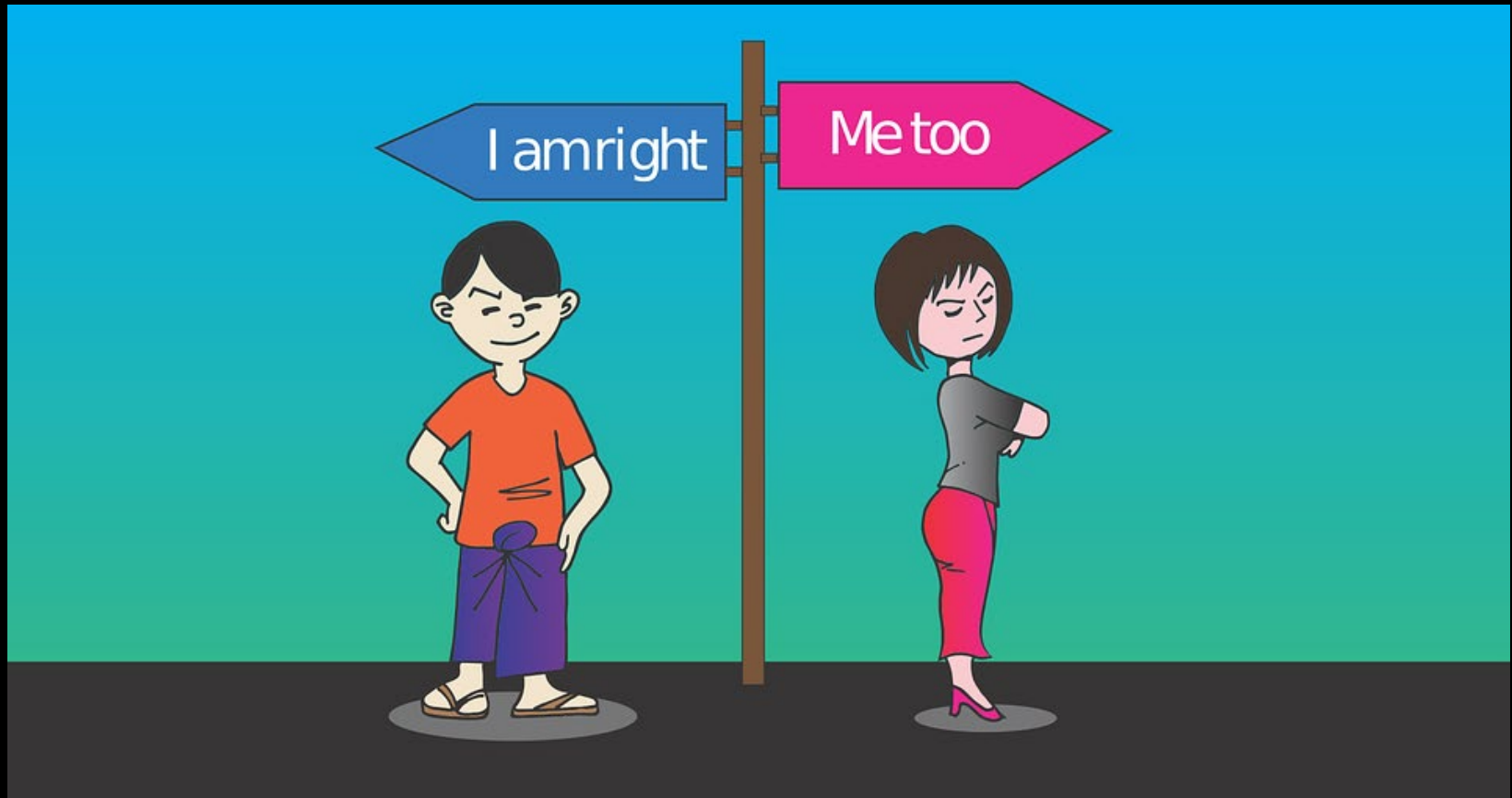
Accept one  
another, then, just  
as Christ accepted  
you, in order to  
bring praise to  
God.

ROMANS 15:7

# A Hard Conversation Might Be Needed If ...

- You've been avoiding someone
- You talk *about*, but not *to* someone
- Your congregation is divided into factions
- A disagreement ended a partnership
- There's a lot of bad feeling in the air

# When “agreeing to disagree” means maintaining angry silence



# Question for Reflection

*Think of a person with whom you may want to have a difficult conversation, or a situation at your church in which a difficult conversation may be helpful.*

*Keep this specific case in mind.*

# Get Yourself Ready



# Let Go of ...

Needing to be right or  
to change the other person



# Let Go of ...

Pushing your position or  
recruiting for your cause



# Be Aware of ...

Your agenda, your emotions, your biases





Be Open to ...

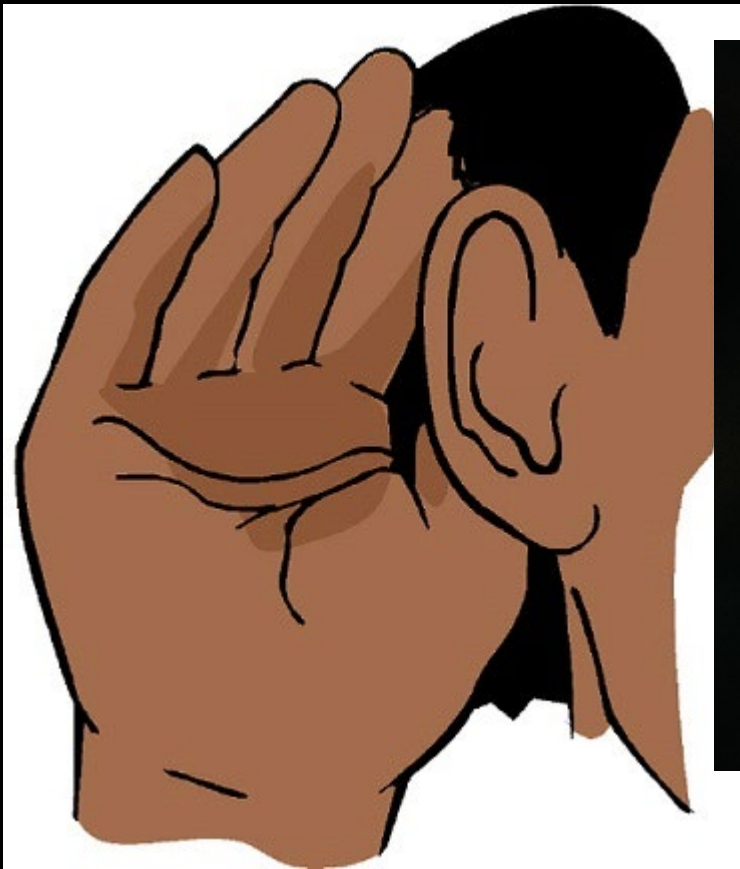
Being surprised and enlightened

The work of the Holy Spirit



# Pray for ...

Both of you to have open ears, open hearts



# Chat Box Question

*Which of these “getting ready” actions would be most challenging for you?*

- Let go of needing to be right
- Don't try to change or recruit the other person
- Prepare to be surprised and enlightened
- Be open to the work of the Holy Spirit
- Pray for open ears and open hearts

# Starting the Conversation



# A Clear Invitation

*“I think we have different opinions on the issue of \_\_\_\_, and I would like to sit down and have a conversation with you on that topic. I want to hear more about your viewpoints and what makes this important to you. I’d also like to share my viewpoints and why I hold them, not to try to convince you but so we can understand one another better.”*

# Chat Box Question

*What ground rules would you suggest for a bridge-building conversation?*



# Ground Rules

Commit to:

- Confidentiality
- Respectful communication
- Acceptance of one another's story

# Ground Rules

Have a plan to:

- Structure the conversation to avoid debate
- Handle hurt feelings
- Get uncomfortable but stay safe



# Tips for a Fruitful Conversation



# A Posture of Caring Curiosity

Don't listen to catch flaws in their argument ...  
Instead, listen to understand the person



# Active Listening ...



- Clear distractions
- Listen with full attention
- Wait to speak
- Summarize / paraphrase
- Ask clarifying questions

... and Honest Sharing

# Share Stories

- *How did you get involved in this topic?*
- *What people or experiences have helped shape your views?*
- *Have your views changed over time?*



# Focus on Vision

Ask “I WISH” questions ...

- *What do you wish would happen that isn't happening now?*
- *How do you wish this issue could be resolved?*
- *What do you wish the future could look like?*

# Find “the Belief Behind the Belief”

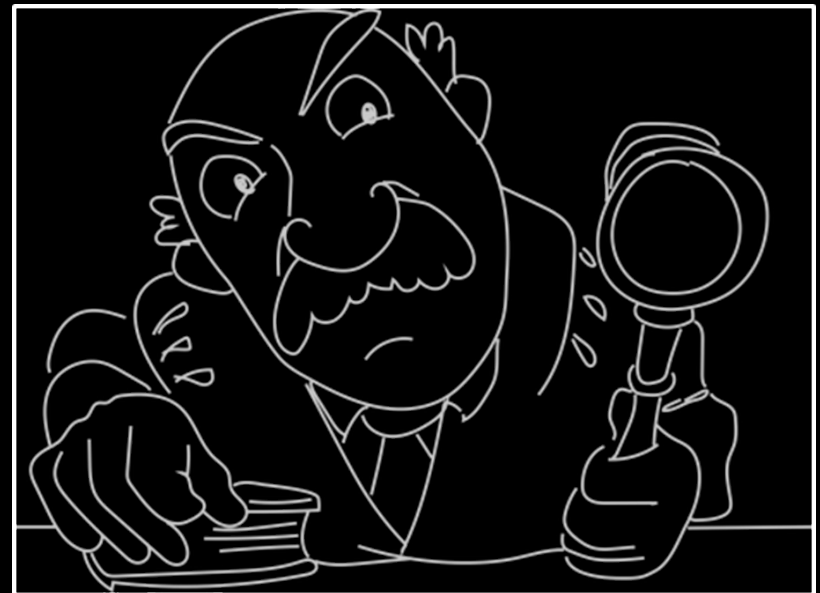
- *What makes this issue important to you?*
- *How does your faith relate to this topic?*
- *What core values are you trying to protect?*



# Go from Critical to Curious

Before you judge ... Ask “I WONDER” questions:

- *I wonder why you feel so strongly about this?*
- *I wonder what challenges you have faced that connect to this issue?*
- *I wonder what you think I don't understand yet?*



# Look for Shared Values

You might disagree on the *WHAT* or *HOW*  
but share the *WHY!*





# Bring Closure

- Make a stopping point
- Re-center on your connection
- Offer affirmations & new insights
- Decide on next steps



# Chat Box Question

*What is a question you could ask someone in relation to the issue you thought of earlier?*



# If the Heat Is Rising ...

Pause to check:

- *How am I / are we doing?*
- *Do we need a break?*
- *What will help us stay focused on connection?*
- *Reaffirm ground rules*



# If the Heat Is Rising ...

Self-care--ask yourself:

- *I wonder what's behind how I feel right now?*
- *What is my goal in this conversation?*
- *What do I need to take care of myself?*



# When To Step Back

- The other person is not interested in dialogue and is not listening
- There are personal attacks or angry behavior like yelling or bullying
- You are so angry that you stop seeing the other person as a person



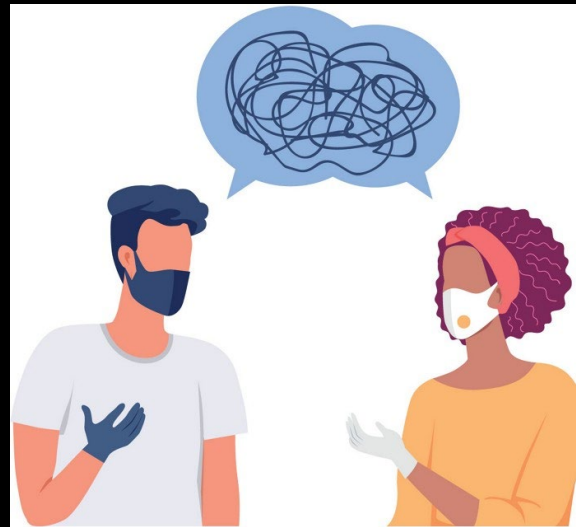
# In the End ... Give Your Disagreements to God!

“All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”

- *Philippians 3:15-16*

# Chat Box Question

*What are potential costs or risks of having a difficult conversation?*



*What are potential costs of **NOT** having a difficult conversation?*

# The Beauty of Difficult Conversations

- Fresh vision for ministry & seeing God at work
- Progress on tough issues by welcoming all gifts
- Reconciled relationships
- Changed attitudes about “those people”
- Better self-understanding





# How Can We Help Your Church?

## Services we provide:

- **Consulting** on planning new ministry
- **Coaching** to support a leader or team
- Facilitate **asset discovery**
- Facilitate **listening** processes in the church and community
- **Training** webinars or conversations

# How Can We Help Your Church?

## Training topics include:

- Helping Your Church Process Its “Covid Year”
- Becoming a More Relationship-Rich Church
- How to Talk to Strangers
- Engage New and Loosely Attached Church Attenders
- Becoming a Church That Listens Well
- Connecting with People Who Are Hidden & Hurting
- Getting to Know Your Neighbors

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