



May 13, 2020  
St. Abban of Ireland, baptized in 165 A.D.

## *Scriptural Guidelines for Parish Conflict Resolution*

*“Let brotherly love continue.” (Hebrews 13.1)*

*“But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the Law, for they are unprofitable and futile.” (Titus 3.9)*

*“If any one says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” I John 4:20*

Resolution of conflict in a parish is an urgent matter whose goal is to maintain the peace, harmony and unity of the Church, for so it is well-pleasing to God, recognizing that Christ died for the sake of us all—for both us and those with whom we may have differences of opinion. Dissension in the Church is a scandal that makes a mockery of Christ’s loving death. The sign that we are His disciples lies in our love for one another.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church [i.e., pastor or bishop], and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

1. Disputes should be confined to the absolute minimum number of people, completely avoiding slander and gossip. People who spread gossip *divide* the Church, the Body of Christ and ultimately become the devil’s plaything! A Christian will make every effort towards reconciliation!
2. Recognize that we do not all have to agree on everything, that there are legitimate differences in perspective, but that mutual respect and love must always prevail. Respect includes abiding by the judgment calls and discretionary decisions of those in authority, even if you would have made a different decision had you been in charge. Give them your input, but then allow the parish priest, committee chairmen, etc., to do their work to the best of their ability, setting aside criticism and showing them gratitude for their efforts.
3. If you have an issue with another parishioner,
  - a. Speak to him privately.



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“Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” Augustine

- b. If you are not able to resolve the issue, take it to your pastor.
4. If you have an issue with your priest,
    - a. Speak to him personally and *privately*. (*The role of the parish council chair and / or parish council is NOT to take anonymous complaints to the priest. All concerns brought to a council member are to be referred to the priest himself. If the person is unwilling to speak with the priest personally, the matter is to be dropped.*)
    - b. If you are not able to resolve the issue, then you may take it to your dean.
    - c. If there is a charge of misconduct or moral impropriety against the priest, keep the matter confidential, informing only the dean, who will report the matter to the diocesan bishop. (*If the charge is against the dean himself, then you may go directly to the bishop, keeping in mind Deut. 19: 15ff.*)
    - d. If the issue is one of general lack of effort or of incompatibility between a priest and the community he serves, having already worked with the pastor and solicited the help of the dean, the parish council may decide to request a change of pastor. The request kept in the strictest confidence and would be communicated to the bishop by a letter signed by every member of the parish council; those dissenting must also sign, but they may indicate their dissent. The bishop looks to the parish council, for the most part, as the voice of the parish. They are the ones who were deemed in good spiritual and financial standing and properly elected by the general assembly, but he alone will then decide whether or not to reassign the priest. *No single person or council member speaks on behalf of the parish council or the entire parish.*
  5. Nothing should happen without the knowledge of the parish priest, and no meeting of the parish council may ever take place unless the pastor is present. In no case should people beyond those directly involved be troubled with a dispute. No letters, e-mail messages, petitions, etc., should be circulated.
  6. If the issue remains unresolved, then and only then, you may make an appointment with the diocesan bishop. Such an appointment must be set up through the pastor. All parties involved will be consulted so as to be evenhanded.
  7. Confidential correspondence to/from the diocesan bishop is strictly the property of the hierarchy is not to be shared with anyone.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+ MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania  
CC: V. Rev. Fr. Martin Browne, Chancellor