

## **Guidelines for Dealing with Conflict**

*Adopted by Hosanna Lutheran Church Council May 19, 1998*

**This policy-level statement on dealing with criticism is provided as a model or pattern which can be adopted for use in a congregation. This type of instrument can be especially helpful in assisting a congregation to deal with critical comments in an appropriate and healthful manner.**

Coping with criticism in an appropriate manner can be a means for building up the Body of Christ. If not dealt with in a structured and predictable way, criticism when denied or ignored becomes a destructive and draining force.

**As a congregational leader please attempt to comply with the following policy and practice:**

1. All members are affirmed in their right to express their opinions about the mission, programs and other dynamics of congregational life, including the personnel.
2. All congregational leaders need to remember that an opinion expressed by a participant in the life of the congregation is just that – an opinion.
3. The congregation operates with a “direct democracy” form of governance, which allows the sharing of opinions directly with the called, employed, elected and appointed leaders in the congregational system. Members are invited and encouraged to attend meetings within the congregation’s system.
4. When there is an occasion for a member of the congregation to share an opinion, concern, question or complaint with someone on the leadership team (clergy, other staff, elected or appointed members) the following response should be used, *“What would you like for me to do with what you have just shared with me?”*

If the response is *“Oh . . . nothing. I just thought you ought to know that I (we, they) are upset about what is (not) going on . . .”*, then the leader receiving the information should intentionally indicate that nothing is going to be done with the comment; and, that the comment will be forgotten. **(This is a very important response to the person unwilling to proceed in one of the following ways. It prohibits the development of the impression that just sharing an opinion will produce a response which is acceptable to the petitioner.)**

If the response is that an outcome is or was expected by sharing the comment . . . then the leader will instruct the person about how to communicate within the system.

- 5a. Matters concerning functional issues (programs, facilities or organizational structure):  
*If the issue or concern is related to the “system”, the person sharing the matter should be invited and encouraged to bring the information or opinion to the next meeting of the congregational group directly responsible.*
- 5b. Matters related to relational (interpersonal) issues (clergy, other staff or member-to-member):  
*If the issue or concern is related to personnel or other interpersonal matters the person sharing the matter should be invited and encouraged to confer with the appropriate committee (Staff Support, Personnel, Pastor/Parish Committee, etc.).*
6. If the person sharing the concern does not desire to make an appearance or to communicate with the appropriate group within the congregational system, the leader should ask for permission to use his/her name in reporting the issue. If permission is not granted, then the leader will say, “I

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*am sorry but I will not be able to report or share your concern since we do not deal with anonymous comments.”* If permission to use the petitioner’s name is granted, the leader will share information with the appropriate group or person in the system with the person’s name included in the report.

- 7. The minutes of the board, committee or group receiving a member concern will make mention of the topic in the minutes of the meeting(s) at which it is discussed. Additionally, if an official action is deemed appropriate or necessary, the person who has shared the concern should be informed of the decision made with regard to the issue**