

Highland Mennonite Brethren Church Governance Manual - EXECUTIVE Safe Place - Conflict Resolution Guidelines

The following guidelines for resolving conflict in the Church are based on Scriptural teachings (see *Conflict Resolution Appendix - Scripture References - with commentary*). *Note: The plural pronoun is used in place of the singular throughout to avoid gender (e.g., they instead of he/she).*

1. Conflict between congregants ...
 - 1.1. When the conflict is based on differences of opinion, mindset, values...
 - 1.1.1. Does the Church have any policies/guidelines regarding this difference? If so, then conform to the Church standard. If not then go to next step ...
 - 1.1.2. Seek common ground. On what can you agree? Use those commonly held items as a basis for dialogue about the things on which you disagree? Seek to understand each other's point of view. Maybe views will change or the parties can amicably agree to disagree. If that doesn't resolve the conflict go to next step ...
 - 1.1.3. If conflict remains unresolved between parties then have each party bring in sympathizers to see if a resolution can be reached. If conflict still exists go to next step ...
 - 1.1.4. Parties in conflict present their respective sides to Leadership Team Executive. The decision of the Leadership Team Executive will be considered binding.
 - 1.1.5. If conflict continues then the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).
 - 1.2. When conflict is theological or biblical ...
 - 1.2.1. Consult the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference Confession of Faith with commentary (available on their website - www.mennonitebrethren.ca) plus any relevant Conference or Church resolutions. If the issue is addressed in the Confession or other resolution(s) then consider any relevant statement(s) binding; if not, then go to next step ...
 - 1.2.2. Since the particular issue is not addressed in our Confession of Faith, the issue should be considered as secondary in nature; Augustine's axiom should be applied, "In essentials [Confession of Faith], unity; in non-essentials, liberty [allow for disagreement]; in all things, charity [love one another]."
 - 1.2.3. If conflict continues the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).
 - 1.3. When conflict is moral/sin (follow biblical guidelines)
 - 1.3.1. When someone sins against you (see Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-22): the biblical guidelines focus primarily on the one offended rather than on the offender. The act of asking someone for forgiveness seems to be assumed; the problem is with the forgiver. We need to respond to all offenses against us by others with a forgiving, loving attitude. Even when the same person repeatedly sins against us, we need to repeatedly extend forgiveness. It is reasonable though for the offended party to use the process outlined in Matthew 18 (see 1.3.2 next).

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- 1.3.2. When someone sins (not necessarily against you; see especially Matthew 18:15-20 on which the following is based; also Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20):
 - 1.3.2.1. Go directly to the offender and reveal to them their sin. The person may immediately see their sin; if not they may have to be shown from Scripture or from how they have hurt the Church or others (you?) that they have sinned. The purpose is not to condemn the offender but to convince them to repent of their sin and change their behaviour so that they can be restored to the Church family and/or those they have offended.
 - 1.3.2.2. If the person refuses to listen bring one or two other trustworthy persons into the conversation. Again, the purpose is not to condemn (two-fold or more) but to emphasize the seriousness of their sin and the strong desire to see that person restored and reconciled with those they have offended and the Church family at large.
 - 1.3.2.3. If the person still refuses to listen bring the matter to the Leadership Team Executive. Again, the purpose is to restore the offender and reconcile them to the Church family.
 - 1.3.2.4. If the person still refuses to listen, the Leadership Team Executive should bring the matter to the Church membership at a duly called meeting.
 - 1.3.2.4.1. If the offender refuses to listen to the membership then they should be treated by the membership as a non-Christian (that is, someone who needs to come to faith in Jesus Christ in repentance and dedication for the forgiveness of sins).
 - 1.3.2.4.2. If the offender is a member of the Church then their membership will be placed in abeyance as a “member *not* in good standing.” As such they may not participate in ‘members only’ meetings, make or vote on motions, or serve in any capacity in the ministry of the Church. If there is no satisfactory resolution or reconciliation within six months then they will be released from membership.
2. Conflict between volunteer ministry personnel – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above along the following lines of authority:
 - 2.1. One or both parties involved should take the matter to their direct supervisor;
 - 2.2. If the direct supervisor cannot or does not resolve the matter, one or both parties should appeal to the next higher level of authority;
 - 2.3. The highest level of authority shall be the Leadership Team Executive unless it is necessary to take the matter to the Church membership (see 1.3.2.4 above)

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3. Conflict between congregant and congregational leader (i.e., Leadership Team members and pastors) – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:
 - 3.1. Matter should first be addressed by Leadership Team Executive in an effort to find a resolution and reconciliation;
 - 3.2. If Leadership Team Executive is unable or unwilling to resolve matter then it would be brought to the Church membership for discernment and decision

4. Conflict between leaders – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:
 - 4.1. The individuals involved in the conflict should seek resolution/reconciliation between each other
 - 4.2. If no resolution is found then matter should be dealt with by the Leadership Team Executive
 - 4.3. If still no resolution is found then the Leadership Team Executive should bring the matter to the Church membership for discernment and decision
 - 4.4. Any conflict should be addressed as soon as it arises. Members should be informed quickly if there is no immediate resolution.

5. In all matters, those in conflict should act with humility, follow biblical guidelines, adhere to the Church’s policies and procedures, and be concerned with their and the Church’s public testimony. Their actions and attitudes should reflect ‘HMBC’s Family Rules’ (see *Conflict Resolution Appendix – HMBC’s Family Rules*).