



## COMMUNICATION COVENANT

For Christians and their Organizations

*Rev. Ted and Ruth Brewer, Directors, New Peace Network*

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**The greatest sin  
we tolerate is a  
critical spirit.**

### **Spiritual Fact of Life**

It's a fact of life—each of us wounds others with hurtful words. We do it every week in our homes, jobs and churches.

This wounding is especially painful and destructive in our churches. Dr. Al Broom, former Director of Church Dynamics International, who consulted with churches across America said: “The greatest thing that is destroying churches today is toleration of known sin. And the greatest sin we tolerate is a critical spirit!” We believe this applies to all our Christian organizations—families, churches, schools, businesses, camp/conference centers, hospitals, home/foreign missions and denominations.

Misuse of our tongues and the critical spirit that often results is destructive in many ways—it hinders our personal growth, strains and breaks our relationships, destroys our organizations and poisons our witness to the watching world. In contrast, wise communication can bring growth to individuals, blessing to interpersonal relationships, a positive witness to our dying world and glory to God!

To promote God-honoring use of our tongues, we recommend that Christian in all organizations use this biblically based communication covenant. Make it your own through discussion and adaptation, covenant together to follow it in all your relationships, teach it to your people and review it regularly.

Otherwise, if you do not agree upon and follow such biblically based communication principles, you will pay dearly in terms of unhealthy conflict. It will sap your time and resources and damage your unity and witness.

We recommend that Christian leaders follow the concept of widening circles of influence, sharing these principles first with their staff, then their official board, then other leaders and then the organization as a whole. This covenant is based on many Scriptures, including the following key passages.

### **Key Scriptures**

*Matthew 18:15-17*

(15) “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. (16) But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses’ [*Deuteronomy 19:15*]. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

*Ephesians 4:14-16*

(14) “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 men in their deceitful scheming. (15) Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (16) From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

*Ephesians 4:29-32*

(29) “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (31) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (32) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

*John 13:34-35*

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

## **Communication Covenant**

This communication agreement is adapted from the Biblical Resolution Covenant by Mels Carbonell, Ph.D., President of Uniquely You in Christ ([www.uniquelyyou.com](http://www.uniquelyyou.com)) and is used with written permission.

In obedience to God’s Holy Word and commitment to practicing biblical conflict resolution, I promise to follow the principle of priorities. That is, my priorities are to glorify God, grow in Christ, serve others, build harmony in the church (including preventing and resolving unhealthy conflicts) and help reach my world for Christ. Healthy conflicts can include problems needing solutions and wisely handled disagreements that can tune our relationships and organizational goals. Unhealthy conflicts include hurtful disagreements, contests, fight or flight situations and intractable disputes where the parties cannot seem to stop fighting. I will do as Matthew 18 admonishes and go to an offending brother “just between the two of us.”

### **First Step**

I will *not* first share the offense with another person. I am committed to restoring the relationship, rather than seeking primarily to expose possible sin. I recognize most problems with people are personality clashes, and I will try to understand their actions based upon their perspective. I will prayerfully examine myself and take responsibility for my contribution to the problem, removing

“Go and show  
him his fault  
just between  
the two of you.”

Matthew 18:15

any logs from my own eye (*Matthew 7:3-5*). I will prayerfully discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked (*Proverbs 19:11; 12:16; 15:18; 17:14, 20; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 4:8*). If the offense is too serious to overlook, then I shall go, repeatedly if necessary, and talk to the offender in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately, having first confessed my own wrongdoing to the Lord and as necessary, to others, including my offender (*1 John 1:9; Matthew 7:5; James 5:16a; Matthew 18:15*).

### **Second Step**

If going to a person first alone does not resolve our differences, I promise to seek one or two others who can help. This person or persons may be literal witnesses—they were present when my offender offended me, or they have similar issues to mine concerning my offender because they, too, have been similarly offended by him. Or the person or persons may be figurative “witnesses”—neutral and mature individuals who will help my offender and me meet together and listen to each of our perspectives of the problem. He or they will hopefully be able to shed light on blind spots or areas my offender and I are unaware of where we need to grow so we can better glorify God.

I recognize that the “witness(es)” may reveal or say things I won’t like, but I will believe God is using them to help resolve the conflict, rather than take sides. The “witness” must be a person with deep spiritual wisdom and highly respected by all those involved. He or she may be a member or officer of the organization, a respected Christian in the community, or a trained mediator or arbitrator from a Christian conciliation ministry. The “witness” will be someone both my offender and I respect and preferably one both of us agree upon. If after my suggestion of such a meeting my offender refuses, I could say, “This situation is damaging our relationship and hurting others. It’s too important for us to walk away from. I would prefer that we join together to invite this person to meet with us. But if you will not join me, I’ll have to ask her myself.” Often when the offender sees you are really serious about resolution, he will join with you in inviting another person to help you both.

Whether I approach my offender with literal witnesses who saw or heard the offense or were similarly offended or with figurative “witnesses” who are neutral parties, I will bring them to meet with the offender only *after* I have talked with him/her privately, remembering the Scriptural principle expressed in *Matthew 18:16*—“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses;’” and *Deuteronomy 19:15*—“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

“Take one or two others along.”  
Matthew 15:16

**The purpose of  
“witnesses” is  
to open my  
heart and mind  
to blind spots.**

**I will first  
go alone to  
my ministry  
leader.**

### **Warning**

I will *not* seek to find others who have also been offended, nor share my concerns with them prior to the meeting with my “offending brother.” If I need to go further and take one or two “witnesses,” the purpose is not to validate my hurt but rather to open my heart and mind to the possible needs I may have regarding my relationships with others.

I realize my friends may naturally listen to my concerns, but also take up my offense. I will, therefore, not cause them to become a party to a possible division and disharmony because of our friendship. When I feel an urge to share the offense with my friends, I will pray and commune with God about my hurt.

If I find without seeking him, that there is another person who has been similarly offended, we will each go individually to the offender. Only if that fails will we go together to confront the offender in love, each taking responsibility for our contribution to the difficulties and seeking through our combined witness to understand with the offender what each of us has to learn from this situation.

### **Confronting Ministry Leaders**

I believe in the scriptural admonition not to rebuke a spiritual leader such as a Pastor, Elder or Deacon, other than in grave matters of misconduct and open sin (*“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses” 1 Timothy 5:19*). I will earnestly pray for and follow those God has placed in leadership over me. I will not allow anyone to criticize them without following the principles in Matthew 18 and without the specific person present.

If I have a problem with my ministry leader, I will go first alone to him or her. I will not share my concern with anyone. I will listen and try to understand his perspective of the problem. If I am not satisfied with his explanation and continue to have deep concern, I will ask his counsel to find a “witness” who will listen to our conflict.

If the “witness” finds I have misunderstood the situation and should continue no further, I will trust God to complete His work in my life by casting my burden on the Lord and leaving it there. If the “witness” agrees with my concern and finds the ministry leader contributed to the dispute and the leader refuses to hear the “witness,” we will then find a group of two or three other “witnesses” who will hear the matter and determine what God is seeking to do through this conflict.

As before with an offender not in leadership, I may come with one or two witnesses if such exist, who have seen or heard the offense against me by the leader, or who have been similarly offended by the leader. As before, I will bring them to meet with the offender only after I have talked with him/her privately and taken responsibility for my own contribution to the difficulty.

## Should I join another ministry rather than cause ongoing conflict?

### Third Step and Beyond

If the *prayerful and repeated* efforts of going with one or two others do not resolve the dispute, and the offender remains unrepentant, then I will follow the next step in *Matthew 18:17a* and “tell the church.” While each church must determine what this means in their church polity, it usually means speaking to the church leaders, such as the Elders, Deacons or Church Board members rather than the whole church. These leaders will prayerfully and confidentially investigate and seek to bring about communication, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. They will seek through repeated attempts over a period of time to bring about resolution. While all sins are an affront to God’s holiness, we suggest that those sins that warrant this third step and beyond are those that have a strong negative effect on other people and even on the entire local congregation. Church leaders should decide what this means for their church and communicate this to their people.

If the offending party is willfully unrepentant and intransigent, unwilling to admit his or her contribution to the difficulties and to begin to take steps towards resolution, then the leaders may pursue the next step of church discipline, telling the church members as a congregation of the matter and asking them to pray for the unrepentant person. If the person steadfastly refuses to repent and take steps towards change and resolution, then the church may have to treat him or her as an outsider (*Matthew 18:17b*). These steps must be followed according to agreed upon procedures by the denomination and/or local church for the purpose of loving and firm restoration of the unrepentant offender.

### Commitment to Preserving Unity

If I continue to find fault with a ministry leader even though the “witnesses” believe either that he has not sinned against me or that he has sinned against me but is repentant, and if I believe that I cannot worship in “spirit and truth” (*John 4:24*) within this ministry, I will seek to join another ministry rather than cause any conflict and disharmony. I am committed to pleasing God through resolving my conflicts, even if it means separating myself from the source of my irritations.

### Responding to Negative Reports

Steps to take when someone comes with negative information about another person:

*Gossip* may be defined as: (1) revealing or discussing personal information about others with people who are not part of the problem or the solution, and (2) needless repetition of real or imaginary faults with a person not part of the problem or solution. (*Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 20:19; 26:20; 1 Timothy 5:13*).

*Slander* may be defined as speaking false words to someone that damage a third person’s reputation; these false words may be exaggerations of a person’s real faults, or finding fault with their conduct or character (*Leviticus 19:16; 2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3*).

When someone comes to me and begins to share negative information about another person, I will stop them and say something like this:

“I can see you are feeling hurt and upset. Matthew 18:15 says that when you believe a person has sinned against you, you need to go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. I believe that God wants you to go and speak privately to \_\_\_\_\_(name the person with whom they are upset). If he listens to you, you will have won him over. If he does not listen, then you can take one or two ‘witnesses’ with you.

“Would you be willing to go privately to speak to him? I’d like to ask you next week how your meeting went.” (This offers accountability. Be careful not to listen to details when you receive the report next week, unless you are needed as a “witness”).

If they reply that the individual would not listen, or they are afraid to go because of earlier rebuffs, you could say: “God will give you strength and I’ll pray for you.” If they still refuse to go, you could say:

“I believe so strongly that we must follow Matthew 18, that I would be willing to go with you to assist you and the other person to meet, but once you are together, I’ll leave the room and stay nearby to pray for you both.”

If the offender is unrepentant when confronted repeatedly by the individual, then follow further steps as described above (go with one or two “witnesses,” etc.)

### **Ultimate Goal**

I commit myself to be spiritual rather than “normal” and supernatural rather than “natural” when it comes to solving my problems with others. I want God’s will and way to resolve my conflicts and will do as the Bible teaches, regardless of my normal and natural feelings.

My ultimate goal is to glorify God through bearing much fruit, getting involved in ministry, avoiding and resolving unhealthy conflicts and helping to reach people for Christ.

## **Just Imagine!**

Just imagine the positive effects of such a communication agreement in your family, church, school, business, hospital, camp/conference center, home or foreign mission:

- Relationships will be restored
- Your organization will be more effective in its mission
- The watching world will see Christians working out their differences rather than fighting
- People will conclude that Jesus Christ is worth their consideration after all
- God will be glorified!

## **Help for You**

The New Peace Network can help you adapt this communication covenant to your group's needs and give you guidelines for introducing it to your family, school, business, church, hospital, camp/conference center, mission or other organization.

Rev. Ted and Ruth Brewer offer you help with team building, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, spiritual renewal, and resourcing throughout New England and the Northeastern U.S. They personally provide peacemaking services and they also network those in need of peacemaking with others who can help. Contact the Brewers by telephone, their web page or email to promote healthy communication for you and those you care about!

## **For further information, please contact:**

Rev. Ted and Ruth Brewer  
Directors, New Peace Network  
24 Maywood Drive, Nashua, NH 03064

Tel: 603-880-1799

Email: [renewal@newpeace.net](mailto:renewal@newpeace.net)

Web: [www.newpeace.net](http://www.newpeace.net)