

Decision Making at Mennonite Church of the Servant

Our Understandings document states:

The Mennonite Church of the Servant holds regular Church Life meetings to make decisions and to strengthen our life together as the body of Christ. Basic decisions are made by consensus of the members who are present during any particular meeting. In this process of decision making, members attempt to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Only members can block consensus.

Consensus means not necessarily full agreement with one another, but that everyone is willing for the church to move ahead, perhaps with a heavy heart, in recognition of the leading of many brothers and sisters and the sense of the group as a whole. The process of consensus seeks, first of all, the will of God as known to us through the Spirit. Our first task in decision making is to set aside our own assumptions and biases and listen to what the Spirit is saying to us.

Decision making by consensus seeks, then, to hear all points of view on the issue before the church, since sometimes the minority viewpoint may reflect more deeply God's truth. However, we recognize that our decisions never reflect the full wisdom of God. We need to be open to hearing new insights at all times and then revising our decision. Consensus may mean waiting longer to make the decision, but when the decision is finally reached, support for that decision will enable it to be carried out more quickly and enthusiastically. The role of the moderator in consensus is to make sure all points of view are heard, to suggest times for prayer when appropriate, and to summarize the discussion occasionally, testing for whether consensus has been reached.

Under certain circumstances, the church life meeting may make decisions by use of the lot, a centuries-old practice of Mennonites. Use of the lot is limited to those situations in which (a) having to reach consensus on one of two or more options or persons would harm the unity or relationships within the church or (b) after gathering all necessary information and hearing all points of view, there are no strong feelings within the church or no strong sense of the Spirit's leading after prayer and discussion, and a decision must be made so quickly that there is no time to wait on consensus. God can work through the lot to bring unity to the church.

So here are the steps of consensus decision making:

1. **Seek the mind of Christ.** The most important process is to discern the mind of Christ on a matter, rather than seek to negotiate the positions each person already has. This will require all to set aside their preconceived ideas and ask themselves, Is there anything more important to me than doing God's will in this matter?

2. **Listen** to all the information, listen to each person's viewpoint, and take time to listen to God.
3. **Test** for consensus. The moderator or another person attempts to summarize the sense of the meeting. Each person has several possible responses:
 - a. I agree with the stated sense of the meeting.
 - b. I could agree if (In other words, we need some more discussion.)
 - c. I stand aside. This means, I do not agree, but I am willing to let the decision go forward if others are in agreement.
 - d. I disagree. If even one person takes this position, there is no consensus.
4. **Decide on next steps.** If everyone is in agreement or stands aside, a decision has been made, and the group can talk about how the decision will be put into action. If there are those who want to modify the sense of the meeting or who disagree with it, there may be a need for more discussion. Or if opposition to the proposal is significant, the group may decide to postpone the discussion or drop the issue.

Lois Barrett

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