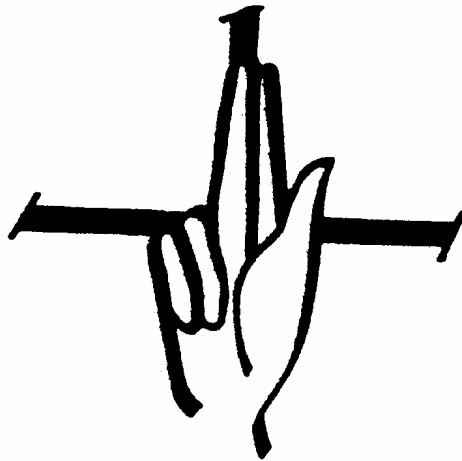


# Brotherly Reconciliation

*A Report of the  
Commission on Theological and Social Concerns*



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## The Scriptures Speak on Brotherly Reconciliation

- I. *'They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one.'* (Psalm 14:3)  
The corruption all men have inherited from Adam means that conflict is to be expected and is inevitable.  
(Cf. Gen. 6:5, 11-12; I Kings 8:46; Ps. 14:1-3; Ps. 51:5; Is. 53:6; Jer. 5:1; Rom. 3:23, 5:12; Eph. 2:3)
- II. *'For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.'* (James 3:2)  
Hurtful and divisive words are an unavoidable fruit of this corruption; the tongue is the most difficult beast to tame.  
(Cf. Mt. 15:17-20; Eph. 4:29; Jas 3:2-12; 4:11)
- III. *'When you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, ...'* (I Cor. 11:18)  
Because the Christian is *simul justus et peccator* 'simultaneously saint and sinner', such conflict is to be expected even in the church (God's people on earth).  
(Cf. Gen. 4:8; 37:4; I Sam. 18:8-9; II Chron. 24:20-21; Jer. 20:1-2; Acts 15:37-40; I Cor. 1:10-13; 6:1; Gal. 2:11-14; Jas 4:1-2)
- IV. *'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in the one hope of your calling;  
one Lord, one faith, one Baptism;  
one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.'*  
(Eph. 4:4-7)  
Christians find true unity in the gifts of God that they hold in common, particularly in the one Baptism they have all received.  
(Cf. Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:12-15)

- V. *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ (Eph. 4:1-3)*  
 This common baptismal calling compels Christians to seek reconciliation with one another, treasuring the gift of true unity in Christ and the Spirit.  
 (Cf. Gen. 50:15-21; Rom. 12:16; 15:5; I Cor. 1:10; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; I Pet. 3:8)
- VI. *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.’ (Eph. 4:31-32)*  
 Baptismal unity is best treasured and expressed when Christians forgive one another out of the rich storehouse of forgiveness God has showered upon them in Christ.  
 (Cf. Mt. 6:12-15; 18:21-35; Col. 3:12-15)
- VII. *‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one Body, for we all partake of the one bread.’ (I Cor. 10:16-17)*  
 The Sacrament of the Altar both requires brotherly unity in the church and sustains it by giving the Body and Blood of Christ as a common gift.  
 (Cf. I Cor. 11:17-34)
- VIII. *‘Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted.’ (Gal. 6:1)*  
 The Christian does not view his brother self-righteously, but first confesses that he himself is a sinner in need of forgiveness.  
 (Cf. Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 6:37-42; Rom. 2:1; Rom. 14:4)

IX. *'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'* (Rom. 12:2)

The church does not resort to the adversarial and self-interested methods of the world, but acts in a self-less and forgiving manner (that is, in the way of the Gospel).

(Cf. Mt. 20:25; I Cor. 6:1-8)

X. *'For to this [suffering] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you a pattern, that you should follow in His steps.'* (I Pet. 2:21)

The Christian seeks neither vengeance nor vindication, but willingly suffers wrong for the sake of Christ who suffered for us.

(Cf. Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35; Mt. 5:10-12, 38-42; Acts 5:41; Rom. 8:17; 12:14-21; I Cor. 6:7; Phil. 1:29; I Pet. 2:20; Heb 10:30)

XI. *'But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'* (Mt. 5:44)

When conflict or dispute arises in the church, Christians must always stand ready to seek the Lord's gracious assistance through prayer.

(Cf. Matt. 5:43-48; Eph. 6:18-19; James 1:5-6; 5:13-16)

XII. *'Remind them to ... avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men.'* (Titus 3:1-2)

When dealing with conflict and seeking to reconcile brothers, the church must not only seek the truth, provide for justice, and insist on fairness, but must also treat all parties with mercy.

(Cf. Ex. 23:1-9; Lev. 19:9-18; Prov. 17:15; Hos. 6:6; Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10; Matt. 5:6-7, 9; 12:7; 23:23; I Cor. 13:4-6; 16:14)

XIII. *If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.’ (Mt. 18:15-16)*

Our Lord exhorts the Christian to seek out the erring brother and show him his sin. In His wisdom Christ teaches us:

- a. to deal with our brother face to face;
- b. to keep his sin confidential;
- c. lovingly to seek to regain him, rather than to exclude him;
- d. to persist towards this goal with the assistance of brother Christians, if necessary;
- e. to be concerned with faithful witness to the truth, rather than hearsay;
- f. finally, to turn to the whole church, where sin is dealt with.

(Cf. Deut. 19:15; Mt. 5:21-24; Lk. 17:3; Jn 8:17; Gal. 6:1; I Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28)

XIV. *‘And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.’ (Mt. 18:17)*

One possible outcome of this process is that the sinner be excluded from the church (excommunication) in order that he be made mindful of the seriousness of his sin. The church then views him again as an object of her mission.

(Cf. Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:9-13; II Cor. 13:1-2; II Thess. 3:14-15; Tit. 3:10-11)

XV. *‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ (I Jn 1:9)*

The goal of ‘conflict resolution’ is not merely social harmony, nor even that brothers be reconciled only to each other, but that sinners be reconciled to God through repentance, Confession of sins, and Holy Absolution.

(Cf. Mt. 16:19; 18:18-20; Jn 20:19-23; II Cor. 5:18-20)

## Procedures for Brotherly Reconciliation When Conflicts Arise in the Church

### **1 Appointment of mediator**

- 1.1 In the first instance, disputes within the ELCE should be referred for mediation as follows:
- 1.2 In the case of a dispute within the congregation, referral should be made to the pastor.
- 1.3 In a dispute between members of two congregations, the pastors of both should be approached to act together.
- 1.4 In a dispute involving a pastor, the ELCE chairman should be approached to serve as mediator or to appoint another mediator if he deems it preferable.
- 1.5 In a dispute involving the chairman of the ELCE, the vice-chairman should be approached; or, if he, too, is involved, a faculty member at Westfield House should rather be approached.
- 1.6 An individual should not serve as mediator if he, or a member of his immediate family, is a party to the dispute, or if there is any other conflict of interest.

### **2 Duties of the mediator**

- 2.1 It should be the first duty of the appointed mediator to decide whether the matter is one for which a reconciliation process is appropriate. Reconciliation is to be sought whenever there is injury or hostility between members or sections of the church. When a point of doctrine can be identified as the matter in dispute, adjudication on the question is required. In the case of a theological dispute within the congregation, the pastor should adjudicate. In the case of a theological dispute beyond the confines of a congregation, it should be referred to the Barnes Conference for adjudication.
- 2.2 If the mediator is satisfied that the situation is one calling for a reconciliation process, he should first determine whether the parties involved have met in an attempt to resolve the matter. If they have not done so, he should attempt to bring them together for this purpose. It is the duty of each party to the dispute to agree to meet in these circumstances.
- 2.3 If the step outlined in the previous paragraph does not succeed in

achieving a reconciliation of the parties, the mediator should assemble a mediation panel.

### **3 Constitution of the arbitration panel**

- 3.1 In the case of a dispute within a congregation, the board of elders should ordinarily serve as the arbitration panel.
- 3.2 In the case of a dispute beyond the confines of a congregation, the panel should consist of the mediator, together with one further member nominated by each of the disputants, and agreed by all parties to the dispute.
- 3.3 An individual should not serve on the arbitration panel if he, or a member of his immediate family, is a party to the dispute, or if there is any other conflict of interest.
- 3.4 The panel should be assembled as quickly as is practicable.

### **4 The duties of the arbitration panel and the disputants**

- 4.1 The meetings should be in private and confidential. The panel should meet as often as is necessary to resolve the situation.
- 4.2 The arbitration panel, upon completion of its task, should report back to the chairman of the ELCE through the mediator.
- 4.3 It is the duty of the disputants to co-operate with the panel and to respect its authority as appointed by the church, and agree to abide by its decision.