

Jesus said: "If your sister or brother sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won your sister or brother over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they refuse to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17



Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford

DIRECT DEALING POLICY

Rationale: This policy, based on the widely accepted concept of “direct dealing,” is intended to provide the members and friends of MCC Hartford, including its leadership, with guidelines for managing conflict productively. Conflict is a fact of life in human society and organizations. The local church is a human organization, and so conflict will naturally occur within the church from time to time. An organization with no conflict at all probably has no purpose at all or, at best, a very frivolous purpose. Conflict can be good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, creative or destructive. Conflict that hones the edge of an organization and keeps it mindful of and true to its purpose is healthy.

Healthy conflict is where members and friends of the church deal with their issues up front. Specific behaviors that include healthy conflict management include:

- talking directly to those with whom one is in disagreement;
- bringing substantive evidence with one’s particular viewpoint and making demands that are reasonable;
- presenting one’s viewpoint as supportive of the mission of the church and being able to show this clearly;
- demonstrating a deep love for the church, and love and respect for the leadership of the church;
- being honorable in sharing one’s viewpoint, refraining from making personal attacks on others with whom one disagrees;
- being introspective and concerned that one has correct information
- viewing oneself as working with the church leadership to find a peaceful, loving solution to the issue at hand for the good of all people concerned; and
- supporting the witness of the body evident in any vote that is taken, whether or not one is in agreement with the decision, continuing to be constructive and positive in one’s work for the common good of the church as witnessed by the body.

Unhealthy conflict is where a member, on the basis of non-substantive evidence, goes out of his or her way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in leadership positions. Persons who engage in unhealthy conflict are often referred to as antagonists.

Antagonists and situations in which unhealthy conflict occurs are usually of a small number in any congregation. However, such unhealthy conflict and antagonistic behavior have the potential to disrupt, even to destroy the mission and ministry of Christ through the people of God, as has been the experience of many of our churches in the Metropolitan Community Church. Antagonism is the primary reason that churches are unable to have steady, enduring growth and one of the major reasons for the loss of dynamic, enthusiastic leaders and pastors. Antagonism left unchecked in the church creates a negative, fearful and unhappy environment. Antagonistic people drain the leadership of their time and energy and hinder others from experiencing their involvement in the church as a joyous and blessed activity.

Policy Statement: It is the policy of MCC Hartford and its administrative bodies (Board of Directors, committees, councils, etc.) to deal directly with people regarding issues of the church and to teach all members about direct dealing. All leaders are expected to handle conflict in a healthy, loving, creative way and to expect the same from members and friends of the church. Specifically:

- Administrative bodies will refuse to deal with proposals or concerns where the proponents of such claim to represent other individuals, but are unwilling to identify these other individuals by name. Further, those individuals who are named, as well as the person said to represent them, must be present in person or present their views in writing before the proposal or concern will be considered. If the individuals are not willing to represent themselves or to be identified, the administrative body will consider the issue a “non-issue.”
- Following scriptural guidelines, persons who have a grievance or concern will be counseled to take their concern directly to the person(s) or ministry group involved in the matter. If that person or group is unable to resolve the issue, the parties may request that a mutually agreed upon third party meet with them and serve as a facilitator to help resolve the conflict. All parties must be present at this meeting. If the conflict still cannot be resolved, the parties may request that the Board of Directors assist in seeking a resolution to the conflict. Once again, all parties must be present at any meetings held for this purpose.
- The Board of Directors will deal promptly with antagonists in the church as they become aware of them. Antagonistic behavior in the church will be deemed unbecoming conduct for any member, and unacceptable conduct for anyone holding a position of ministry or administrative leadership in the church. The Board will lovingly confront any such member or leader, clearly specify how his or her behavior is unhealthy and causing disruption in the congregation, and request that a change in the behavior occur. Failure to change the behavior may result in the Board moving to remove the member or leader from the church.

Reference Material: Below are some reference books that provide more information about conflict and the management of conflict.

Managing Church Conflict, Hugh F. Halverstadt. Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1991.

Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard, David Augsburger, Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA, 1982.

Antagonists in the Church, How to Deal with Destructive Conflict, Kenneth C. Haugk, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1988.