Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

“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

Accept conflict 1. 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

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

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

In Action

Go to the other... 4. Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism.* Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20

...in the spirit of humility 5. 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

Be quick to listen 6. 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

Be slow to judge 7. Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats and act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way. Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26

Be willing to negotiate 8. Work through the disagreements constructively. Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11
   • Identify issues, interests, and needs of both (rather than take positions).
   • Generate a variety of options for meeting both parties’ needs (rather than defending one’s own way).
   • Evaluate options by how they meet the needs and satisfy the interests of all sides (not one side’s values).
   • Collaborate in working out a joint solution (so both sides gain, both grow and win).
   • Cooperate with the emerging agreement (accept the possible, not demand your ideal).
   • Reward each other for each step forward, toward agreement (celebrate mutuality).

In Life

Be steadfast in love 9. 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

Be open to mediation 10. 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

Trust the community 11. 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
   • In one-to-one or small group disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate.
   • In congregational, conference district or denominational disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate or implementing constitutional decision-making processes, insuring that they are done in the spirit of these guidelines, and abiding by whatever decision is made.

Be the body of Christ 12. 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

*Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between. Mennonite Church USA (adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church Triannual Session and Mennonite Church General Assembly, Wichita, KS July 1995)