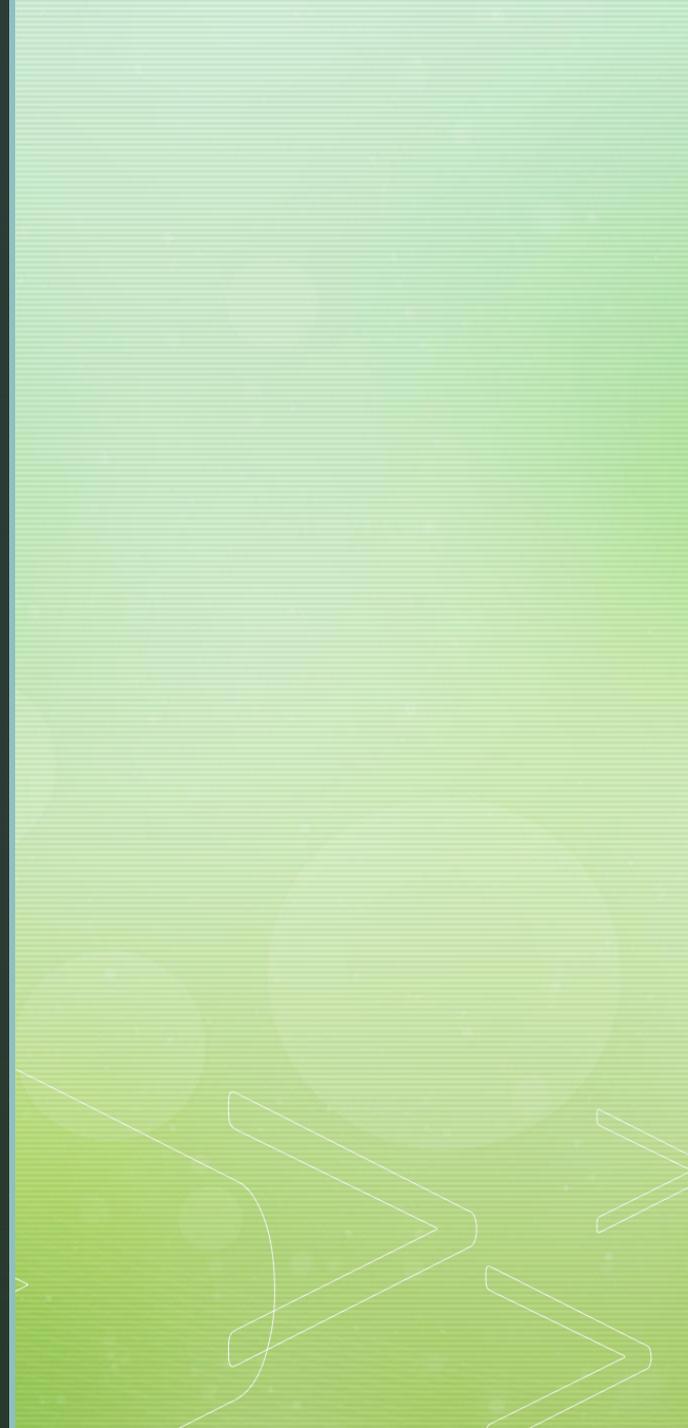


**Belonging Beyond
Differences**

▸ **Family Systems
Theory**

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▶ Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God, you have called us into one Body, with many members and many gifts.

As we reflect on how we live together, give us clarity of mind, gentleness of heart, and the courage to see ourselves truthfully.

May your Spirit guide us into deeper wisdom and love. Amen

▶ **Word Association:**

“CONFLICT”

▸ **Conflict: Normalized**

- **Matthew 18:15-18**
- **Corinthians**
- **Jesus and Paul knew.....**

▶ **What is Family Systems Theory?**

- **We function as part of emotional systems**
- **We are affecting and be affected by the emotional climate around us**
- **A family, a congregation, a workplace, a Vestry, a committee**
- **Problems are rarely caused by one person, but arise from patterns of interaction**

▶ **Church as an Emotional System**

- **With a shared story**
- **With anxiety**
- **Helps us move from blame to curiosity**

Core Concepts: Differentiation

- **Staying connected to others even in disagreement**
- **Low Differentiation:**
 - **Avoiding**
 - **Overreacting**



- **High Differentiation**
 - **Calm**
 - **Clearly and not attacking**
 - **Engaged instead of withdrawn**



▶ **Core Concepts: Anxiety**

- **Acute Anxiety:**
 - **A sudden crisis**
 - **A heated meeting**
 - **Unexpected news**



- **Chronic Anxiety**
 - **Declining membership**
 - **Lingering mistrust**
 - **Longstanding conflict**



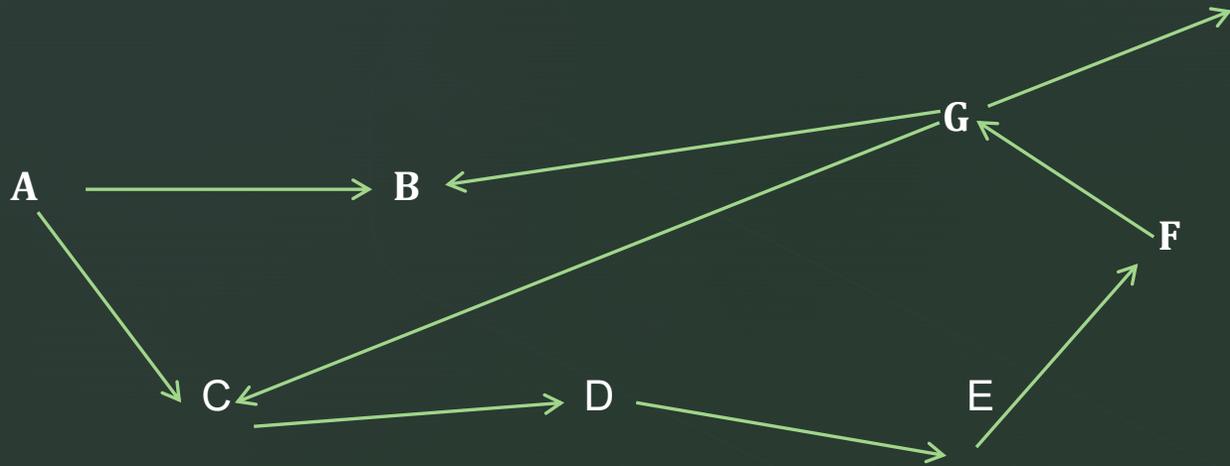
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- **When anxiety becomes chronic:**
 - **“Fix” people**
 - **Quick solutions**
 - **Resist change**
 - **Rely heavily on a strong leader**
- 

▶ **Core Concepts: Triangles**

- **Triangles form when tension between two people pulls in a third person (or more!) to stabilize the relationship**

I

Triangulation Example



▶ **Core Concepts: Over-Under
Functioning**

- **Over Functioning**
 - **Doing more than your share**
 - **Taking responsibility for others' emotions**
 - **Feeling indispensable**



- **Under Functioning**
 - **Small group doing almost everything**
 - **Burnout among leaders**
 - **Quiet resentment on all sides**

Leadership and Presence

- **Less about authority and more about presence**
 - **Manages own anxiety**
 - **Refuses to react**
 - **Stays connected without taking sides**
 - **Calm in tense moments**
 - **ONE STEADY PERSON CAN SHIFT THE ENTIRE SYSTEM OVER TIME.**

▸ **Systems Theory as Spiritual Practice**

- **Prayer that grounds rather than escapes**
- **Silence that slows reactivity**
- **Deep and faithful listening; questions rather than rush to answers**
- **Confession that names our part without blame**
- **Worship that reminds us who we are together**

▶ **Your Practice for the future:**

- **Reflect on and name:**
 - **What practices help me stay grounded when anxiety arises?**
 - **Where am I tempted to over-function, withdraw or control?**
 - **What spiritual resources sustain me in a non-anxious presence?**

▸ **Your Goals:**

- **Not a church without conflict, but...**
- **A church mature enough to stay connected through differences.**