



WILLINGDON  
CHURCH



# Restoring One Another in Love

Willingdon Church Position Papers

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Willingdon Church Elders  
(Reaffirmed February 15, 2012)

“The Church is composed of many members, each contributing to the overall health of the Body. We are interdependent and where one suffers, we all suffer and where one is honoured, everyone rejoices.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

In a healthy Church, the loving restoration of a sinning member is a quiet process. It calls for each of us to care enough to speak to someone we know who is sinning. Frequently, this loving maintenance of the body is all that is required. Where resistance occurs and sin deepens and persists, the restorative process will require others to become involved to assure that health is restored to the member and to the Body. Love must always be our motivation and restoration our goal in all aspects of Church discipline.

It is important that we begin by being open ourselves with fellow members in personal confession of sin, when that occurs, seeking their counsel and support. The study of pertinent passages on

restoration and a willingness to practice it on a personal level will help a Church address the majority of concerns that need correcting. In any matter calling for restoration we must never merely admonish someone but always assure individuals of our love and our willingness to help in the repentance process.

When a member sins he breaks the Law of God and needs to be reconciled with God as soon as possible. When a member's sin involves another person, it is his spiritual responsibility to go and be reconciled to the person he has sinned against as soon as possible (Matthew 5:23-24). If he confesses his sin, submitting to God and the person he has sinned against and sincerely seeks reconciliation, his sin is forgiven (1 John 1:9).

When sin knowingly is not confronted by the member or the Church, the teaching of scripture is violated even further, and instead of sin being properly confronted and contained, it multiplies (1 Corinthians 5:6-7, Galatians 5:9).

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\* “Listens” in the context of this paper and Matthew 18:15 means to acknowledge (confess) the fault and be willing to submit, turn away from the sinful conduct, and make restitution when appropriate in order to be reconciled or restored. “Listens” takes the nuance to agree, follow, heed or obey—John 5:25, 9:27; Acts 28:28—which is necessary for repentance and forgiveness to occur (Luke 17:3).

Restoring an erring member is one of the marks of the true Church and must not be neglected by the leadership of our congregation.

When sin is apparent, there are two possibilities that exist when a person is faced with his sin. He either eventually listens\* to the admonishment and confesses his sin, or refuses to listen, does not confess, is not reconciled and is not restored to fellowship with Christ or His Church. It is the latter possibility that may become more complex and involves the formal discipline of the member by the Church. The scripture provides specific instruction for both possibilities.

Formal discipline is intended to preserve the honour of God's name, to assure the purity of the church (1 Corinthians 5:7) and to eventually reconcile and restore the offending member.

1. Private Level: Always start here "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" (Matthew 18:15). When this is done and the member truly "listens" the restorative process has begun. Confidentiality is crucial for restoration to occur at this time. Galatians 6:1-5 elaborates that the "going" and "showing" must be aimed at restoring the member in gentleness, humility and love with a willingness to help "carry each other's burdens." James 5:9 gives us powerful motivation to go in such a case: "...whoever turns a sinner away from error will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins." The concept of prevention is very clear in this passage. Confession is made to only those sinned against and those the sinner finds liberty in confessing to. Unfortunately, as fellow believers we often do not "go" and "show" our brother his fault. The fault can then lead to a "multitude of sin."

## 2. SEMI-PRIVATE LEVEL: TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS

If the member refuses to listen and achieve reconciliation, "take one or two others along" (Matthew 18:16) so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15-21). This step is semi-private and only is to occur if Step 1 was unsuccessful. Confidentiality again is crucial here, keeping it confined only to those directly involved. Notification of intent to move to this step is reported to the Restorative Committee of the Elders. It is the original person sinned against or who has knowledge of the sin who has the responsibility to take no more than two other members with him to meet again. The intent now is to achieve factual clarity about the sin and also still to counsel and help the person confess his sin and "win your brother over." The "witness" according to Galatians 6:1, ought to be "spiritual" and so the person may well ask Bible Study Leaders or Elders to be involved in helping to restore the member. Since there is no time frame given in this step not in the first, this could involve several attempts at restoration.

Confession again is made to those in the meeting and to any person sinned against. It is assumed that if there is openness to listen, this step should be continued to complete restoration.

## 3. ELDERS-CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL: FORMAL DISCIPLINE IS INITIATED

Refusal to listen to two or three results in the witnesses telling the facts of the sin and their meeting(s) to the Elders Restorative Committee – 3 members. These Elders will conscientiously review whether the restoration process has been sound up to this point. Further consultation may be required to exhaust

all possibilities of restoring the erring member. When all efforts have failed up to this point, the Elders Restorative Committee will bring the matter to a Restorative Committee attended only by the Elders and members of the congregation. An announcement to the congregation will emphasize the importance and seriousness of the planned meeting concerning the erring member giving time, place and urging all members to attend.

#### **4. CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL: TELLING IT TO THE CHURCH – SEEKING TO WIN THEM BACK**

The Restorative Meeting is in keeping with the Scriptural injunction "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17). Ideally the person involved would be present at the meeting.

The members attending the Restorative Meeting will be given opportunity to face the person with his sin and the established facts in expectation that he will yet listen to them. A reasonable amount of time (2-3 months) will be given for members to win back the erring member. Their approach needs to be always in love and with compassion seeking to restore the errant member back to fellowship. Any personal contacts by members should be shared with the Elders Restorative Committee. This Committee in due time, will make a final contact with the errant member to determine if members have made contact and any progress towards restoration that may have occurred.

If the member continues to refuse to listen, then the Elders Restorative Committee, on behalf of the Church with

the authority and agreement of Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 18:18), must expel the member formally from the Church and the fellowship it provides.

An announcement will be made to the congregation that the unrestored member's name has regrettably been removed from our membership and that according to 1 Corinthians 5:11 we are no longer to associate with this member. A letter to that effect will also be delivered in person where possible by a member of the Elder's Restorative Committee or the Senior Pastor. Otherwise the letter will be mailed.

#### **5. CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL: RELATIONSHIP WITH DISFELLOWSHIPED MEMBER**

Once the member has been disfellowshipped, the statement in 1 Corinthians 5:9 would apply to his relationship with other church members..."you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

This treatment is crucial for any brother to experience the discipline of the Lord, which is designed to eventually restore him. It is a very powerful thing to be disfellowshipped by your spiritual family in this way and it should not be continued indefinitely. Nevertheless, the scripture teaches us that it is God's way to achieve full restoration. To do anything less would be to rob the greatest opportunity to win the member back. Application in this matter involves spiritual relationships, not natural or family relationships.