

**Seeking to follow Jesus
as a community of peace
in
congregational decision-making**

“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:17-22

A. Decisions on Process¹

As individual situations will involve different people or different issues, the approaches used will differ. A process suitable to the circumstances should, however, be agreed to at an early stage.

Good communication is key.

- 1) *Identify the issue*, describing it in clear and open terms. Separate different issues, if necessary, and address one at a time, recognizing that underneath some questions are complex issues that may need to be explored.
- 2) *Establish a process*. This can include various ways for response:
a survey;
small-group discussion;
storytelling by congregational members;
straw votes;
panel discussion;
a session for participants to pose questions to others in an open setting; or
less familiar methods such as the human rainbow, sometimes known as the conflict spectrum.
- 3) *Rules for the final decision*. Possible approaches are:
consensus based on mutual consent;
modified consensus with due regard for the concerns of the minority; or,
vote by agreed percentage majority.

B. Implementation

- 4) *Generate diverse ideas and opinions*, being open and sensitive to different thinking and communication styles.
- 5) *Gather detailed information about the available options*.
As appropriate:
commission a study group;
interview people with experience;
obtain expert opinions;
use conference resources;
have home groups study the matter;
plan a sermon series to explore biblical aspects.
- 6) *Narrow the field of options*:
identify areas of common agreement;
eliminate non-viable elements;
note options which have the strongest support; and
propose amendments which would address remaining concerns.
- 7) *Make and implement the decision*, following the rules agreed to when the process was established, putting the process in the broader context of discerning God's will.
- 8) *Review or re-visit the situation* after a period of time, if appropriate.

Remember, good communication is key. An effective all-inclusive decision-making process takes time. It is the better way!



¹Based partly on information from Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, eds., *Making Peace with Conflict* (Scottsdale, Pa. and Waterloo, Ont., Herald Press, 1999), particularly Ch. 16, Alastair McKay, “*Congregational Decision Making*.”

Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement²

The following guidelines may be used as a statement of commitment, to guide congregational discussions.

The Bible guides us to seek reconciliation when we disagree. Scripture teaches us that conflict can be an area for God's revelation.

GUIDELINES

"Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph. 4:3*), as both individual members and the body of Christ, we pledge that we shall:

IN THOUGHT

1. **Accept conflict** Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our life in the church.

(*Romans 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19 15:1-7*)

2. **Affirm hope** Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict we can work through to growth. (*Ephesians 4:15-16*)

3. **Commit to prayer** Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution (no prayers for my success or for the other to change but to find a joint way). (*James 5:16*)

IN ACTION

4. **Go to the other...** Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism.

(*Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20*)

5. **...In the spirit of humility** Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Place

the problem between us at neither doorstep and own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out the others'.

(*Galatians 6:1-5*)

6. **Be quick to listen** Listen carefully, summarize and check out what is heard before responding. Seek as much to understand as to be understood.

(*James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13*)

7. **Be slow to judge** Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats, and act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way.

(*Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26*)

8. **Be willing to negotiate** Work through the disagreements constructively.

(*Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11*)

IN LIFE

9. **Be steadfast in love** Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love.

(*Colossians 3:12-15*)

10. **Be open to mediation** Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use those with gifts and training in mediation in the larger church. (*Philippians 4:1-3*)

11. **Trust the community** We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation or from the broader church. (*Acts 15*)

12. **Be the Body of Christ** Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than resort to the courts of law.

(*1 Corinthians 6:1-6*)



Congregational Decision-Making



At **Petitcodiac Mennonite Church**
we seek to follow Jesus as we ...

Practice Christ-like living, guided by Mennonite Theology, within a welcoming Community of believers.

This pamphlet summarizes stages or procedures for decision-making in small groups or at the congregational level. It is for everyone, especially those leading a group that needs to make decisions.

Effective decision-making considers the views of all. Differences of opinion are inevitable... they are an expected and integral part of the process.

At times, differences lead to conflict: "a disagreement between inter-dependent people." The rewards then lie in the transformation of real or perceived problems into opportunities for growth.

Reconciliation of differences is necessary to restore or maintain healthy relationships within the congregation. This can be done through conflict transformation:

- It is relationship centered;
- It engages the systems within which relationships are set;
- It envisions conflict as a dynamic of ebb and flow, to pursue constructive change; and
- It rests on biblical principles.

²Adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church Triennial Session and Mennonite Church General Assembly, Wichita, KS, July 1995.