

From Emily Provance' 2025 Swarthmore Lecture at Woodbrooke, "A Testimony of Community"

Minute 16 (Conflict)

Become an instrument of peace by steeping yourself in the power of the everlasting spirit. Be a peacemaker and seek justice. Demonstrations and conferences are not enough. Find real, creative ways of solving conflicts peacefully. If you prove your own unwillingness to be violent, you can gain the trust of those who fear (sometimes reasonably) that others will be violent toward them.

It is easier to love humanity in the abstract than our literal neighbors. It is often hard to get along with people we love. Community members disappoint one another, but convictions that might divide us can strengthen us instead depending on how we handle it. Learn conflict management in daily settings so you are ready for bigger settings. All people need to build the skill of finding win-win solutions. Teach nonviolent conflict resolution skills in all contexts. Sports are one good medium for building bridges and supporting peace.

Make sure that you are reconciled with your brother before you praise or worship God. Make peace first. Deal with your interpersonal conflicts, if necessary, with help from the wider community.

Practice humility in conflict. Always remember you may be mistaken. Deal with your own faults first and others' second. Confront conflict, hurt, and hard conversations promptly and directly, without gossip or procedural fuss. Express concern about someone's behavior privately first and don't talk publicly unless necessary. Meet face to face when having difficult conversations. Explain yourself to people who find your actions objectionable. Try to speak in a way that can be heard. Be patient with each other as you try to work through conflict. If you realize you've made a stupid agreement with someone, confess that it was stupid and ask for mercy. In most cases, deal with conflict directly and not through legal systems. To enable destructive behavior is not compassionate.

Don't engage in conversations that you know will make someone angry unless there is a good reason to do so. Don't yell and throw tantrums. Don't flay open people's weaknesses. Don't waste time arguing, but don't ignore things that other people believe are important. Critics should speak to the right person in the right spirit.

If a matter divides us, God is interested and will provide guidance, even if the question is trivial. Don't ignore differences to avoid conflict. Do not hold wrongdoing against someone after they have repented. But also, do not pretend you feel no conflict or anger or disapproval when you really do because that's maintaining relationship under false pretenses. Always try to resolve issues rather than ignore them. Seek help resolving the conflict early if you need it. The longer you avoid a conflict, the more likely it is to become irreconcilable. Conflicts are not always about what they appear to be about. For example, many conflicts that are nominally about something else are actually about the urban/rural divide.

People should try to resolve their conflict privately, but if they can't, help them. Act immediately if a conflict is disturbing the community. Be careful not to increase divisions by taking sides in a conflict you aren't part of, though it's sometimes appropriate to mediate by facilitating dialogue between opponents. Pray for people who are in conflict. When facing a complicated situation in your community, ask for help from the wider community.

To deal with conflict through violence is contrary to the spirit of Christ. Truth is greater than any one individual or group may know. Use conflict to honor all voices and discover deeper truth. We can survive more than we think. Have the scary conversation. Use Quaker business principles in other parts of your life. We are not anarchists, and we know that individual hearing from the divine is contextualized in everyone hearing from the divine.

When decisions are being made, show up. When possible, work to persuade people to make better choices rather than outvoting or overpowering them. Look out for people who start conflict on purpose. An intentionally divisive person is bad for a community and can be sent away.

Remember: as you interact in community, both intentions and impact are important.

Sources

1 Corinthians	Meeting
Aotearoa / New Zealand Yearly Meeting	Description of the Qualifications of a
Australia Yearly Meeting	Gospel Minister
Baltimore Yearly Meeting	Ecclesiastes
Britain Yearly Meeting	Ireland Yearly Meeting
Central and Southern Africa Yearly	Lake Erie Yearly Meeting

Luke
New England Yearly Meeting
New York Yearly Meeting
North Carolina Yearly Meeting
(Conservative)
North Pacific Yearly Meeting
Northwest YM
Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
Pacific Yearly Meeting
Evangelical Friends Church
Southwest Region
Ephesians
Fox's Epistles
Great Plains Yearly Meeting

Illinois Yearly Meeting
Indiana Yearly Meeting
Intermountain Yearly Meeting
Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
Iowa Yearly Meeting (FUM)
Pennington
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Philippians
Proverbs
Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting
Southeastern Yearly Meeting
Titus
Western Yearly Meeting
Woolman's Journal