

## Conflict in the Church

Elders, staff, lay leaders, members, and attendees of Church of the Open Door may experience relational conflict within the community at some time. Conflict is a normal part of healthy, growing relationships and is an opportunity for personal and community growth and transformation. However, if not handled in a direct, humble and prayerful manner, conflict can bring division within the community of faith and discredit the name of Christ in the eyes of the wider community.

It is expected that all who attend or participate in ministry at Church of the Open Door deal with conflict in a manner consistent with Jesus' command in Matthew 18:15-20. Generally, grievances should be dealt with directly and privately between the parties involved before others are brought into confidence regarding the situation. No person should participate in a discussion regarding a conflict without first checking to see if the parties directly involved have attempted to resolve it. All rumors and potentially damaging second-hand information should be checked out directly.

If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached through direct interaction, then the person seeking resolution should ask a lay minister or pastor who has some relationship or authority relative to the other individual, for assistance in resolving the issue.

## Partnership of Women and Men in Ministry

We believe the Bible teaches that God created men and women and they equally bear His image (Genesis 1:27). God's intention was for them to share oneness and community (Genesis 2:23-24), even as the Godhead experiences oneness within the Trinity. Each had a direct relationship with God and they shared jointly the responsibilities of rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Genesis 1:26-28). However, human oneness was shattered by the Fall. The struggle for power and the desire to "rule over" another is part of the result of human sin. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

It is God's intention for his children to experience the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that old divisions and hierarchies between genders and races are not to be tolerated in the church, where all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

In the formation of the church at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men exercise prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2:17-18; I Corinthians 11:4-5; I Peter 2:9-10). Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all members of the New Community sovereignly, without giving anyone preferential treatment based on gender (Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:7,11). Every believer is to offer her or his gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8; I Peter 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to quench the work of the Spirit.

## **Baptism – Adult**

At Open Door, the Bible is the source of our beliefs, including our views on baptism. Throughout the New Testament, baptism is the means by which followers of Christ are identified.

We believe baptism is an important and vital step in the formation of Christ in us. Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17) and commanded all who believe in him to be baptized (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, practiced by individuals who are fully devoted followers. It is a public profession of your faith that signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection and our fellowship with his church. In the New Testament, when a person believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she was baptized.

Baptism does not produce salvation in the person being baptized because salvation comes through faith in Christ. “So through baptism, we were buried with Him in death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, so we too should live an entirely new life” (Romans 6:4; II Corinthians 5:17)

We believe the immersion mode of baptism best illustrates the work of Christ. While validating the convictions of Christians who have a different understanding, the only form of baptism we practice is believers’ baptism by immersion. We invite those who have been baptized as infants to re-affirm their baptism through immersion. When infants are baptized, the intent of their parents is to bring them up in the Christian faith and life so they will become a follower of Christ. A believers’ baptism reaffirms a parents’ original desire for their child’s life and expresses the individual’s choice to follow Christ.

## **Baptism – Child**

Throughout the Bible there are several references to children, the development of their faith and capacity to believe. We desire and pray that children will make a decision to believe in Christ. A child’s decision to believe in Christ is not diminished by his or her age or childlike faith. Parents and guardians have a responsibility to affirm a decision that is appropriate for a child’s stage of faith development. When a child expresses a sincere desire to be baptized, serious consideration needs to be given to their desire.

## **Child Dedication**

We believe that child dedication is an invitation to the Spirit of God to work in the heart and life of a child, to bring him or her to faith in Christ. Dedication does not produce salvation, but is the beginning of the journey toward faith. For Christian parents, child dedication is a sacred act of intentionally placing their child in the hands of the loving God. By dedicating their child they are affirming that only in God will their child find fullness of life.

In the Bible we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and told his disciples to welcome them. We believe that bringing a child to others in the faith community for prayer and blessing affirms the importance of the relationship between family and the church. As a church we desire to bless children and stand with a parents desire to see their child grow in faith and the knowledge of the Lord. We pray with families for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to raise their children in love and truth.

## **The Sanctity of Human Life**

Church of the Open Door firmly believes that all life is sacred and is, in its broadest definition, prolife. The fetus, infant, child, youth, adult, elderly, disabled, variety of races, poor, rich - all humans born and unborn, are bearers of God's image. We support personal and social responsibility for all human life.

## **Marriage and Sexual Purity**

Church of the Open Door believes that marriage is sacred and represents the relationship between Christ and the believer (Ephesians 5:22-33). Therefore, marriage can only exist within the bonds of moral commitment and be sustained in an environment of purity and holiness. The heterosexual union expresses the plan of God for marriage and expresses the nature of God.

We believe that sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage is sin. God's plan for a strong marriage requires living within the Biblical boundaries of moral fidelity. We also believe that singles are to live out their lives within the Biblical boundaries of abstinence.

## **Divorce and Remarriage**

Because God has established marriage as an indissoluble union, and since it is an earthly copy of the relationship between God and His people, it is to be kept inviolate. However, because of the fallenness of human nature, the Scriptures permit divorce in the following cases as an accommodation to human sin for the protection of the innocent party:

- Divorce for the cause of immorality - with the understanding that the obligation to maintain or reinstate the marriage may not be imposed upon the betrayed spouse.
- Divorce for desertion - desertion being defined as behavior equivalent to abandonment of the marriage relationship. In such cases, the betrayed or abandoned spouse is not bound. He or she is free to remarry in the Lord (though seeking repentance and reconciliation should always be the first recourse).

The remarriage of believers may not be approved when:

- Divorce is being used as a vehicle to seek a different mate, since such pre-intent makes the divorce adulterous.
- There is no evidence of repentance and brokenness over the circumstances that caused the divorce.
- Restoration of the original marriage remains a viable option.

The above concerns do not apply to divorces that have occurred before conversion.

In light of the above, each case of divorce or remarriage is dealt with on an individual basis from the perspective of God's inexhaustible capacity to forgive human sin and to restore broken lives. Church of the Open Door believes that a new relationship should not be pursued until the potential of a healthy reconciliation has been exhausted and time for personal recovery has

passed. Therefore, we recommend that premarital counseling and class process not begin until at least one year has elapsed from the time the divorce was made (legally) final. We strongly encourage couples to go through a divorce recovery program before seeking enrollment in remarital education.

## Christian Giving

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, chapter 14, Abraham personified the spirit of giving that is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. We have come to refer to this spirit or attitude toward giving as the “spirit of the tithe,” and it is characterized by the following:

### 1. A belief that everything I have belongs to God.

Abraham said, “Lord God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, everything I have belongs to you....” In this spirit, Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to the Lord because a tenth in that culture was symbolic of the whole. The Scripture teaches that we are caretakers of the earth and its resources which belong to God, and we will be held accountable for how we use these gifts.

In the Old Testament God required the Israelites to give a considerable amount, much of it the first fruits of their harvest, to symbolize their gratitude, their dependence, and their trust in Him to provide for them. This discipline of giving was designed to keep their devotion centered on God as their loving provider, rather than on the material things themselves which lead to idolatry and greed. This required giving was also the means by which the needs of the people as a nation were provided for.

In the New Testament this principle of giving remains the same. The parables of Jesus repeatedly illustrate that we are not owners but stewards and heirs, entrusted with the resources of the kingdom of God. We will be held accountable for how we manage these gifts. The discipline of giving continues to keep our focus on God as our loving provider and our only hope both spiritually and physically, and breaks the bondage of materialism (idolatry) and greed. The discipline of giving a tithe is not for God’s benefit, but for ours. God has need of nothing, but he wants us to be in relationship with Him and with others. Giving generously and sacrificially reconnects us to our dependence on God and His gifts to us; it also connects us with the needs and lives of others.

In the New Testament, the discipline of giving is also the means through which the needs of the people in the community of faith are met. We are commanded to care and provide for one another, for our spiritual leaders, and for the poor. What is not needed to provide and care for our families is to be used to provide for and minister to the needs of others, the church, and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

This belief has practical applications for how we live as believers. First, we must endeavor to live simply, and without debt as much as possible so that we are free to give and to go where God calls us. Second, we give, not only of our money, but also of our time, our talents, our expertise, our bodily strength and energy in service to God, who gave all of Himself to us. Third, we give priority in giving to the church as the community or family that cares for us, like we care for our own families, and we give to other organizations and individuals seeking to minister to the needs of others so that the sacrificial giving message of the Gospel is declared in both word and deed. Fourth, a very practical, legitimate, biblical way to affirm and maintain this “spirit of the tithe” is to tithe - to give a tenth as a symbol of the whole.

## 2. A celebratory attitude of gratitude.

As Romans 12:1 instructs, we give everything we have - our very selves - in response to the great mercy and love of God which He pours out on us in Jesus Christ. For a believer the act of giving is one of deep thanksgiving and praise. It is an acknowledgment and celebration of our dependent relationship with God and his generous and extravagant provision. It is an expression of our faith and an act of worship.

## Statement of Faith (*Expanded*)

### THE BOOK

**I. The Bible** - We believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

### THE CHARACTERS

**II. The Trinity** - We believe in one God who is equal Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the eternal community of perfect love. God's love is freely and graciously revealed through God's activity in the creation, salvation and promised future consummation of the world.

**III. The Son, Jesus** - We believe God's love is definitively revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, lived a life of complete surrender to the Father, was crucified, died, buried and bodily resurrected to reconcile the world to God and give new life to those who by faith participate in his death and resurrection.

**IV. The Holy Spirit** - We believe the Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin and reveals Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gives the life of Christ to those who repent of sin and trust in Him. The Holy Spirit sanctifies and empowers those who believe.

**V. Humankind** - We believe that all persons are created in the image of God, and that, among other things, this means that all persons are designed for fellowship with God. We believe that all persons are sinners estranged from God and in need of salvation.

### THE PLOT

**VI. Salvation** - We believe that all who receive the message of Jesus Christ and trust in him are baptized into his death and raised to new life in him; these are made participants in the eternal life and perfect fellowship of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Water baptism and the sharing of the Lord's Supper are the two commands of Jesus Christ given to the Church as powerful and active symbols of his life and message.

**VII. The Church** - We believe that although it has multitudes of diverse expressions, there is one universal Christian Church consisting of all who receive the good news of Jesus Christ. This good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the source of the Church's existence and the basis of its life.

**VIII. The Future** - We believe that all human beings will be bodily resurrected when Christ returns in glory to bring human history to its climax. Those who have been reconciled to God through Christ will be resurrected to eternal life and fellowship with God. Those who have chosen to reject the salvation of God through Christ will be resurrected to judgment and eternal separation from God.