

**APPENDIX A**  
**DEFINITION AND CULTURE OF CONSENSUS**

*July, 2012*

**ASLC**

**ABIDING SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH**



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# Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church (ASLC)

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITION AND CULTURE OF CONSENSUS

### Revised July, 2012

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#### Section 1. Individual Guidelines for Reaching Consensus

- Approach the issue as objectively and analytically as you can. Avoid advocating your own individual viewpoint just because you are emotionally attached to it.
- Support and love all members of the group, even if you have difficulty with their values or opinions.
- Welcome differences of opinion as a way to sharpen your own thinking. Listen closely to everyone and respectfully consider all their ideas. Avoid coming to your own conclusions prematurely. The broader, deeper, and more open the dialogue, the greater the chance of a breakthrough decision.
- Voice your support for other members of the group, even if you agree only partially with their proposals and solutions. At the same time, don't give in to a decision you think is unwise or unbiblical just to appear agreeable and avoid conflict.
- Work toward a shared decision that you yourself can genuinely accept and support.
- Help keep the group from resorting to conflict-relieving actions such as majority vote, compromise, or deal-making.

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#### Section 2. Team Agreements

- Every team will want to decide on agreements to guide members' interactions. Here are some suggestions. Team members may choose from among these examples or offer others. Post your Team Agreements as a reminder for all to see at every meeting.
- We each agree to monitor our own participation, so that no one else needs to remind us of these team agreements.
- We agree to begin and end our meetings on time and to be prompt in all things.
- We agree to routinely use the "round" to check for thoughts and feelings and to gauge agreement—and to follow the Guidelines for the Round.
- We agree not to interrupt one another or talk while others are talking—no side conversations or one-on-one explanations.
- We agree to avoid the expression "I disagree" when someone offers a view we don't share.
- We agree to keep our remarks brief. Say it once and then stop talking.
- We agree to encourage one another to all participate fully in our dialogue/activities.
- We commit to reaching mutual agreement before making a group decision.
- We agree to be accountable for getting any information we may miss when unable to attend a meeting, so that the group doesn't have to spend time covering "old" material.
- We agree to be loyal to members who are absent from any meeting or conversation we have.
- We will not criticize, condemn, or complain about other members behind their backs.
- We will make every effort to understand and honor other members' positions and interests, even when we may not share their views.
- We commit to placing at least as high a priority on unity of spirit and purpose and on Christ-like love and devotion to one another as we place on making wise decisions.

### **Section 3. Scriptural Guidelines for Our Interactions**

Suggested by 1 Corinthians 13

- Be patient with and kind to one another.
- Be content with what God has given you.
- Don't give in to envy.
- Resist the urge to boast.
- Keep pride out of your words and actions.
- Speak gently and kindly. Don't be rude.
- Think of the other person. Don't be self-seeking.
- Be slow to anger. Don't react to others words or actions, but respond in love.
- Forgive completely. Don't hold grudges or "keep a record" of others slights and offenses.
- Separate yourself from gossip or unkind talk. Speak lovingly and constructively about everyone.
- Protect others' feelings and reputations.
- Be trusting and trustworthy.
- Be optimistic in your dealings with others.
- Persevere. Don't give up on loving others.

Suggested by James 1:19

- Listen more readily than you speak.
- Be thoughtful in your responses.
- Avoid sinful anger.

Suggested by 1 Thessalonians 5:11

- Encourage one another in every way possible.
- Build each other up.
- Help one another grow and flourish.

Suggested by Ephesians 5:21

- Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- Defer to one another's wishes, and yield to one another's God-pleasing suggestions.

Suggested by Philippians 2:3

- Don't do anything out of selfish ambition.
- Humbly consider others better than yourself.

Suggested by Matthew 7:1-2, Luke 6:37, Romans 2:1, Romans 14:10

- Don't criticize, condemn, or complain about others.
- Forgive others.
- Keep in mind that you very likely do many of the same things for which you judge others.
- Don't look down on anyone else.

Suggested by Galatians 5:22-23

- Demonstrate the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control you have received from the Spirit of Christ living in you.

Suggested by 2 Timothy 1:7

- Don't be timid or fearful, but show forth the power, love, and self-control of the Spirit in you.

## Section 4. Guidelines for “The Round”

The Round can enhance a team’s productivity by: (a) providing an opportunity for all voices to be heard, (b) reducing domination of discussions, and (c) helping to develop unity and understanding.

- Each person speaks in turn, one at a time. Leader goes last. Ensures that each team member has an opportunity to be heard without challenge or interruption.
- Facilitator Tip: Frame the question or proposal clearly. Check with the group for understanding.
- Then ask who would like to go first. Make eye contact with each person who is about to speak, say his or her name, and repeat the question. When that person has finished speaking, simply thank him or her by name and move on to the next person. Refrain from making any evaluation—positive or negative—about what each person has to say.
- Listening is the primary activity. Everyone listens attentively, for understanding, and hears each speaker completely rather than planning a response and only half listening.
- Members express their thoughts and feelings clearly. The discussion is more productive if members state as clearly as possible exactly what is on their minds and hearts.
- Brevity is critical. A member makes a point or points briefly and then stops talking. Long-winded rationalizations, reminiscences, and irrelevant sidebars derail the team and take it off task.
- There is no interrupting. If there is no facilitator to guide the round, when one person has apparently finished speaking, the next person waits briefly before speaking to make certain he or she is not interrupting.
- There is no attacking, verbally or otherwise. The round is effective only if it is safe.
- There is no cross talk. As each member speaks, other members withhold their comments and questions until after the round is complete.
- There are no side conversations. As each member speaks, other members remain silent and do not speak to their neighbors.
- Any member is allowed to pass. Speaking or not speaking is an individual prerogative; however, everyone is encouraged to participate. Withholding participation or holding out to see which way the wind blows hampers productive dialogue.
- Someone on the team (preferably not the leader) summarizes the outcome of the round. Shared Spirit grows more positive if the meeting is not dominated by the leader or facilitator AND a summary will help give the team a sense of how the dialogue went. It is OK to permit some discussion in order to achieve consensus on the summary. Often, by coming to consensus on the summary, the team will also come closer to consensus on the issue or subject before them more quickly.

## Section 5. Some Common Uses of the Round

- Opening check in – The Team ‘Weather Report’: Very often members of a team have things on their mind which have nothing to do with the meeting they are in but have everything to do with their mental and emotional state. It will help the meeting if those present have the benefit of a ‘weather report’ about joys and sorrows affecting each person. This way members can take into account the otherwise unexplained reactions of their colleagues.
- Listen to, listen with, and listen for: All rounds, including check-in rounds, are primarily about listening. We show our love for each individual member by listening to him or her with our full attention. We show our devotion to community by listening with the other members of the group in collective love and gratitude for the person speaking as well as for one another. We show our desire to understand one another by listening for the thoughts, desires, feelings, and emotions that are expressed explicitly and implicitly in what each member of the group says.
- Sometimes it is helpful to do a second check-in round that is more focused on still stronger emotions of the members. This can be a useful, contained venting mechanism when there is

obvious anger and frustration among group members with some aspect of the project at hand.

- Especially in groups where some or all people are new the round is helpful for getting to know everyone present and what their specific roles or interests are.
- Open up discussion on a focused subject: A round can help to expedite a discussion by allowing the team to start from a place of knowing every participant's unique take on the matter. Such a round helps to keep the discussion focused on the matter at hand and avoid tangents.
- Open up discussion in order to find focus when several items are requiring attention: Often we come into meetings where the agenda is loaded, and even within individual agenda items there may be many areas to cover. The round can serve to establish the priorities of the team thus avoiding the impatience and anxiety that can occur when "less critical" items seem to dominate the discussion.
- Discover consensus of the team regarding a question: A round or two can efficiently process the nuances of opinion into a decision that represents the mind of the team.
- Provide a safe place for individuals to speak who otherwise would be intimidated. This is especially crucial when a topic is emotionally charged.
- Reestablish focus: Often teams lose their focus. A focused round will help them get back on track.
- Build a discussion: As one person speaks, the next person seeks to add his or her own thoughts to the ideas that have already been stated so as to build toward a conclusion.
- Closing check out: It will improve team spirit if, at the end of each session, each person relates what went well for him or her during the meeting and what did not go well.

## **Section 6. Gauging Consensus Using Fist-to-Five**

The Fist-to-Five technique is a convenient visual indicator of the quality and degree of consensus among a group on a given matter. The facilitator or any other member who senses that the group is moving in a particular direction on an issue may state that apparent direction of the group as a proposal and ask for a "Fist-to-Five" on it. Members indicate how they feel about the proposal with one of these hand signs:

- Five Fingers, which means, "This is an excellent idea, probably the best decision we can make given what we currently know." This person may be willing to volunteer for a leading role in implementing the proposal.
- Four Fingers, which means, "This is a good idea, and I will work for it."
- Three Fingers, which means, "I don't think it's necessarily the best option we could come up with, but I will support it and work for it." This person may not be in total accord but feels comfortable supporting this proposal without further discussion.
- Two Fingers, which means, "I'm not crazy about the idea as presented, but I can go along with it if that's the best we can do." The person might be more comfortable with the proposal after briefly exploring some minor issues and suggesting some slight changes.
- One Finger, which means, "I don't like the idea, but I won't stand in the way of the group's implementing it." This person may benefit from further dialogue on some issues and may wish to be given an opportunity to suggest significant changes before being able to support the proposal.
- Fist, which means, "This is a poor idea, and I'm not even close to being able to go along with it or support it." This person feels strongly enough about the issue to block full consensus and may also resist implementation if the group chooses the course of action under discussion.

- After everyone has indicated his or her level of support, the facilitator asks any people with fists, 1's or 2's to clarify their objections and to offer modifications that they think the whole group is likely to accept. The group explores the issue as necessary, makes changes to address the objections, and checks for consensus again. This process continues until (a) consensus with all 3's or higher is reached or (b) the group decides to move on and return to the issue later.
- When consensus has been reached, it is wise to re-check the quality of the consensus. A show of hands with mostly three fingers displayed is quite different from one with mostly four or five fingers. A low-grade consensus tells you the decision is probably only a stopgap measure, at best, and should be reconsidered. In any case, such a decision will need to be monitored closely and revisited.

**NOTE:** It often saves time to do a quick check for consensus early in the discussion of a proposal. Sometimes a group is actually ready for consensus earlier than expected. An early check might find all 4's and 5's except for two 1's, for example, meaning no one would block consensus and only two people have needs to be met. Any group member who suspects that there is already consensus on the proposal may call for a Fist-to-Five show of hands.