

Answer Challenges to the SGM Model

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At the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, Rev. Dr. Steve Crump has been exploring the topic of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) from the book on that topic by Marshall B. Rosenberg. We wanted to continue the exploration in our small groups and Rev. Helen Zidowecki graciously wrote an introductory session for our groups to use. (Her session, *Compassionate Communications: Connections* is posted on the UU Small Group Ministry Network website <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/public/sessions/index.html>.)

Here's Helen's summary of the NVC process:

The concrete actions we are **observing** that are affecting our well-being.

How we **feel** in relation to what we are observing.

The **needs**, *values*, desires that are creating our feelings.

The concrete actions we **request** in order to enrich our lives.

One of our leaders had the following experience:

During our last Branches session we were using the NVC format and things were moving smoothly until a full blown debate ensued. One member shared an idea as being universal, and was challenged by another member. The discussion went back and forth, no one willing to consider the other's point of view.

As co-leader of the group I observed that we would be stuck until this discussion was resolved or redirected. It occurred to me that since we were focusing on the NVC model, this presented an opportunity to see if it would work.

I made three statements:

1. "I observe there is a disagreement in the group" ...
2. "I feel uncomfortable"...
3. "I request we move a position of allowing difference of opinion to be okay."

There was an immediate smile on the faces of the "debaters" and the energy in the room shifted. I was amazed that three simple statements had created such a dramatic change.

Such a good story. It occurs to me that this is a formula we can all use to bring our groups back to the model when they go astray. It would work like this:

I observe (XXX)

I feel anxious, because, as facilitator, **I need** to implement our church's model and part of it is that we YYY.

I request (that we stop doing XXX and get back to YYY).

I think this solves a problem for me. When a group I'm leading goes off topic, or starts doing impersonal reporting and not personal sharing or begins to criticize a politician or any of the various ways of challenging the basic small group ministry model, I always sit there for a few minutes wondering what I'm going to do or say. Now I have a formula. If you try it, send me your story. diana_dorroh@hotmail.com