

# *Seeking to be Faithful Together:*

## Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement

In a spirit of trust and love, we promise we will...

<p><b>G</b>ive them a hearing... listen before we answer</p> <p><i>John 7:51 and Proverbs 18:13</i></p>	<p><b>1 Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will keep our conversations and communications open for candid and forthright exchange,</li> <li>– we will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others.</li> </ul> <p><b>2 Learn about various positions on the topic of disagreement.</b></p> <p><b>3 State what we think we heard and ask for clarification before responding, in an effort to be sure we understand each other.</b></p>
<p><b>S</b>peak the truth in love</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:15</i></p>	<p><b>4 Share our concerns directly with individuals or groups with whom we have disagreements in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teachings.</b></p> <p><b>5 Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will not engage in name-calling or labelling of others prior to, during, or following the discussion.</li> </ul> <p><b>6 Share our personal experiences about the subject of disagreement so that others may more fully understand our concerns.</b></p>
<p><b>M</b>aintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace</p> <p><i>Ephesians 4:3</i></p>	<p><b>7 Indicate where we agree with those of other viewpoints as well as where we disagree.</b></p> <p><b>8 Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous and full of tension;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we will be ready to forgive and be forgiven.</li> </ul> <p><b>9 Follow these additional guidelines when we meet in decision-making bodies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– urge persons of various points of view to speak and promise to listen to these positions seriously;</li> <li>– seek conclusions informed by our points of agreement;</li> <li>– be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of those who do not agree with the majority and respect their rights of conscience;</li> <li>– abide by the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these Guidelines.</li> </ul> <p><b>10 Include our disagreement in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.</b></p>

**A**s Presbyterians, we are called to work for the “peace, unity and purity of the Church” (Book of Order) as we seek to be faithful to God’s work in the world. However, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we try to be faithful. They exist within committees, congregations, presbyteries, synods, at General Assemblies and in the national life of the denomination.

Conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements. Several of Paul’s letters address the conflicts which were common in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God’s work in the world and as we interpret scripture.

Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

At the same time, conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights, learning, and individual and corporate growth. Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and can present solutions to problems which previously had not been seen. The successful resolution of conflict can also bind people together in a powerful way.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and much advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the Guidelines in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Adopted by the 204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*