

# River Peacemaking Covenant

8/6/09

In response to the unfathomable love of God we have received through the peacemaking work of Jesus Christ on the Cross – our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, our adoption into His family, the sealing of the Spirit, and our anointing for ministry in His Body – we embrace His peacemaking call in our lives. (Eph. 1-2, Phil. 2, Jn 17) In the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we believe that we are called to spread the Shalom of God by following Jesus in peacemaking, extending His Kingdom, in the Church, and also in the world, as Christ's ambassadors. (Mt. 5:9, 21-26, 38-48, Jn 13:34-35, Ro. 12:14-18, Eph. 2:11-22, 2 Cor. 5:18-21)

As a result, we believe that conflict is a God-given opportunity, not an accident, not something to be avoided. We believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God in faith, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ (Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1; Jas. 1:2-4). Therefore, in response to God's call and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to "grow up into Christ" as a learning community, following Jesus in gaining the habits to live according to the following values. As God gives us wisdom and grace, we will humbly teach and promote these values and practices with all who have ears to hear.

## Exalting God

When we are in conflict we will pause and look to God and remember His presence among us in the midst of conflict. (Mt. 18:18-20) Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord who has given us an opportunity to experience His redemption, and to see Him make His Name great. (Phil 4:2-7, Jn 17, Is. 48:10-12) We will trust Him with our own interests and our reputation. We will depend on God for His forgiveness, wisdom, power, forbearance, and love as we seek to faithfully follow Jesus Christ and obey His word, maintaining a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude. (Ps. 37:1-6; Mk 11:25-26; Jn 14:15-17; Rom. 12:17-21; Col. 3:1-4; Js. 3:17-4:3; 1 Pt. 2:12).

## Examining Ourselves

Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will "first take the log out of our own eye", seeking God for our part in the conflict no matter how "right" we may feel or how much we believe the other party is at fault. (Mt. 7:1-12) We will trust in God's mercy and justice and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts — confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Pr. 28:13; Mt. 7:3-5; Lk 19:8; Col. 3:5-14; 1 Jn 1:8-9).

## Engaging Others

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses. We will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. (Mt 18:14-16, Lk 17:2-4, Gal. 6:1-2, Eph. 4:15) When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a Biblical manner. When there is hardening of heart and no repentance we will follow God's Word regarding church discipline, always holding out hope for restoration of trust and fellowship. (Pr. 19:11; Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-6:8; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Js. 5:9).

Recognizing that Jesus has called us to live out His peacemaking ministry in the world, we will with a learning posture, wisely and courageously engage in peacemaking witness in our community and cross-culturally. (Mt. 5:11-16, Jn. 20:21-22, Acts 16:16-40, 1 Cor. 9:19-27, 10:31-11:1)

## Entering Biblical Community

Instead of accepting compromise, keeping our distance from members we don't "connect" with, and just allowing stressed relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine Shalom and reconciliation – seeking first to understand, then be understood, forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. We will seek creative third way solutions to conflicts, just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences. We will seek to synergize across differences, recognizing that God has called us to grow into one Body, joined together. (Eph. 4:15-16) Where wounding has occurred and trust has been broken, we will seek appropriate reconciliation in God's timing with the counsel of the Body. (Mt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 2:4-11).

By God's grace we will live out these values together as a matter of worship and spiritual discipline. We endeavor that the River and all its ministries would be a relationally safe place where we all are challenged to follow Jesus in community. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter of getting to a specific result quickly, without messiness, but of faithful, dependent obedience here and now. And we will pray that our ministry of carrying on Jesus' peacemaking ministry in this world will bring praise to Him and lead others to know His immeasurable love and the joy unspeakable of sharing in His Kingdom. (Mt 25:14-21; Jn 13:34-35; Rom. 12:18; 1 Pt 2:19, 4:19)

### **Communication and Conflict Practices**

The following practices will guide our relationships with one another. These are only of assistance as we live out the law of love, walking in the Spirit. We will also be open to God leading us to change or amend these practices as we journey together towards Christ-likeness.

#### **Peacemaking in Communication**

1. We will be present, real, and honest with each other versus remaining silent, checking out, and telling white lies in order to maintain a facade of smooth relationships. (Eph. 4:15, 25-27)
2. We will refrain from gossip, backbiting, and slander. We will practice the discipline of holding our tongue. (Life Together, Ch. 4) If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them (Eph 4:29-32).
3. When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously, in love, with the goal of serving and restoring the neighbor, rather than putting them down or just stopping their annoying behavior (Pr. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal 6:1).
4. When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Pr. 9:8, 15:32).
5. When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as He has forgiven us (Mt. 18:21-35; Eph. 4:32).
6. We will commit ourselves to a path of healing and repentance from sinful and unhealthy communication and conflict styles we have inherited or become habituated in, e.g. shame, defensiveness, rage, passive aggression, walking out of meetings, etc. (Col 3, Eph. 4:17-32)
7. We will recognize and understand direct and indirect communication styles, not excusing harshness under the guise of being direct nor excuse conflict avoidance under the guise of being indirect.
8. We will recognize power dynamics between us and in the world and practice Jesus' upside-down way of servant leadership. We will recognize systemic power and injustice as well as the manipulation of claiming "victim" status (Mk 10:32-45, Acts 6:1-7).

#### **Peacemaking in Conflicts**

1. We will forebear minor offenses and believe the best about each other until the facts prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7). We will accept one another as God's work in progress vs. expecting others to be fully sanctified now. (Ro. 15:1-8; Eph. 4:1-3)
2. When an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Mt 5:23-24, 18:15). We will prioritize face-to-face communication in serious matters, voice-to-voice communication in less-serious matters, and will avoid email and other electronic medium for reconciliation communication.

3. If we need help to get clear before we confront someone, we will talk only with trustworthy counselors who can guide us into God's highest way, who will not spread what we share with them, who will not be poisoned towards the other party, who will "side" with us and with God (Pr. 11:13, 26:20).
4. In conflict situations, we will use active listening to understand one another and "I statements" without making an idol of human emotions or desires.
5. Conflict happening in a team or small group will be reconciled in the team or small group. Conflict between individuals will be reconciled between individuals. (Mk 8:31-38; Gal 2:11-16)

### **Assisted Peacemaking**

1. I will take the initiative with Christians in my circle of influence who are not living in peace with other believers. I will admonish those who are engaged in attack or avoidance responses to conflict and urge them to be reconciled with their brother or sister (Phil. 4:2-7, Gal. 6:1-4)
2. When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a staff member or church leader, we will look to other leaders of the same stature for assistance.
3. When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or certified conciliators, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
4. If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will obey God's command not to go into the civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Instead, we will submit the matter to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries ([www.Peacemaker.net](http://www.Peacemaker.net)).
5. When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through Biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
6. If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
7. When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline. (To be established by the board of directors)

### **Sources**

- 1) "Our Values for River Staff Communication", 10/06
- 2) "Our Values for River Staff Conflict Resolution", 10/06
- 3) "The Peacemaker's Pledge", Peacemaking Principles, Peacemaker Ministries. 2004.
- 4) "Relational Commitments", Peacemaker Ministries.