

## Behavioral Covenant - Decorah Covenant Church - August 2009

A behavioral covenant is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by the congregation and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline. The behavioral covenant answers the question, "How will we behave / how will we live together when we don't understand each other and when we don't agree?" - Gil Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations*

**The Premise** - We recognize that disagreement and conflict are inevitable parts of human interaction, even in the Church. Healthy churches, therefore, are not characterized by a lack of conflict but by the manner in which they deal with conflict. Furthermore, the successful resolution of conflict by Christians demonstrates our commitment to living within the value system of the Kingdom of God and brings glory to God.

### **The Biblical Principles for Interactions**

Matthew 7:12 says "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 18:15-17 says: <sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup>But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 5:23-24 says: "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."

Ephesians 4:29 says: " Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear."

### **A. The Practical Application of Biblical Principles**

- I understand that we will not always agree.
- I will speak about others in ways that they would recognize as loving and honoring them.
- I will offer my opinions with charity and humility.
- I will be respectful of the offices of the church.
- I will be willing to accept correction from others.
- I will seek out reconciliation wherever it is needed.

### **B. The Process for Resolution of Misunderstandings and Conflict**

The church leadership seeks to provide a safe, healthy process by which to deal with the inevitable misunderstandings and conflicts that arise between individuals.

The following outline defines the steps to be followed if there is misunderstanding and/or conflict between individuals within the church. The process springs from Matthew 18 and provides a way for Christians to resolve conflict and restore relationship. ***(It is important to note that allegations of sexual misconduct are***

***to be reported immediately to the pastor or another church leader for resolution under the sexual misconduct investigation protocol.)***

Decorah Covenant Church commits to doing the following:

1. The Church will always encourage persons who have an issue with another (including the pastor) to go directly to that person with their concerns. If there is no resolution, the matter should be brought to a trusted member of the body who can be expected to be objective and to help seek reconciliation. If there is still no resolution, the matter should be brought to a member of the Council's Executive Committee.

2. The Executive Committee (pastor, church chair, vice chair, and council secretary) will do the following:

A. Meet with both parties individually and hear their concerns.

B. Encourage both parties to pray for God to help them understand their own responsibility for the conflict, and to restore their relationship.

Matthew 7:3-5: <sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but <sup>4</sup>do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

C. Call upon both parties to meet together and resolve their differences. If this fails, the Executive Committee will recommend mediation.

D. Assign a mediator to meet with both parties and seek a resolution. If this fails, the Executive Committee will recommend arbitration.

E. Assign an arbitrator (mutually acceptable to both parties) to hear the complaints and make a decision as to a satisfactory outcome. If this fails, the Executive Committee will recommend to the Council that action be taken by the Church Body.

F. The Council will determine how to bring the matter to the Church Body for resolution or to impose discipline upon the offending parties, always with the purpose of bringing about restoration.

### **C. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

Conflict resolution among Christians is about resolving disputes and restoring relationships, just as Christ has done for us. Therefore, we will expect that when the misunderstanding and conflict has been resolved both parties will experience the joy of Christ in their restored relationship.

**Colossians 3:12-17:** <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.