

Conflict Resolution Covenant

*St. Michael Lutheran Church
Canton, Michigan*

Preamble

We define conflict as disagreement over church ministry, dissatisfaction with church leadership, or an argument involving two or more parties. As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, we are called to respond to conflict in words and actions that are remarkably different from the world outside our church. It is our prayer and our appeal that all members and attendees of St. Michael Lutheran Church follow Christ's example by treating each other with love and respect, seeing each other as God sees us. These are biblically mandated behaviors which give witness to our communities that we are indeed disciples of Christ (Mathew 18, John 13:34-35).

Recognizing that disagreement and conflict are an inevitable aspect of living life together, this *Conflict Resolution Covenant* seeks to establish principles and guidelines through which God will be honored by our efforts to resolve differences in love, maintaining relationships and unity within the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:2-3). Such unity and humility are further acknowledged to mean that church membership or attendance does not entitle someone to total personal satisfaction over everything happening within our community of faith.

We proclaim relationship to be our priority in conflict management and resolution, and we will strive always toward understanding and reconciliation. In doing so we will support our pastors, leaders and church staff. We will not walk away from St. Michael or each other without first practicing these Covenant principles and guidelines, and we promise to work together to overcome differences and celebrate the common ground we share in Christ. Instead of blaming others or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and faithfulness, accepting responsibility for our own contribution to conflict, and allow the concerns of all parties to be heard and understood. We will both dispense and embrace grace where we and others fall short.

Covenant Principles and Guidelines

Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance upon his grace, we commit ourselves to conflict resolution using the principles our Savior Jesus sets forth in Matthew 18, and to the following guidelines and standards of behavior:

1. We will pray and reflect on our personal concerns to discern if they actually warrant action and discussion.
2. We will overlook minor offenses.
3. In all interactions with each other, we will respect different ideas and views, allow others to be heard, and express any disagreement with civility and Christian love.
4. We will address disagreements and conflicts as soon as possible, recognizing that the longer it takes to address disagreements the harder it becomes to bridge differences.
5. We will avoid anger, disparaging comments and inappropriate language.
6. We will personally refrain from gossip in all its forms as behavior dishonoring to our Lord Jesus (James 4:11-12). Gossip is a subtle and ambiguous poison, and is especially dangerous because it so often masquerades as concern for others. We will be on alert against this behavior in others whenever "secret information" is being circulated. We will walk away from

conversations where someone not present is being disparaged, and advise gently that concerns and complaints are better discussed one-on-one between parties directly involved or responsible.

7. When parties have a concern or conflict which cannot be overlooked, those parties will meet together, face to face, to discuss the matter, improve understanding, and seek to reconcile (Matthew 18:15). If a concern or a complaint is about a pastor, leader, or staff member of St. Michael, our initial step will always be to discuss the matter directly with the individual involved.
8. If the concern or conflict involves a staff member, leader, or pastor and is not resolved through direct one-on-one communication, the concerned member or attendee may choose to involve the Lead Pastor or a Mutual Ministry Team member in a subsequent meeting – once again seeking to reconcile (Mathew 18:16). In all circumstances, confidentiality must be respected and gossip must be avoided.
9. Once further discussion(s) involving the parties and the Lead Pastor or a Mutual Ministry Team member have occurred, and if the member or attendee of St. Micheal continues to feel their concern is not being adequately addressed, then that party must prayerfully determine if they can tolerate the situation as it stands. If not, in keeping with Mathew 18:17 the member or attendee should then consult with the Mutual Ministry Team. We recognize Mathew 18:17 in this context as calling for participation of the church team whose purpose embraces conflict resolution, and not involvement of the congregation-at-large in a public shaming exercise.
10. After consultation with the Mutual Ministry Team has occurred, if the concerned party continues to feel dissatisfied, then once again they must prayerfully determine if they can tolerate the situation. If not, then the member or attendee will consider finding a new congregation with which to affiliate. If all efforts at resolution and reconciliation fail, any party wishing to leave the church fellowship will do so lovingly, without rancor or bitterness (1 John 2:10).
11. Concerns involving sexual misconduct of a pastor, leader, or staff person must be directed only to the Lead Pastor and Congregation President, who will then take appropriate action in consultation with the Mutual Ministry Team and (if necessary) LCMC leadership. If the accusation involves the Lead Pastor, the concern will be directed to the Congregation President and Vice-President.
12. At no time is it acceptable to discuss complaints or concerns about staff members, leaders, or pastors with others not identified above. Complaints or concerns of this nature are very personal to both the concerned individual and to the one whose behavior that concern is fixed upon.

Consequence of Violating this Covenant

Any member or attendee of St. Michael who expresses concerns or complaints outside these guidelines will be counseled by the Lead Pastor and/or a designee of the Executive Board. If the principles and guidelines of this Covenant have been offended to the degree that the mission of St. Michael has been or could be compromised, the offending party will be asked to discontinue attending St. Michael Lutheran Church.