

The Work of the Church

is Work in Community

Communities necessitate structured agreements as well as a plan for what to do when we fail at those agreements.

This document provides some examples of Codes of Conduct as a starting place for community agreements.

There are many voices in the church which are passionate and some even bring forward necessary dissonance. Everyone does not agree. Frustrations, misunderstandings and conflict are just a few of the human markings which can diminish community effectiveness. But, these passions are things we can do something about. And, acknowledging our struggles can actually build up a community. Based on Matthew 18 consider formally adopting some parameters and guidelines for how your community will respect and communicate with one another. Each of the following pages offers a different starting place for your community.

Fifteen years ago Charles W. Christian, minister at Canby Chapel (Church of the Nazarene in Canby, OR) offered these suggestions:

- + **If you have a problem with me, come to me** (privately).
- + **If I have a problem with you, I'll come to you** (privately).
- + **If someone has a problem with me and comes to you, send them to me.** (I'll do the same for you.)
- + **If someone consistently will not come to me, say, "Let's go to together."** (I will do the same for you.)
- + **Be careful how you interpret me—I'd rather do that.** On matters that are unclear, do not feel pressured to interpret my feelings or thoughts. It is easy to misinterpret intentions.
- + **I will be careful how I interpret you.**
- + **If it's confidential, don't tell.** (This especially applies to board meetings.) If you or anyone comes to me in confidence, I won't tell unless (a) the person is going to harm himself/herself, (b) the person is going to physically harm someone else, (c) someone vulnerable has been physically or sexually abused. I expect the same from you.
- + **I do not read unsigned letters or notes.**
- + **I do not manipulate; I will not be manipulated; do not let others manipulate you.** Do not let others try to manipulate me through you. I will not preach "at" you on Sunday mornings. I will leave conviction to the Holy Spirit (who does it better anyway).
- + **When in doubt, just say it.** The only dumb questions are those that don't get asked. We are a family here and we care about each other, so if you have a concern, pray, and then (if led) speak up. If I can answer it without misrepresenting something or breaking a confidence, I will.

Charles W. Christian's article, [10 Rules for Respect](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1999/summer/9l3055.html), first appeared in *Christianity Today* on July 1st, 1999

(<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1999/summer/9l3055.html>).

Eric Law's work with the Kaleidoscope Institute offers:

Respectful Communications Guidelines

R = take **R**esponsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use **E**mpathetic listening

S = be **S**ensitive to differences in communication styles

P = **P**onder what you hear and feel before you speak

E = **E**xamine your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep **C**onfidentiality

T = **T**rust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

The [Kaleidoscope Institute](#) is the host for Rev. Eric H. F. Law's work which seeks to nourish health and vitality in communities of diversity.

Note especially [Respectful Communication Guidelines](#)

(http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-02_Kaleidoscope_Newsletter.pdf).

Components of Nonviolent Communication (**NVC**)

While **NVC** is much more than a communication model, these components provide a structural concept of the process that leads to giving and receiving from the heart.

HONESTLY EXPRESSING how I am and what I would like without using blame, criticism or demands

EMPATHICALLY RECEIVING how another is and what he/she would like without hearing blame, criticism or demands

Whether expressing or receiving, **NVC** focuses attention on four pieces of information:

OBSERVATIONS—Objectively describing what is going on without using evaluation, moralistic judgment, interpretation or diagnosis

FEELINGS—Saying how you feel (emotions and body sensations) about what you have observed without assigning blame

NEEDS—The basic human needs that are or not being met and are the source of feelings

REQUESTS—Clear request for actions that can meet needs

The resources and trainings of NVC are as elemental or extensive as your setting could use. Some websites to consider:

Center for NonViolent Communication (<http://www.cnvc.org>)

NonViolent Communication (<http://www.nonviolentcommunication.com>)

Rose City NVC (<http://rosecitynvc.org>)

Wise Heart PDX (<http://www.wiseheartpdx.org>)

Or have your community generate your own specific list together ...

*When it comes to
how we talk with one another – how we engage one another ...*

Some Things to Reach for ...

- ① ... where people work together to tell a story or a concern.
- ② ... where there is permission to say anything – including hard things.
- ③ ... where there is mutual respect – listening and trying to understand – not pushing information but trying to draw out information instead.
- ④ ... where things that others say are not taken personally and where guilt is not an underlying theme.
- ⑤ ... where a person feels heard and their comments are acknowledged as evidence by affirming non-verbal language (eye contact, nodding of the head, leaning forward, etc) as well as by repeating back what has been heard and even expanding the narrative and its implications.
- ⑥ ... where feelings are offered and tied to needs.
- ⑦ ... where it is OK to take a break and come back to the conversation later.
- ⑧ ... where there is an obvious tone of kindness in the conversation.
- ⑨ ... where an “inside voice” is used.

Some Things to Avoid ...

- ❶ ... when people do not listen and talk over others who are talking – interrupting.
- ❷ ... where persuasion is more important than understanding for instance when a person’s narrative rambles on and on to dominate the conversation or to keep talking only for the sake that maybe a person will start to make sense.
- ❸ ... where the conversation gets heated or angry and persons cry, when things get loud and such difficulties are not acknowledged and dealt with.
- ❹ ... where absolute language is implied: “you never” “you always” “why can’t I ever.”
- ❺ ... when some of the people shut-down and stop participating in the discussion by being dismissive, not paying attention, closing the conversation.
- ❻ ... using dismissive non-verbal communication: rolling of the eyes, leaning away, looking away, shaking the head, walking away, pillow over the head, sighing, attention is redirected to phone or nails etc., crossing one’s arms.
- ❼ ... when guilt is a theme – or – people ignore what is being said – or – when someone is overtly physical.