



**Mennonite  
World Conference**

A Community of Anabaptist  
related Churches

**Congreso  
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Una Comunidad de  
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**Conférence  
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Une Communauté  
d'Eglises Anabaptistes

## Report

### **Guidelines for Determining Possible Involvement in Internal Conflicts of Member Churches**

Drafted by Peace Commission  
Approved by MWC General Council  
May 2012, Switzerland

#### **Focusing the Agenda**

*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).  
If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice  
together with it. Now you are the body of Christ... (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).  
All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the  
ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).*

Conflict in church life is a normal thing. In retrospect it is often seen as having been a maturing and growth process. Often, too, conflict is an opportunity dressed in the clothes of a burden. But when burdens are on our shoulders, they are heavy. When one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. That is why the Apostle Paul teaches that burdens are meant to be borne together with others. Indeed, he says, it is the law of Christ to do so. We have been reconciled by God and in turn we are called to a ministry of reconciliation.

MWC would not normally get involved in internal conflicts of its member churches. Most conflicts do not require third party intervention. There are enough burden bearers to resolve the conflict. In the vast majority of cases, the burdens can be borne closer to where the stress has been generated.

But sometimes, conflicts get worse rather than better. In such circumstances, there may come a time when those who are supposed to help bear the burden are actually part of the burden itself. In such cases it is wise to find others, a bit more distant, to help to relieve the burden of particular conflicts.

In a communion such as MWC, are there times and circumstances when MWC should get involved with conflict internal to its member churches? If not, why not? If so, what guidelines or criteria would help us discern when?

#### **Recommendation**

The Peace Commission recommends that:

***When MWC becomes aware that a member church is in a situation of significant conflict affecting the entire church, MWC is called to contribute to a peace building and healing process taking seriously the following guidelines:***

1. When a member church sends a formal request to MWC for third party intervention in a conflict situation, MWC will conduct a preliminary investigation to determine the level of conflict experienced by the church and the levels of support represented by the request.
  - a) MWC would not normally get involved with requests coming from individual leaders or congregations of the member-church.
  - b) Requests should be sent to the General Secretary of MWC.
  - c) After the preliminary assessment, the Executive Committee of MWC may then forward this request to the Peace Commission for further action.
2. In cultures where it is unlikely that a formal request would be formulated, in spite of serious conflict, a signal of significant conflict problems may come through other channels. In these cases the General Secretary should take steps to make a preliminary assessment.
  - a) Again the Executive Committee may then ask the Peace Commission to follow up for further action.
3. MWC reserves the right to not pursue involvement if the preliminary investigation would indicate that:
  - a) The conflict is not affecting the entire member-church;
  - b) There has not been sufficient effort made to resolve the conflict by alternative means. MWC assumes that before it is called upon to help, the member-church involved will already have expended significant effort to resolve the conflict internally or through regional mediators or facilitators. MWC would not be a "first responder" to conflict situations. In this sense, MWC would try to apply the Matthew 18 model to determine the appropriateness of its own involvement.
  - c) MWC does not have the capacity to follow through as the situation would require.
4. MWC would be aware of power imbalances when conflict issues are assessed.
  - a) This may include the possibility that MWC's own financial involvements (including the agencies under the umbrella of MWC Commissions) may be one factor in the conflict and would need to be assessed.
5. MWC can potentially act in many different roles and at many different levels in conflicts: Observer and Listener, Facilitator, Mediator, Circle of friends, Accompanier, Consultant. The level of intervention and the kind of role would be clarified in dialogue with the conflicted parties.
  - a) MWC would not normally "take charge" of mediating or arbitrating a conflict.
  - b) MWC would need to consider its capacity for involvement in terms of expertise, available personnel, finances, and time.
6. The financial costs of intervention would need to be borne by the member-church requesting help. Exceptions to this would need to be negotiated.
7. MWC would not get involved in legal processes, and would not engage lawyers as part of the conflict intervention process.
8. MWC would normally expect that its involvement would not be long-term in chronic or endemic conflict situations.
  - a) MWC would be open to capacity building in conflict transformation in those cases where a long-term presence is needed and requested.
9. The guidelines identified here do not assume that the Peace Commission will act alone in a given intervention. Other resources, including the resources of the other MWC Commissions, will be discerned.