

CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMITTEE

OFFICIAL REPORT

Many congregations across our state have quietly learned to avoid their most controversial conversations as they have grown afraid of the divisive and church-splitting arguments that all too often follow. Silence on these issues can often feel like the safer, more peaceable, and even more loving option. However, not addressing them often directly comes at the cost of a tension that only compounds over time rather than disappearing.

As our committee reviewed the topics suggested, we found that a striking number revolved around one central question: “How do we deal with disagreements in the church around issues of genuine importance in a Christ-like way?” This report is an attempt to honor that question. We are not attempting to resolve every dispute that is rooted within this topic, but rather provide the resource of a spiritual foundation in how to disagree well.

The topics discussed for consideration by this committee have made it clear just how diverse, complex, and pressing these issues have become. Members sponsored conversations ranging from the growing normalization of euthanasia around the world to the growing rate of domestic violence within the country. Others pointed to the prevalence of online gambling or how we should discuss various international wars. Several pointed to the growing tension around sexuality, tolerance, and the role of the church in our political landscape.

These are not small disagreements, and the committee does not intend to minimize any one of them by setting them aside. Rather the goal is to exemplify that each of these issues asks for the church to simultaneously hold fast to a Godly conviction of what is true while maintaining strong roots in a genuine, costly love for the people on the other side of the disagreement. This is the tension that the committee’s report is attempting to address.

What Does the Bible Say About Handling Disagreement?

Scripture is full of guidance as to how to tackle disagreement within the church, offering not a path towards avoidance, but instead advocating a spiritual posture and biblical process for having these more contentious conversations.

1. Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV)

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is perhaps the greatest point of reference for all action and conversation. This depiction of what it looks like to model our lives after Christ shows us how to be sacrificial in dealing with one another, and how to always move toward unity grounded in servanthood. In the most divisive of conversations, we must root ourselves in humility and allow that to assist us in our discernment of engaging in the confrontation.

2. 2 Timothy 2:23-25 (NIV)

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...

This is good guidance for leaders when navigating difficult conversations: not every conversation or situation merits engaging. We must be able to discern which topics need to be addressed and then do so with kindness. Debates are not the time for public admonishments, but the Bible instead lays out a clear path for gracious instruction.

3. Matthew 18:15-22 (NIV)

"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. 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'" Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

These verses lay out an order of operations in handling disagreement. The goal isn't to win: it is to correct and reconcile. In this model, there is no space for gossip. Christians deal in direct, kind confrontation only. Although Jesus calls for harsh lines to be drawn from those who refuse correction or reconciliation, he also reminds Peter that if that person should come around, we are to forgive and restore them endlessly.

4. Ephesians 4:14-15 (NIV)

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

These conversations can only be successful if they are rooted in an earnest desire to direct ourselves towards God's light. We must not be deceived by worldly teachings or ideas, but instead open our hearts to others who may be speaking the truth into us. Test everything by the merit of Christ, and should you fall short in some way, be willing to be corrected in love to grow in Christ.

5. James 1:19-21 (NIV)

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

This sets the guidelines for healthy conversation: quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. This is where many good intentioned disagreements fall apart. Where ego and anger take precedent over humility and love, there is no chance for productive discourse. All actions should be guided by gentleness and kindness.

6. Philippians 4:5 (NIV)

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Quite simply, we should be known for our gentleness. Healthy conversation requires it.

7. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 (NIV)

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people here send their greetings.

Paul's final words to the Church in Corinth usher them towards unity and peace. This is important considering he used all the letter before this to address their points of division! Disagreement and tough conversation don't have to be avoided to share life in faith well: they just have to be embraced with a desire to grow deeper in Christ and closer as a community.

What Are Practical Next Steps?

In addition to the scriptural foundation, the committee wanted to elevate three accessible resources that are alleviating some of the burden placed on church leaders to orchestrate these conversations. We hope these practical guides for engaging communities in difficult areas might be able to function as a starting point for various congregations across the state.

1. Living Room Conversations – An insightful resource for taking up an important conversation with guides to discussion topics of all varieties. While this resource is not inherently faith-based, it sits very well alongside the

second resource and is an asset in assisting congregations in diving deeper into their faith.
<https://livingroomconversations.org/>

2. Covenant for Conversation – This resource from the Conference of Baptist Ministers in Massachusetts is a good baseline for charitable conversation among church leaders and members. These rules are rooted in a spirit of concern for the other and a valuing of the image of God at work in them and allow for passionate conversation alongside mutual respect. <https://conferenceofbaptistministers.com/covenant-for-conversation-1>
3. The Center for Healthy Churches – From how to move on after a pastor departs, to how to manage a potential church split, this library of online resources guides churches through the difficulties associated with disagreements in the congregation. <https://chchurches.org/church-conflict-resolution-tools/>

Conclusion

This report will not resolve every conflict within the churches of the BGAV in the years ahead, nor was that its design. Our hope is that this might instead act as a spiritual foundation and reminder that scripture does not ask our congregations to silently avoid conflict; rather, it commands us to be both honest and loving when engaging each other in prayerful discourse over differences of opinion. When disagreements come, may we rest faithfully on the promises of God's grace and handle each conversation with humility, gentleness, and kindness.

Respectfully Submitted,

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