

# A Format for Reconciliation Meeting

## Note to Facilitator:

The format and the concluding worship service are steps toward moving from forgiving to living as forgiven. But it is important for the facilitator to understand that it might take months of meetings with individuals, families, and/or leaders of congregations to come to an agreement for the steps of reconciliation. It takes listening skills, caring skills, and much prayer to work toward a reconciliation meeting and worship closure. This format is designed for the people involved to listen to the confessions of others, listen to God's word, confess, and receive forgiveness, and then resume living as forgiven.

I have found that it is best to hold this meeting in the chancel or nave of the congregation, if the broken relationships are between individuals or families of the congregation. This is to remind all the participants that these steps are being done before Almighty God. It is only God in Jesus Christ that can turn people around to forgive and live as forgiven. If the broken relationships are between congregations, it might be best to invite the spiritual leaders of each congregation to meet in the chancel or nave of one of the congregations of the community, not involved in the broken relationships.

The role of the facilitator is to make certain that the format is followed, that confessions are heard, clarification is expressed without judgment, that they are ready to forgive and receive forgiveness, and to lead them to the worship service for reconciliation.

## Gathering & Welcome ( F = Facilitator; C1 = Congregation 1; C2 = Congregation 2)

F: I am pleased and, most importantly, God is pleased that you are ready to take steps toward reconciliation. Confession and absolution/forgiveness are essential in marriages, families, friendships, and in the Christian congregations to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Because of my love for our Lord, Jesus, his Church and families, I am thankful to God for the opportunity to lead you in the steps toward reconciliation.

**Step 1:** **Facilitator** begins with the reading of from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 23,24)

*So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.*

**Step 2:** **Facilitator** speaks the following prayer:

*Almighty God, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die on the cross, so that we could be made whole. You have called us to proclaim this gift of grace through a ministry of reconciliation in the cross of Jesus Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and heal the brokenness of the relationships among some of the people of \_\_\_\_\_ name of congregation, family, or individual and \_\_\_\_\_ name of congregation, family, or individual. Give us courage to speak boldly, to listen to feelings, and not react to words. Give us courage and passion through Jesus Christ to forgive one another and to live as forgiven. Bless both congregations, families, individuals as we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people throughout this community and throughout the world. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray and praise you. Amen.*

**Step 3: Facilitator reminds the participants of purpose of the process**

The purpose of this meeting is to hear the pain and wounds of people and to clarify the events causing such a break in relationships, and to reconcile. Our prayer is to live in the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. This process is not about who is right and who is wrong. This is about how do we stand next to each other even when one has been wronged by another or has wronged another person. Sin always separates. But the cross of Jesus Christ reconciles. We sit at the foot of the cross of Jesus in this meeting time. Through forgiveness we are called to live as forgiven in the love of God.

**Step 4: Hearing the stories of pain and hurt from the people of Congregation 2, (family 2, or individual 2).** (Facilitator will give ample time for a full description of the hurt and pain of individuals from Congregation 2, but keep the process moving forward and not become sidetracked by judgment statements. Thomas Gordon's "I statements" would be helpful here: "I feel \_\_\_\_\_, when you did/said \_\_\_\_\_ because it had \_\_\_\_\_ affect on my faith).

F: I invite all the individuals present from Congregation 2, family 2, or individual 2, who have been so deeply hurt to express their pain and brokenness. Again this is not about judgment, but rather about expressing the pain and hurt you have been feeling.

People of Congregation 1, family 1, or individual 1, please listen carefully to the feelings expressed. Do not focus on being defensive about your previous action or words. Stay focused on the feelings of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Only questions of clarification of the expressions of feelings will be allowed. After all the people of Congregation 2, family 2, or individual 2 have expressed their pain and hurt, I will invite the people of Congregation 1, family 1, individual 1 to respond, if they have any questions of clarifications of feelings, and also to ask forgiveness for any pain that was caused their words or actions.

**Step 5: Hearing the stories of pain and hurt from the people of Congregation 1, (family 1, or individual 1).** (Facilitator will give ample time for a full description of the hurt and pain of individuals from Congregation 1, but keep the process moving forward and not become sidetracked by judgment statements. Thomas Gordon's "I statements" would be helpful here: "I feel \_\_\_\_\_, when you did/said \_\_\_\_\_ because it had \_\_\_\_\_ affect on my faith. )

F: I invite all the individuals present from Congregation 1, family 1, or individual 1, who have been so deeply hurt to express their pain and brokenness. Again this is not about judgment, but rather about expressing the pain and hurt you have been feeling.

People of Congregation 2, family 2, or individual 2, please listen carefully to the feelings expressed. Do not focus on being defensive about your previous action or words. Stay focused on the feelings of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Only questions of clarification of the expressions of feelings will be allowed. After all the people of Congregation 1, family 1, or individual 1 have expressed their pain and hurt, I will invite the people of Congregation 2, family 2, individual 2 to respond, if they have any questions of clarifications of feelings, and also to ask forgiveness for any pain that was caused their words or actions.

**Step 6: Prayer of Preparation for Closing Worship Service Reconciliation and Forgiveness**

F: (Facilitator asks all the participants if they are ready to move toward reconciliation and closure. If not, the Facilitator asks for clarification of readiness and if other expressions are still needed. If the participants are ready, the Facilitator leads them in the following prayer of preparation:

Almighty and most merciful God, we thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit, who has turned us around--from turning our backs on our brothers and sisters in Christ and holding on to our anger, hurt, pain, and sin--to turning face-to-face to each other and owning and confessing our sin. Through the cross of Jesus we see each other differently and you have turned our hearts toward healing our wounds, dispelling the pain, and with confession and forgiveness we long for you, O God, to heal us, forgive us, and make us whole as your children, your Church. Jesus prayed for the Holy Spirit to empower us, as believers in your saving act in Christ, to be in unity. Prepare our hearts as we now worship you and give you thanks for the gift of confession, forgiveness, and living as forgiven. We ask this confidently in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

F: We will bring closure to this process with a brief worship service of Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

(The Facilitator might ask the participants to sit next to a member of the other congregation, family, or individual during the worship service)

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To download the worship service go to my website: [www.faithwellmt.com](http://www.faithwellmt.com) under "Worship Services."