

# CBCGB Conflict Resolution Process

05/2017

Hebrews 12:14-15:

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

This document explains CBCGB's policy on how to resolve conflicts between individuals, whether that conflict has to do with misconduct, concerns about job competency, or others. CBCGB believes that we should follow Biblical guidelines in order to live together peaceably and exhort one another. We resist and reject secular notions of talking behind each other's backs, gossiping, and causing divisions.

Concerns around individuals or groups in the church fall broadly into two categories: misconduct (i.e. sin, morality, etc.), and performance (i.e. competency, ability to perform a role or function). The handling and escalation of these is overall similar, though with some notable differences, so will be discussed below.

## I. Misconduct

Issues of misconduct are primarily focused around Biblical sins that have been committed, or have been perceived to be committed. These could be sins against other members of the body, or issues of morality and character, etc. For examples, see Exodus 20:1-13, Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:29-30, 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

CBCGB's official reconciliation stance towards matters of sin brought up against any members of the body, including leadership, follows Matthew 18:15-17:

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

This section goes into detail about how to apply Matthew 18, but the general summary is that if you have a grievance against someone, bring it up with them. Do not just hold resentment in your heart nor (worse yet) gossip about it.

For concerns against members or leaders, we follow this escalation path, with the ultimate goal being reconciliation:

1. Members who have a grievance are encouraged to bring that concern directly to the affected individual alone, and then (if needed) with witnesses, in accordance with Matthew 18.
2. If those actions do not resolve the situation, then members can escalate by bringing the concern to the next level of authority. E.G. If the concern is against a leader, then the escalation should be the leader's manager; if a member, then a small group leader or pastor; if a deacon then the chair of the deacon board, etc.
3. The authority, after verifying that Matthew 18 has been followed, is at liberty to decide on next action, which could include dismissing the issue, handling the issue personally with the accused, escalating further, etc. If Matthew 18 has not been followed -- e.g. the accuser was unwilling to approach the accused before escalating -- then the concern may be dismissed unless there is a legitimate reason that the accuser cannot approach the accused.
4. If the issue reaches the top of the chain of command (i.e. chairman of BoE) or if an issue is raised against the chair of BoE, then the elder board as a whole will form a mediator group, minus the accused (e.g. if a concern is raised against BoE chair, then all elders except BoE chair will be considered mediators). In this capacity, the elders will act jointly; except in dire emergencies, no action should be taken without unanimous agreement among mediator group.

One clarification from Matthew 18 is our interpretation of "Tell it to the church". In NT times, "the church" is a fairly flat congregational organization that collectively assembles to enact discipline (e.g. 1Corinthians 5:4); whereas CBCGB and most modern churches have tiers of leadership to help govern and keep the peace. We have congregational votes for certain matters that affect direction of the whole church; but our leadership handles many sensitive issues without involving the congregation, and our leadership is also entrusted with handling discipline. Thus, we do not feel that it is appropriate for a member should bring an issue to the entire congregation publicly. Nor does bringing up an issue publicly lead to a good outcome in many cases; we are chiefly focused on reconciliation, whereas public shaming is moreso an act of discipline.

## II. Performance

Performance concerns are questions around competency to do a certain job or role, whether towards lay leaders, staff, or anyone in a ministry function. If the performance concern relates to misconduct or sin, see the "misconduct" section above. Otherwise, this does not fall under Matthew 18 and the goal is not "reconciliation", but rather correcting the performance concern or

clarifying the performance expectation. Note that because there is not an abundance of Biblical text that addresses this particular area, we are primarily relying on professional standards of conflict resolution, along with general Biblical tenets, in formulating this section.

We do not expect any of our servants to be perfect. And setting expectations for good performance is itself subjective; e.g. a great pianist here might be considered subpar at another church, or a certain style of piano playing may be pleasant for one person but disagreeable for another. Thus, if someone has a concern with the performance of a servant, that is not related to misconduct, he/she should bring up the concern with EITHER the servant directly or the servant's immediate leader. See the appropriate section in "Misconduct" to identify who is the servant's immediate leader; if any uncertainty, ask the Board of Elders.

Unlike the previous section, we do not mandate that the accuser bring up the concern to the accused. There are two primary practical reasons:

1. The accuser may not be in a position to judge what is a reasonable standard for performance.
2. Sometimes performance concerns are noticed by many people (e.g. a pianist makes a lot of mistakes on a song) and we do not want the accused to get inundated with a lot of negative feedback.

After the concern is brought up, it is the responsibility of the ministry leader to determine how to proceed. The leader may approach the accused to address the issue. The leader may approach the accused along with the accuser(s) to address the issue. The leader may disagree with the accuser and seek to change the accuser's point of view, without making the accused aware of the complaint. The leader may wait and see if the behavior corrects itself versus becoming a pattern. Etc. Note that because some actions may be fairly confidential -- particularly if the accused is paid staff -- the ministry leader is not obligated to tell the accuser what the follow up action is.

If the accuser is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she can either talk to the ministry leader again, or escalate to the next level of leadership. However, as best practice, CBCGB discourages escalation for performance unless the issue is a matter of extreme incompetence. Although anyone has a right to raise a concern and then escalate if the complaint is not handled to their satisfaction, this right should not be exercised lightly. Setting reasonable performance standards, and enforcing those, is the responsibility of each leader. In some cases the performance standard is subjective, so the leader needs to ultimately decide whether certain concerns are legitimate. In some cases the leader is already working with the accused but it just takes time to make significant progress on an issue. In some cases the leader would like to be more transparent about what is being done to address a concern but cannot due to confidentiality or sensitivity. Thus, as a general principle, we exhort members to extend trust to leadership at all levels even in cases where there may be disagreement with some decisions or outcomes.

As common with the “misconduct” section, if anyone has a concern with another’s performance and chooses not to bring it up with the ministry leader, then the person should hold his/her peace and not gossip, should not bring up the concern during an annual review for the first time, etc.