

PURSUING UNITY IN THE CHURCH

The Bible expects that all Christians will experience conflict. Therefore, it continually calls us to love, forgive, and pursue peace in the church (Eph 4:31-32; 1 Cor 1:10). Jesus himself said that his disciples would be recognized by the way they love one another—and this is especially true in how we respond to conflict. When we live in harmony within the local church, God pours out his blessing on his people (Ps 133). Therefore, we invite every member to commit to the following ways of pursuing unity.

ADDRESSING CONFLICT DIRECTLY

When people come together, there will inevitably be conflict—given enough time. This is even true in the local church. However, conflict is not an enemy to be avoided at all costs. God often uses conflict to unite us and grow our love for one another. Therefore, by God’s grace:

- ▶ I will face conflict with courage and love, without over-spiritualizing, denying, or running from it.
- ▶ If I sense tension with someone, I will go to the person and clear the air, asking, “Is everything okay between us?”
- ▶ If I am hurt by or angry with someone, I will go privately to that person and talk about it directly.
- ▶ I will not hide my concerns or complaints anonymously behind the phrase, “Many people feel that…” when what I really mean is “I feel that…”
- ▶ I will resist the temptation to talk about unaddressed conflict with others in the church—even as a prayer request or concern.
- ▶ If I need perspective and prayer prior to addressing a conflict, I will speak only to one spiritually mature person about it, who will hold me accountable to having direct conversation with the appropriate person.
- ▶ When someone sins against me, I’ll do my best to follow the conflict-resolution guidelines in Matthew 18:15-17.

HANDLING CONCERNS WISELY

Whenever someone brings concerns about someone else, the situation must be handled with care and grace. Every situation has two sides, and we often don’t see the full picture. Therefore, by God’s grace:

- ▶ I commit not to blindly accept or believe any negative report—no matter who gave it—until I have gone to all parties concerned and asked to hear their perspective.
- ▶ When I need to pass on another’s concerns or complaints, I will name the person who gave that information or who felt that way.
- ▶ I will ask others to take their concerns directly to whomever he or she is criticizing or complaining about.
- ▶ If someone is hesitant to address conflict with others, I will offer to go with him or her.

UPHOLDING UNITY EAGERLY

Divisiveness is one of the few things serious enough to warrant being removed from the communion of the Church. The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace should be eagerly maintained and sought after. Therefore, by God’s grace:

- ▶ When I am more permissive on a secondary issue, I will not exercise my freedom in a way that causes another to stumble in the faith.
- ▶ When I am more restrictive on a secondary issue, I will not pass judgment and condemn others as immature or less spiritual.
- ▶ I will hold and express my convictions in a way that promotes peace and mutual upbuilding.
- ▶ I commit to obey my leaders and submit to their authority, while still maintaining my ultimate allegiance to Christ.
- ▶ I will pursue the unity of the communion table by going to others I have offended—before the meal—and seeking reconciliation.
- ▶ If I am disciplined by the church, I commit to stay in community, seek repentance, and pursue restoration.
- ▶ If I am thinking about leaving the church, I will meet with an elder to express honestly why I am thinking about that.

SEEKING FORGIVENESS EARNESTLY

We have all fallen short. In true Christian community, we will sin against others and be sinned against by others. Jesus calls us to be people marked by radical forgiveness. Therefore, by God’s grace:

- ▶ When I am hurt by another person in this church, I will work to forgive the person fully.
- ▶ I will focus more on how I need to change than on how others need to change.
- ▶ I will regularly confess my sins, both in public worship and in gospel community.
- ▶ When I realize I have sinned against another, I will ask for God’s forgiveness. Then I will go to those who were affected and ask their forgiveness, too.