***“Disagreeing Agreeably” Webinar Intro***

***March 25, 2015***

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Thanks for taking the time to join in this important area of relationship. A few months ago I wrote the following letter to the editor of the Christian Courier reflecting on articles that had been written on conflict within congregational communities.

*Years ago, Dr. Edwin Friedman, paraphrasing an Episcopal priest, said, "The Clergy collar is the screen upon which parishioners show home movies."  As congregational communities-both parishioners and pastors/staff-increasing our capacities and skills for fielding anxiety needs to be a priority.  At the same time we need to take greater individual responsibility for our own functioning.  I am convinced that the key starting point lies in God's grace both as a theological concept and, equally, as an everyday practice and attitude toward one another.  Applying grace is neither as automatic as we might think nor as easy as we might hope.  Instead, practical grace-grace applied-involves intentional decisions and developed skills that take time, effort and dedication on the part of every one of us.*

Few, if any, of us always function well in difficult or highly anxious conversations. Still, as Christians we are called to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5) and to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit *through the bond of peace*.” (Ephesians 4:3 NIV italics mine). My hope is that the following webinar will function as a starting point for each of us to reflect on how we might increase our capacity for spiritually healthy connection during conversations that can be “highly charged”. Differences in opinion and perspective are, often, healthy and helpful.

I sometimes wonder about it this way. How would Jesus respond to some of our conversations, conflicts and interactions? As Jesus “observes” the challenging interactions between his followers, wouldn’t it be great if he could respond with, “Well done! That was a difficult conversation or interaction that needed to take place but you handled it so well. I am so proud of how you were an example of me in that.” How many of our anxiety charged conversations could he say that about? I wonder if this webinar could be one more piece (peace?) that helps us move in that direction. Surely the grace of God in Christ can overflow into the relationships we have with one another and our neighbors.