

Tension Triage + Conversation Starter

A simple discernment tool for church leaders, staff, and ministry teams



Tension is normal. Escalation is not inevitable.

Use this handout to slow down, name what's happening, and discern whether you need outside support.

1 Name the Moment (60 seconds)

What are we noticing right now?

Where is this showing up?

Check the statement that best fits what you are seeing right now.

staff elders/deacons committee congregation-wide search/transition other: _____

What's the temperature today? (circle one). Low ——— Moderate ——— High

2 Spot the Shift (2 minutes) Tension becomes risky when it shifts...

Check any you're seeing:

- The focus is moving from issue → person
- The room is running on assumptions, not shared facts
- People feel unheard and are repeating themselves
- Conversations are becoming reactive (tone, emails, side meetings)
- Trust feels fragile or already low

If you checked 2 or more, treat this as a leadership moment—not just a problem to solve.

3 Ask What's Underneath (3 minutes) Often the presenting issue isn't the whole story.

Pick two questions to discuss (don't try to answer everything):

1. What might feel at stake for people right now?
2. What loss might people be grieving (change, identity, influence, belonging, stability)?
3. Where might fear or anxiety be shaping reactions?
4. What assumptions are being made about one another?
5. Where is trust weakest: communication, clarity, process, or leadership credibility?

4 Trust and Communication When tension rises, speed is not always wisdom.

Choose one step you can take in the next 7 days:

- Slow the timeline (delay a decision; create space to listen)
- Clarify in writing what is changing / what is not
- Host listening conversations (small group or 1:1)
- Name the tension in the room with a calm, pastoral tone
- Create a better process before continuing the conversation

Our Chosen Step (one sentence)

When to Bring in Outside Support

Consider contacting CHC if any are true:

- The conflict is becoming personal
- Trust is low and staying low
- Leaders are stuck or divided about next steps
- A decision must be made, but the process feels unsafe
- A pastor transition / staffing change is amplifying anxiety
- Polarization or factions are forming

What CHC can provide (in a neutral, steady way):

- Conflict discernment and assessment
- Facilitated leadership conversations
- Trust-building communication processes
- Identity clarification during seasons of change
- Coaching for pastors and key leaders

If you're not sure what you need: start with a conversation.

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