

## **Process For Dealing With Concerns Raised About Staff or Others In The Church**

### **Process Basis**

Matthew 18:15-18 "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Before we get into it, people are always quick to point out that this says "sin" and "another believer". I have found that people usually do believe that they have some offense to resolve and that they have been wronged. I also believe that this process works better than any other approach whether or not actual sin is involved and whether or not the other person is a believer. This is why it is referred to as the basis for the process.

### **The Process**

What will be our approach when we get any form of correspondence (verbal, email, phone call, carrier pigeon, there are no exceptions) from a member or attender that is critical of staff, volunteers or any other person in the church.

1. As soon as we recognize the intention to draw us into a discussion about someone else, we must stop reading/listening and ask the person if they have contacted the other person directly about this. (You can probably assume that the answer is no because it almost never is yes.) We must provide gentle corrective instruction. They need to approach people that they have issues with directly and not through other people. Listening to them is not pastoral but, rather a form of gossip. Well meaning people with a heart towards shepherding others can get sucked into conversations that are corrosive to the team and church culture.

Many times the party that feels offended needs to do a self examination before confronting someone else. We can tend to be distrustful, assume wrong motives and see things through our life experience filter. We need to ask, "Is there really an offense here? Is it possible that this is simply a misunderstanding? Is it possible that the other person had no intent to hurt and is unaware that any hurt may have been caused?" The following passages may be helpful.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Matthew 7:1-5

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

Ephesians 4:2-4 Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future.

As gently as possible, ask them to consider whether the perceived offense is worth conflict.

Proverbs 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. ESV Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs. NLT

It does not matter how many staff members deliver this message. The more the merrier, as long as we are gentle and careful not to get drawn in to gossip. This means you will make this recommendation without knowing the particulars of the situation.

There are times where it may not make sense to do this. Situations of abuse would be an exception to the rule.

2. Let's assume that a person has followed the process and gone to the person that they have issue with. Let's also assume that they didn't get the issue resolved. They still should not come to church staff. They need to seek a believer to help mediate the

situation and tell them only about that much. The person they select needs to be mature and it would be helpful if they are gifted in mediating conflict. If possible they should not be close personal friends with either party. They should then go try to resolve the issue again. If you look at verse 16 it doesn't say "get some people and give them every detail from your point of view so that they will take your side against the other person." Most of the time when people give lip service to this process they want to have a pre-meeting and only ask people to help that they know will agree with their point of view. Most of these situations are miscommunication and trust issues not real sins against each other. The general experience in the church is that the actual sins are typically gossip, bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive that result from not following the process. The "offense" that starts it all is usually someone assuming bad motives and misunderstanding something said.

3. Let's assume the people involved think that they have followed the process and it is still not resolved. Now the Elders get involved. First they must verify that the process was followed before they look at or hear anything.

4. Assuming the Elders think they should be involved, they must not meet with either party without the other party present. The only possible exception to this could be cases involving physical/sexual abuse in which case we may need to direct people to the legal authorities or report the situation. When the meeting takes place each party is allowed to explain why this has elevated to the Elders. The Elders must not have heard from or reviewed any information relative to the situation prior to the meeting. The Elders will have their own process for how to conduct the meeting.

5. Our goal needs to be restoration, resolution, and forgiveness.

Luke 17:4 Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him."

We must set the example in this area for our congregation to follow.