

## Raleigh Mennonite Church Church Discipline Guidelines

**CHURCH DISCIPLINE** The purpose of Church discipline is the restoration of an erring member to a spiritually healthy condition and full participation as a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, and preserving the unity of the Church body. In progressing through the stages of Church Discipline, ample time for change of heart must be allowed at each step.

If any member shall consistently conduct herself/himself in a manner which is contrary to Biblical teachings or the RMC Covenant Statement and does not show evidence of repentance at the end of the following steps of discipline, that member may be removed from covenant membership. While Church discipline would generally apply to covenant members, circumstances could arise in which non-covenant, regular attendees, could appropriately be subject to formal discipline as well. If the erring member is a Servant Leader or Pastor, the process described in I Timothy 5:19 (NIV) is appropriate - *“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.”*

In some circumstances interpersonal conflict may be the central issue rather than “conduct which is contrary to Biblical teachings or the RMC Covenant Statement.” In instances of interpersonal conflict, the parties involved should seek to use mediation as well as other tools for reconciliation. (See *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love - Commitments in Times of Disagreement* attached)

### **Steps Of Discipline following the outline of Matthew 18:15-17:**

(Below see Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1, I Corinthians 5:1-5, II Thessalonians 3:6, Titus 1:13, Titus 3:10, Romans 16:17.)

1. **Private confrontation:** The erring member should be directly approached in private by one concerned and informed person and confronted with his/her sin. If repentance does not follow this step then the second step should be followed. In cases of sexual abuse we do not recommend the first step to be one-on-one between the abused and abuser. In reality, the abused and abuser may not be able to meet face to face for a long time.
2. **Private conference:** If the erring member is unrepentant then two or three believers should confront him about his/her sin. If repentance does not follow this step then the third step should be followed, and the congregation's Overseer should be informed.
3. **Public meeting:** After step two, the Servant Leaders should be made aware of the situation and should determine whether or not the Biblical ideals of discipline, love and concern have been communicated to the erring member. If the Servant Leaders determine that the erring member is unrepentant after being given ample counsel and time, then the Servant Leaders shall present the matter in a meeting of the covenant members of the Church. (Covenant members only should be in attendance - discipline is a “family matter.”) If the erring member refuses to listen then step four should be followed.

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At Step 3, the Servant Leaders are informing the covenant members of the situation in the most loving and hopeful manner, always consistent with the purpose of restoring the erring member to spiritual health and full participation as a member of the congregation. Covenant members will be given opportunity to share insights about the congregation's response to the erring member. The erring member will be told that the covenant members are being informed. The covenant members will be asked to pray for the erring member.

If the Servant Leaders, when initiating investigation of a member's conduct, deem such conduct to be potentially harmful in any way to the well being of other Church members, the Church's ministries or the Church's public testimony and reputation, the Servant Leaders may remove the member under investigation from any Church role or office until the disciplinary issue is resolved according to the Steps of Discipline.

4. **Public exclusion:** When the Servant Leaders and congregation have made consistent, loving efforts to bring the erring member to repentance without results, then the erring member may lose his/her membership in the Church, be asked to stay away from Church activities or both. Servant Leaders will take initiative to lead the discipline procedure.

(All references are from the NIV)

### **Matthew 18:15-17**

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

### **Galatians 6:1**

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

### **I Corinthians 5:1-5**

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature[a] may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

### **II Thessalonians 3:6**

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

### **Titus 1:13**

This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith

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## **Titus 3:10**

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

## **Romans 16:17**

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

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## Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love Commitments in Times of Disagreement

"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 for 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)

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## ----- 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. I Corinthians 6:1-6

\*Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between.

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