

East 91st Street Christian Church Conflict Resolution Policy

This document is to be used as a guide to resolve conflict in a biblical way between lay people, staff or church elders. If any combination of the afore mentioned groups are in conflict the church leadership requests that they follow the attached procedure in anticipation of working through any conflict or disagreement in a God honoring way.

Three Important Steps for Resolving Your Conflict

STEP 1: Make sure you are prepared to respond biblically

God's principles do not change according to the severity of our problems. Whether we are involved in a minor disagreement or a life-changing conflict, he calls us to make the same choice. We can either curse the problem and take matters into our own hands, or we can consecrate the situation to God, trust in his Word, and depend on him to guide us through it, even if that means we must endure a certain amount of suffering (Phil. 1:29-30; Rom. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-25, 4:12-16). Whenever we curse our struggles and conflicts, we inevitably squander opportunities to bring glory to God, serve others, and grow to be more like Christ. But when we respond to God's grace by consecrating our difficulties to him, there is no limit to the good that can be accomplished, even when that good seems far away at the time. For when we consecrate our struggles and conflicts to God, it is not really the apostle Paul we are imitating. It is the Lord Jesus himself. From the beginning to the end of his epic conflict against sin and darkness, he continually consecrated himself and everything he faced to his Father. At the climax of that great struggle, he reaffirmed his dedication with these marvelous words, "Not my will, but yours be done" and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 22:42; 23:46).

STEP 2: Go to the other person to work it out

When you have a conflict with another person, Jesus says that you should go to that person and try to work out your differences personally and privately (see Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15). If repeated efforts to resolve a dispute in private do not succeed, the Bible teaches that you should seek assistance from other Christians in resolving the matter through biblical conflict coaching, mediation, or arbitration. This is discussed in Step 3: Take one or two others along. As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict.¹ We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ.² Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles: **See checklist on pages 263-269 in "The Peacemaker" book by Ken Sande**

Glorify God — Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude.³

Get the Log out of Your Eye — Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.⁴

Gently Restore — Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.⁵

Go and be reconciled — Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.⁶

¹ Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Gal. 5:19-26.

² Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1; James 1:2-4.

³ Ps. 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Rom. 12:17-21; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 4:2-9; Col. 3:1-4; James 3:17-18; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12.

⁴ Prov. 28:13; Matt. 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Col. 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9.

⁵ Prov. 19:11; Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; James 5:9.

⁶ Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4.

Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal*

STEP 3: Take one or two others along

What are my options for getting help?

If you need help from others, there are three different ways for them to be involved--conflict coaching, mediation, arbitration.

Conflict coaching

When someone asks for your help in resolving a conflict, you can often do a great deal of good without getting directly involved in the dispute. Instead, you can simply offer counsel on how that individual might be able to go back to the other person and resolve their differences in private.

Please encourage the person in conflict to follow-up with you within two weeks of them sharing their struggle to confirm that the issue has been resolved or is still on-going.

Mediation

Jesus knew that we would not always be able to resolve our differences in private. Therefore he said, "But if [your brother] will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'" (Matt. 18:16). The role that these "one or two others" are fulfilling is sometimes referred to as "mediation." Unlike a conciliation coach, who works with only one party in a dispute, a mediator works with both sides to help them move toward a voluntary agreement. (The parties are still responsible for deciding on a final agreement.) Mediation can be as simple as sitting down for a cup of coffee with two friends or as complicated as arranging an all day meeting with several parties and a panel of mediators. In either case, a mediator should be prepared to play a number of roles, including prayer supporter, teacher, referee, encourager, and exhorter.

When mediation meetings are deemed necessary, please schedule those within two weeks after the one to one resolution attempt has occurred.

Arbitration

This process of providing a binding decision is sometimes referred to as arbitration. During this process the parties explain their positions to one or more trusted persons from their church or churches who are given the authority to render a final decision on the matter. The arbitration process is similar to mediation, but it is sometimes more formal and does not allow for negotiations between the parties. Depending on the parties' agreement, the arbitrators' final decision may be binding only within the church, or it may be legally enforceable in a civil court. A detailed discussion of arbitration is beyond the scope of this site, but the following principles will be sufficient for many of the disputes that Christians might bring to the church for resolution.

When a one on one meeting and mediation have failed to resolve the conflict, the situation has now reached the level of arbitration. The following are the steps in the arbitration process:

- **Staff member contacts the chairman of the elders through written form describing (who, what, when where, why) in regards to the nature of the conflict and the steps that have been taken to resolve it thus far. This should happen within two weeks following the failed mediation meeting.**
- **The elder board will then review this document in their next elder's meeting**
- **The elder board will contact the staff member to determine a time for the arbitration meeting**
- **The elder board will have discretion regarding process and time frame for final decision**

Additional Resources:

- **The Peacemaker (Updated Version): A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict** (Baker Books, Updated ed. 2003):
- www.peacemaker.net Has additional resources for families, workbooks, etc.