

Holy Conferencing

“Holy Conferencing” is an early principle set forth by John Wesley, the 18th century British founder of Methodism. Wesley believed that "holy conferencing" -- Christians conferring together for the sake of peace and truth seeking -- was a "means of grace," even as are Bible reading, prayer, and the sacraments.

"We believe the Holy Spirit leads in all things, especially as we make decisions," says a postscript to the guidelines' ten points. "We want to avoid making decisions in a fashion that leaves some feeling like winners and others like losers. We can change the world through honest conversation on matters about which we are passionate."

The guidelines began with five verses from the New Testament book of Colossians (3:12-16a, 17). The passage admonishes Christians to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and continues: "bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must love. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

The full text of the guidelines and explanatory notes follow --

What God Expects of Us

Colossians 3:12-16a, 17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
- As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.
- Listen patiently before formulating responses.
- Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
- Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
- Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with that position.
- Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.
- Make use of facilitators and mediators.
- Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God – not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.

We believe Christians can discuss important issues without the acrimonious debate and parliamentary maneuvering that can divide a group into contending factions. We see too many examples of that in secular society. We believe the Holy Spirit leads in all things, especially as we make decisions. We want to avoid making decisions in a fashion that leaves some feeling like winners and others like losers.

We can change the world through honest conversation on matters about which we are passionate.