

DISCIPLINE AND PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING CONTROVERSIES

(Entity names have been updated from original use to current usage.)

The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, but unlike the Master of people, it is imperfect. Occasions do arise when disciplinary measures must be taken against its various members, pastors and churches. It should be remembered that the power which has been given to the Church through the Holy Spirit is to be used for building up, and not for tearing down; for perfecting and not for destroying. Therefore, when needs arise which involve discipline in the church, the underlying attitude should be love and mercy, not wrath and vengeance. The purpose of any disciplinary measure is to resolve the disagreement and bring unity and peace to the church in order that it may grow in accord with God's admonition. For even as the early disciples were "of one accord," (Acts 2:1KJV) so must we strive for that oneness if we are to emulate Christ in the world today.

As Christians, persons committed to the Scriptures, we take seriously the biblical injunctions to practice Christian love and forgiveness. Matthew 5:23-34 (TEV) counsels: "...if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God." Matthew 18:15-16 (TEV) counsels: "If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two persons with you, so that every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Grievances that cannot be resolved between parties involved shall be referred to the conference Director, the President of the Conference or Chairperson of Pastoral Oversight Commission who may refer the issue to the Conference Administrative Council to appoint a Hearing Council.

Charges brought against a local church, pastor or conference official are not items to be considered lightly. One must acknowledge that whenever complaints are made against such persons or bodies, there is a danger of schism. The grounds for filing a grievance, therefore, must be clear.

It is to be noted that the purpose of church doctrine and polity is to promote unity in the church. When a church, pastor or conference official ceases to be in harmony with the doctrine, customs and polity of the Churches of God or when a pastor ceases to be in harmony with his/her ordination vows, then a grievance may be filed against the church, pastor or conference official.

These procedures for resolving grievances in the Churches of God, General Conference are prayerfully submitted with these thoughts in mind.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

I. Procedure for Filing a Grievance

A grievance should be dealt with at the primary level where the grievance has occurred. Additional persons should not be involved unless resolution cannot be achieved. In the event resolution is not possible and a recommendation is made by one of the aforementioned officials that a hearing council be established, the grievances shall be sent in writing to the Conference official first contacted.

II. Procedures for Processing Grievances

After the grievance(s) has been received by the appropriate conference official, it is their responsibility to inform, in writing, the ones the grievance(s) has been filed against, stating clearly the charges. The grievancee then has fifteen days in which to respond in writing to the charges to the conference official. The conference official will determine whether the situation is of such nature to warrant establishment of a hearing council.

III. Establishment of a Hearing Council

A hearing council is to be comprised of five members, all members of the Churches of God. Three members are to be laity, two are to be clergy. The hearing council would not be considered a standing committee but selected for each individual situation. Members of this council must be non-partisan to the situation. No one can serve on the council who is a member or plays a part in the local church filing the grievance nor can anyone serve who is employed in a conference staff position. The council is to be appointed by the Conference Administrative Council with the chief purpose being to achieve an unbiased, objective third party status.

IV. Procedure of the Hearing Council

The hearing council selects a chairperson. Each council member should have copies of all correspondence. The chairperson is responsible for specifying date and location of the initial hearing.

Expenses for the hearing council will be the responsibility of the local conference.

The hearing is to be conducted in an orderly fashion with the chairperson responsible for maintaining an atmosphere becoming to Christians. The chairperson may rule a person out of order and expel the offender from the hearings. Additional meetings may be set, insuring that both parties are allowed to speak and all are satisfied they have had opportunity to express themselves.

The hearing council will then meet in a private session to discuss the situation. The discussion should enter on how the gospel of Christ can best be exercised. After reaching a decision, the hearing council will meet with both parties to inform them of that decision. The decision of the hearing council will be final. The hearing council will then send to the Conference Administrative Council a written report of the proceedings and outcome. The report is to be kept on file in the conference office.

An appeal of the hearing council decision can be made first to the Allegheny Region Conference Administrative Council. An appeal of ARC Administrative Council decision can be made to the General Conference Administrative Council. Grievances between local church members shall be resolved within the local church following the same four (4) steps of the Grievance Procedure above. Charges are referred to the local pastor, president of church council or head elder. The Region Director or Chairperson of the Pastoral Oversight Commission may be contacted for counsel as needed. In cases where there are conflicts interest between parties involved or non-partisan to the situation the Allegheny Region Conference may be called upon to help resolve the grievance.

(Adopted from the General Conference Ministers Resource Manual)