



**ST. MATTHEW'S NEW LIFE
CONFLICT RESOLUTION &
HOLY CONFERENCING COVENANTS**

Holy Conferencing

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12-16a,17).

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
- As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.
- Listen patiently before formulating responses.
- Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
- Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
- Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with a position.
- Avoid using inflammatory words, derogatory names, or an excited and angry voice.
- Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.
- Make use of facilitators and mediators.
- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God -- not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.

We believe Christians can discuss important issues without the acrimonious debate and parliamentary maneuvering that can divide a group into contending factions.

We see too many examples of that in secular society. We believe the Holy Spirit leads in all things, especially as we make decisions. We want to avoid making decisions in a fashion that leaves some feeling like winners and others like losers. We can change the world through honest conversation on matters about which we are passionate

Conflict Resolution Covenant

It is our prayer that all members and attenders of St. Matthew's New Life United Methodist Church (SMNL) will follow the example of our head, Jesus Christ, in treating each other with love and respect. Recognizing that differences of opinion and conflicts are inevitable in any human endeavor, however, our church desires to establish a conflict resolution covenant that we call on members, attenders, and staff to live in, so that when conflict does occur, Jesus will be honored by our efforts to resolve our differences in love and maintain the unity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Conflict may be as simple as a difference of opinion, or it may involve a disagreement over church doctrine, or dissatisfaction with one or more of the church's leadership, or an argument involving two or more parties concerning the policies and direction of the church.

Therefore, we expect that:

1. In all interactions with each other, the people of SMNL will respect different ideas and views and will express disagreement with civility and Christian love, which means acting in the best interest of those we disagree with (1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:18).
2. Gossip is strongly discouraged as dishonoring to our Lord Jesus Christ (James 4:11-12).
3. Disagreements and conflicts should be addressed as soon as possible; the longer conflict is unresolved, the harder it is to bridge the differences (Matthew 5:23-24).
4. Mediators and committees asked to intervene in conflict shall strive to propose resolutions to conflict.
5. Resolution shall be defined as mutual agreement or understanding among all the parties in a conflict.
6. All allegations involving child abuse must be handled as directed in the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy.

7. When the conflict arises because of an allegation of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or sexual abuse, the SPRC chairperson or the pastor will contact the district superintendent immediately (within eight hours) so that the Sexual Misconduct Policy will be implemented.
8. In all circumstances, confidentiality shall be respected.

We have the Scriptural mandate, the polity resources, and the process to grow our church beyond occasional conflict. It requires intentionality, hearts intent on forgiveness, and well-trained Staff- Parish Relations committees. Our hope is that our local congregation will become healthier, and therefore more successful, in growing disciples for Jesus Christ.

Jesus outlines the process of conflict resolution saying: “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. Our goal is that the people of SMNL will not walk away from the church because of conflict but will work together to overcome differences and find the common ground we share in Christ through a three step process: communicate, companions, and council. Such an approach is biblically mandated and serves as an example to the non-Christian world that we are indeed disciples of Christ (John 13:34-35).

Communicate

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.” –
Matthew 18:15*

Begin with prayer for yourself and the individual with whom you have a conflict. Invite God to share wisdom, enable understanding and an openness to communication that resolves differences.

When you have a concern about an action of a pastor, staff member, or parishioner, attempt to work it out directly with the person. Speak with the individual face-to-face. Explain how it has affected you and provide an opportunity for reconciliation between you and the other person. You are encouraged to start the conversation by saying – “I experienced (describe what you felt or experienced) when you (describe the action of the individual) and I would like to resolve our differences.”

Companions

*“But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” –
Matthew 18:16*

If your concern is not reasonably resolved, speak to a member of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and ask for help to resolve your concern. This may include having a member of the committee mediate a conversation between the individuals who are in conflict with one another. This step may also include having those with concerns meet with the full SPRC and pastor so that they may hear the concerns identified.

When the concern is with or involves the pastor, the SPRC chair will contact the district superintendent if there does not appear to be resolution or a path forward to address the concerns presented. SPRCs are encouraged to participate in conference training on conflict resolution and to seek consultation with the Guide about mediating conversations.

Council

*“If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”
– Matthew 18:17*

An individual who does not believe that the SPRC has adequately addressed their concern or believes that the SPRC has not acted objectively, may ask the SPRC chairperson to contact the district superintendent. The superintendent will further review the concerns and determine if additional steps are warranted.

If all efforts at resolution fail, and parties believe they are not able to stay in community in peace, any party wishing to leave SMNL fellowship is asked to do so lovingly, without rancor or bitterness on the part of the one leaving or on the parts of those staying at this church, so that we may not bring disgrace on the name of Jesus (1 John 2:10).

Conflict is a normal part of congregational life. Jesus affirms healthy relationships which include honest communication with one another, a willingness to be reconciled, and an acknowledgement of the need for forgiveness in our lives. He also claims to be in our midst when we are with those who disagree with us. We are at our best, and honor God, when we work to resolve differences, offer

forgiveness and reconcile differences within the congregation. Jesus teaches that “If people refuse to listen even to the church, let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Jesus would give the Gentiles and tax collectors a second chance over and over again and responds to Peter’s question about how many times he needed to forgive with, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” We do not give up the hope of reconciliation but constantly seek after it.