



**Mennonite
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A Community of Anabaptist
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**Congreso
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**Conférence
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d'Eglises Anabaptistes

Report

Guidelines for Determining MWC Response to Internal Conflicts of Member Churches

Drafted by Peace Commission

Approved by MWC General Council, May 2012

Revisions approved by MWC Executive Committee, May 2013

Focusing the Agenda

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ... (1 Corinthians 12:26-27). All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Conflict in church life is a normal thing. In retrospect it is often seen as having been a maturing and growth process. Often, too, conflict is an opportunity dressed in the clothes of a burden. But when burdens are on our shoulders, they are heavy. When one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. That is why the Apostle Paul teaches that burdens are meant to be borne together with others. Indeed, he says, it is the law of Christ to do so. We have been reconciled by God and in turn we are called to a ministry of reconciliation.

Many conflicts do not require third-party intervention; there are enough internal burden-bearers to resolve the conflict, and the burdens can be borne close to where the stress has been generated.

But sometimes conflicts get worse rather than better. In such circumstances, there may come a time when those who are supposed to help bear the burden are actually part of the burden itself. In such cases it is wise to find others, a bit more distant, to help to relieve the burden of particular conflicts.

Recommendation

The Peace Commission recommends that:

When MWC becomes aware that a member church is in a situation of significant conflict, MWC may be called to contribute to a peace building and healing process, taking seriously the following guidelines:

1. When a member-church sends a formal request to MWC for third-party intervention in a conflict situation, MWC Staff will conduct a preliminary investigation to determine the degree of conflict experienced by the church and the levels of support represented by the request. After the preliminary assessment, the Executive Committee of MWC may

recommend that staff involve Peace Commission resources for further action.

2. In cultures where it is unlikely that a formal request would be formulated, in spite of serious conflict, a signal of significant conflict problems may come through other channels. In these cases as well, the General Secretary should take steps to make a preliminary assessment. Again, the Executive Committee may recommend that staff make use of Peace Commission resources to follow up for further action.
3. MWC reserves the right to not pursue involvement if the preliminary investigation would indicate that:
 - a) The conflict is not affecting the entire member-church;
 - b) There has not been sufficient effort made to resolve the conflict by alternative means. MWC assumes that before it is called upon to help, the member-church involved will already have expended significant effort to resolve the conflict internally or through regional mediators or facilitators. MWC would not be a “first responder” to conflict situations. In this sense, MWC would try to apply the Matthew 18 model to determine the appropriateness of its own involvement.
 - c) MWC does not have the capacity to follow through as the situation would require.
 - d) Requests are coming from individual leaders or congregations of the member-church.
4. Process for involvement. Requests should be sent to the General Secretary of MWC. After the preliminary assessment, the Executive Committee of MWC may then forward this request to the Peace Commission for further action.
5. MWC can potentially act in many different roles and at many different levels in conflicts: Observer and Listener, Facilitator, Mediator, Circle of friends, Accompanier, Consultant. The level of intervention and the kind of role would be clarified in dialogue with the conflicted parties.
 - a) MWC would not normally “take charge” of mediating or arbitrating a conflict.
 - b) MWC would need to consider its capacity for involvement in terms of expertise, available personnel, finances, and time.
6. The financial costs of intervention would need to be borne by the member church requesting help. Exceptions to this would need to be negotiated.

MWC would consider capacity building in conflict transformation in those cases where a longer term presence is needed and requested

The role of the Peace Commission is to act as a primary resource in support of staff, as recommended by the MWC Executive Committee. Other resources, including the resources of the other MWC Commissions, may also be involved.