

NORTHRIDGE
VINEYARD | CHURCH

PATHWAYS TO RECONCILIATION
Guidelines

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PATHWAYS TO RECONCILIATION Guidelines

These pathways to reconciliation guidelines can be used in processing any type of conflict, dispute, complaint, grievance or other type of concern arising in connection with activities of Northridge Vineyard Church (Northridge) or the behaviour of any employee or volunteer team member of any Northridge ministry. Any of these circumstances is a "Concern" for the purpose of these guidelines.[1]

The aim of this document is to provide a biblically based set of guidelines in the form of a process for healthy steps to reconciliation.

1. Introduction

At Northridge we seek to follow God's heart to build healthy relationships. We also recognise that difficulties in communicating can lead to a breakdown in processing problems effectively. There may be times where different perspectives lead to conflict and individuals need support to seek relational reconciliation.

Relationships are foundational to life. Our God is three beautiful, holy unified relationships. At our best, we image this truth. Yet relationships can be immensely difficult. Our world is marred by conflict at a national, community, family and interpersonal level. As Christians we understand this is a result of our turning away from God's way; of our self-focused acts rather than maintaining a focus to serve and prefer the other.

In Jesus, a new way of whole, flourishing relationships has been opened. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5 that God is reconciling the world to himself. This wonderful work is ongoing. It is God's mission. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 the characteristics of reconciled, whole relationships:

> **"**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails."

This is Jesus' way. Wonderfully, through the Cross and Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, God has made every provision for us, so that, should we choose, we have the power to live the life of love.

As a church, our central aim must be to foster this life of love in our midst. It is the strengthening of relationships characterised by love which must be our focus. This truth is embedded in our value: Community. When we are doing this well, conflict should be rare as we are being respectful and empathetic to how others might perceive our behaviour.

We believe times of disagreement and conflict can become opportunities for growth and maturity.

We believe working together and following healthy pathways of reconciliation results in God being glorified. It also allows relationships to be strengthened and the individuals involved to grow more Christ like.

Suggested Reading: Ken Sande "The Peace Maker" Baker Books 2004.

2. Scope

These guidelines apply to any type of Concern involving people 18 years and older other than:

- concerns of a criminal nature, which must be referred immediately to the appropriate law enforcement agency; and

[1] A reference to a 'Dispute' in connection with these guidelines in an Employment Agreement of a Northridge Employee is to be taken as a reference to a 'Concern'.

- concerns about suspected child abuse, which must be dealt with in accordance with the Northridge Child Protection Policy.

The guidelines are intended for use when all parties agree to participate in the process either voluntarily or under a contract (including a contract of employment). However, Northridge, by giving written notice to an employee, may elect that concerns Northridge has about the employee's performance under their Employment Agreement are not to be treated as a 'Concern' under these guidelines but instead are to be dealt with under general law principles and the terms of their Employment Agreement (excluding references to these guidelines).

Subject to any contract between the parties (including a contract of employment), the guidelines do not prevent a party seeking a legal solution in accordance with their rights.

The Northridge Code of Conduct applies to the implementation of these guidelines.

3. Foundations for Reconciliation

Foundational Bible verses for the 'Pathways to Reconciliation' process

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." **(Philippians 2:3-4, 1 Corinthians 10:24)**

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." **Romans 12:21**

"First go and be reconciled with your brother then bring your gift." **Matthew 5:23-24**

"If your brother offends you, go to your brother first in private." **Matthew 18:15**

"Be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you." **Ephesians 4:32**

Forgiveness:
We recognise the gift of forgiveness granted to all of us through Christ is our key motivator to extend forgiveness to others who hurt us. Forgiveness releases the power of God to see relationships restored.

Listening:
So often Concerns occur through miscommunication or unclear expectations and hence a major part of the process is to listen and understand the other party's thoughts and intentions. The process of 'active listening' is very helpful in ensuring a person really hears the other party's thoughts and can reflect them back to ensure the full meaning has been heard and understood.

Time: We can so often come to a time of discussion with a long list of issues. It is helpful to slow down the process by dealing with one issue at a time. This can be very helpful, showing both parties resolution is possible.
Often, very strong emotions can be associated with a Concern and hence it is important to allow time for the process to occur and not completely overwhelm others involved. Allow freedom for time out or cutting a session short, out of respect for the people involved.

Eager for resolution:
A vital beginning point for reconciliation is that both parties are eager to resolve their differences and disagreements. Both parties need to be willing to consider their own contribution to the disagreement. Scriptures such as Matt 5:23-26 certainly direct us to live in unity and harmony with other members of the church community and, not to seek this, goes against our Christian beliefs. If participation in the process of resolution is not agreed by any party, then these guidelines will not lead to a successful reconciliation. If this is the case, then the Church Board will need to be informed and their prayerful wisdom sought.

Prayer:
It should not surprise that we get spiritual opposition to attempts to grow unity and harmony in the church family. We believe prayer covering over times of resolution is important for all concerned. We ask God's help with clarity in listening, having soft hearts, willingness to take responsibility for our 'stuff', ability to apologise when necessary and the grace to forgive.

4. Northridge's commitment

Northridge believes the Church's call is to foster a fellowship of reconciliation in which all people are loved, respected, and treated with dignity.

Northridge is committed to

- ***promoting*** a safe environment for those attending or participating in worship and other Northridge activities. The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the steps to be taken should a Concern arise

- ***responding*** to Concerns on a case-by-case basis. Responses will depend on the nature of the Concern, the positions or roles of the parties involved, and the skills and expertise of those within Northridge to address and resolve the situation appropriately

- ***fostering*** foundations of safe practice including but not limited to being aware of the specific needs of the individual whose actions or words have initiated the Concern. The individual(s) must be shown respect and kindness. They must be given the opportunity before any meeting to agree on a setting for the meeting, those who will be present at the meeting and the overall agenda for the meeting. Consideration must be given as to whether an individual involved may have concerns about position, status, gender, cultural power or other personal circumstance which could impact on the meeting and steps must be taken to seek to mitigate those concerns (this may involve discussing these issues with the individual before the proposed meeting and seeking to come to an agreement on appropriate mitigating steps).

5. Principles

The following principles underpin these guidelines:

(a) All parties, support people, and others involved in the Concern must:

(i) enter a reconciliation process in good faith, committing to compassion, mercy, grace and justice in working towards an appropriate reconciliation

(ii) maintain appropriate privacy and confidentiality, both during the reconciliation process and following its conclusion. In particular, and subject to any agreement reached between the parties about confidentiality, the parties should discuss the Concern only with a very small number of trusted advisers who they are satisfied will themselves maintain confidentiality, and

(iii) declare any conflict of interest which may result in an assessment of the appropriateness of their ongoing participation in the process.

(b) Concerns should be treated seriously and sensitively and be dealt with as promptly as possible.

(c) The nature of any Concern must be documented (written down), specific, and should preferably refer to times, dates and locations of incident/s, as well as any witnesses present.

(d) The aim of the resolution process is to reach a mutually acceptable outcome which is both fair and effective, which minimises the potential for ongoing damage to relationships, and which allows the ministry of Northridge to continue effectively.

(e) All parties involved in a Concern should receive appropriate information and support to resolve the matter. This will always include providing them with a copy of these guidelines and allowing each to be accompanied by a support person during any reconciliation conversations.

(f) Concerns are to be resolved with respect to procedural fairness, whereby each party has the right to be heard, the right to be treated without bias, the right to be

informed of the concerns being raised, and the right to be provided with an opportunity to respond to those concerns.

(g) It is expected that any perceived imbalance of power by any party due to position, status, gender, cultural power or other personal circumstance be declared and treated as a relevant consideration throughout the reconciliation process.

6. Pathways to Reconciliation

The three phases of the reconciliation process are outlined below.

Phase 1: Self –managed Reconciliation

A great first step where the two parties seek to resolve the issue/s directly without the involvement of a mediator/coach/facilitator ('Facilitator').

Phase 2: Local Reconciliation (used if Phase 1 is not successful)

Where both parties go to the person who is the appropriate leadership within the church and work with that person to seek resolution.

Phase 3: Externally supported Reconciliation (used if Phase 2 is not successful or appropriate)

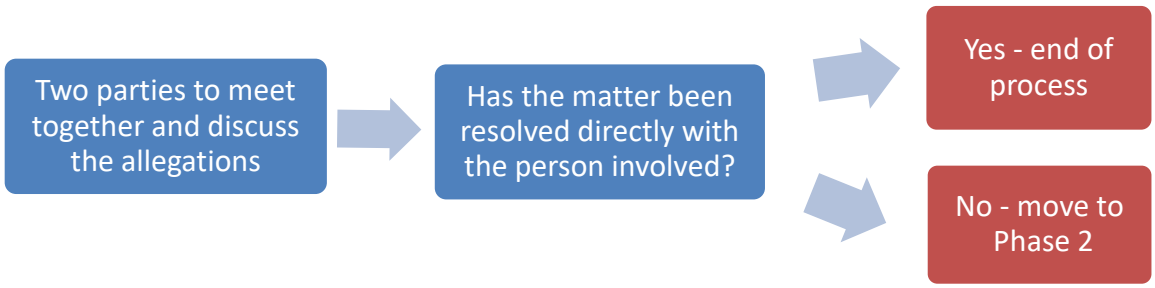
Where both parties use an external Facilitator to facilitate resolution.

Modifications can be made to this procedure which may involve proceeding directly to Phase 2 or Phase 3, or seeking external advice from, or participation, by an appropriately trained Facilitator.

The steps toward resolution outlined in these guidelines must be entered voluntarily by each party.

7. Phase 1: Self–Managed Resolution

Overview:



Procedure:

In most cases a Concern arises unintentionally and sometimes people may not realise they have acted in a way causing concern to another person. Therefore, if someone (a 'Reporter') believes circumstances have occurred giving rise to a Concern, it is important for the Reporter to tell the person whose actions have given rise to the Concern (the 'Respondent') that their actions have caused concern. This gives the Respondent the chance to reflect and modify their behaviour. Successfully navigating this step will remove the need of taking the Concern any further with these guidelines. Ideally, this discussion should occur within two weeks of the incident taking place.

If this step is too difficult to take alone, the Reporter may find a trusted friend in the Northridge community to accompany them. This person is to be a supportive companion but should not speak for the Reporter.

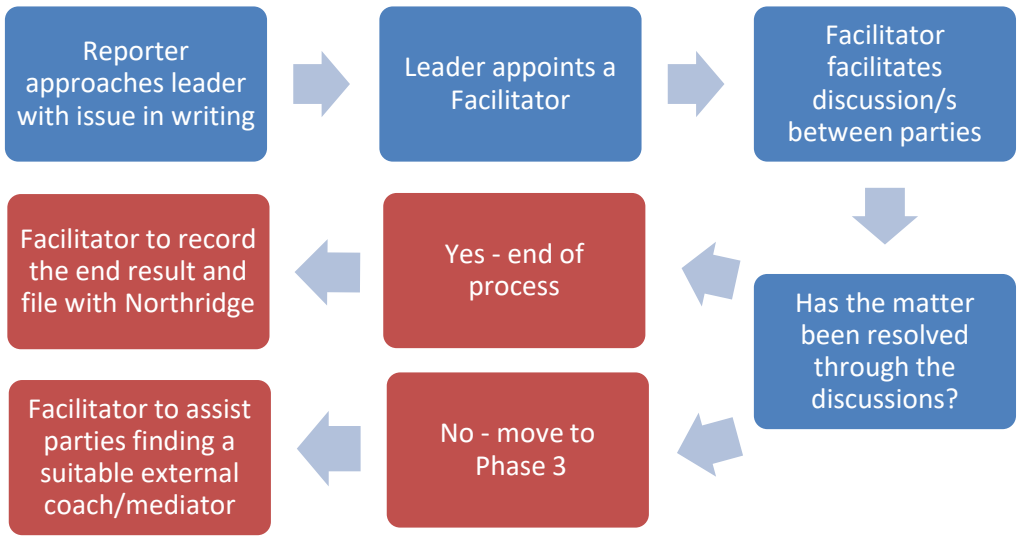
It is often helpful to write down the concern/s prior to any meeting so that the issues can be clearly identified during the discussion. Where circumstances do not prevent otherwise, the Reporter should allow the Respondent sufficient time to consider and respond to the concern/s.

The Reporter is encouraged to note the details of any attempt at self-managed resolution; including the time and place any communications occur. These details may be referred to should the matter proceed to Phase 2.

If self-managed resolution does not result in a satisfactory outcome for either party, or if the Reporter feels unable to address the Concern directly with the Respondent, the matter should proceed to Phase 2.

8. Phase 2: Local Resolution

Overview:



Procedure:

If Phase 1 does not result in an acceptable outcome, either party may refer the Concern for Local Resolution. Ideally, referral should occur within two weeks of the attempt at self-managed resolution.

The referring party should refer the matter in writing to the person they believe is the appropriate leader to whom the matter should be referred. The referral should contain specific details of the nature of the Concern, including dates, times and previous attempts at resolution.

The leader may appoint a Facilitator, who may be themself or a suitable third party within the Northridge community. The Facilitator must be acceptable to both parties.

The Facilitator must:

- inform the other party that the Concern has been referred for Local Resolution
- provide each party with a copy of these guidelines
- invite each party to nominate a support person if they so wish, and
- work with each party to arrange a time - ideally within two weeks of the referral being made - to meet for a conversation to seek to resolve the Concern.

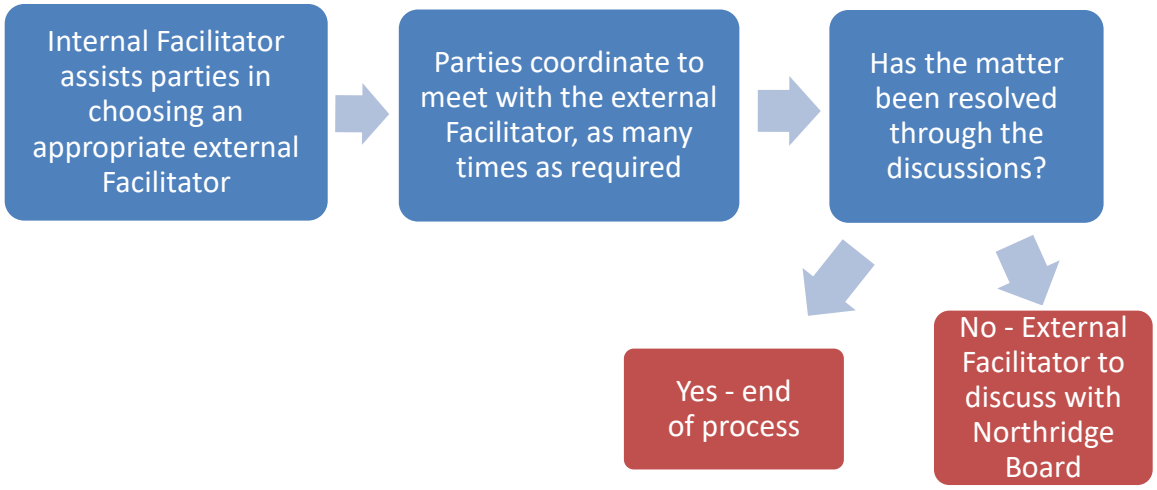
The Facilitator may meet with the Reporter and Respondent (and their support person) separately prior to any joint conversations to give each party an opportunity to share their account of events. The Facilitator is responsible for coordinating and facilitating one or more conversations with the Reporter, the Respondent and any support people to resolve the Concern in a fair and timely manner.

The Facilitator also is responsible for advising the Northridge Board of progress and results of the Local Resolution process. Details of the result are to be securely filed at the church office and kept in strict confidence for a period of 7 years at which time the documents are to be destroyed if there is no reason to keep them.

The Facilitator may suggest the Concern be taken to Phase 3, where an appropriately trained external Facilitator is chosen, agreed to by both parties, to assist the parties in reaching a healthy outcome. The Facilitator is to help the parties choose an appropriate external Facilitator.

9. Phase 3: Externally Supported Resolution

Overview:



Procedure:

If Phase 2 does not result in an acceptable outcome or it is felt by the parties that Phase 2 (using an internal Facilitator) is not the preferred option, then Phase 3 should be implemented using an external appropriately trained Facilitator.

However, an external Facilitator can be engaged only if the parties agree on a written scope of work for the external Facilitator and how the cost of the external facilitator is to be shared. In most situations it is expected that the cost of the external facilitator would be shared between the parties. If one of the parties is an employee, the Northridge Board must approve the costs before the appointment is finalised. If the parties cannot agree on the scope of work or how costs will be shared, then the Phase 3 Externally Supported Resolution Process cannot occur, and the internal Facilitator must inform the Northridge Board for their consideration.

It will be important that the internal Facilitator (or one of the parties involved) notify the Northridge Board of this decision.

If, through this process, resolution is achieved, it would be helpful for the results of the process to be discussed with the internal Facilitator, so local accountability can be maintained for both parties and the goals of resolution (as set out in item 2 above) can be maintained.

The external Facilitator must have an appropriate methodology for assisting the parties to discuss their Concern in a way that is caring and considerate to each party.

If the process is considered satisfactory by both parties, then the matter is ended, and the internal Facilitator can inform the Northridge Board of the result.

If the Phase 3 Externally Supported Resolution process does not end satisfactorily, then the internal Facilitator must inform the Northridge Board for their consideration.