

Highland Mennonite Brethren Church Conduct Manual Conflict Resolution Guidelines

The following guidelines for resolving conflict at Highland Mennonite Brethren Church (“HMBC”) are based on Scriptural teachings (see Appendix 1 - Conflict Resolution Scripture References - with commentary). Note: The plural pronoun is used in place of the singular throughout to avoid gender (e.g., “they” instead of “he/she”).

1. Conflict between congregants ...

1.1. When the conflict is based on differences of opinion, mindset, values...

- 1.1.1. Does HMBC have any policies/guidelines regarding this difference? If so, then conform to those. If not, then go to next step ...
- 1.1.2. Seek common ground. On what can you agree? Use those commonly held items as a basis for dialogue about the things on which you disagree. Seek to understand each other’s point of view. Maybe views will change or the parties can amicably agree to disagree. If that doesn’t resolve the conflict, go to next step ...
- 1.1.3. If conflict remains unresolved between parties, then have each party bring in sympathizers to see if a resolution can be reached. If conflict still exists, go to next step ...
- 1.1.4. Parties in conflict present their respective sides to the Leadership Team Executive (“LTE”). The decision of the LTE will be considered binding.
- 1.1.5. If conflict continues, then the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).

1.2. When conflict is theological or biblical ...

- 1.2.1. Consult the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference (“CCMBC”) Confession of Faith with commentary (available on their website – www.mennonitebrethren.ca) plus any relevant CCMBC or HMBC resolutions. If the issue is addressed in the Confession or other resolution(s) then consider any relevant statement(s) binding; if not, then go to next step ...
- 1.2.2. Since the particular issue is not addressed in our Confession of Faith, the issue should be considered as secondary in nature; Augustine’s axiom should be applied, “In essentials [Confession of Faith], unity; in non-essentials, liberty [allow for disagreement]; in all things, charity [love one another].”
- 1.2.3. If conflict continues, the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).

1.3. When conflict is moral/sin (follow biblical guidelines)

- 1.3.1. When someone sins against you (see Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-22): the biblical guidelines focus primarily on the one offended rather than on the offender. The act of asking someone for forgiveness seems to be assumed; the problem is with the forgiver. We need to respond to all offenses against us by others with a forgiving, loving attitude. Even when the same person repeatedly sins against us, we need to repeatedly extend forgiveness. It is reasonable, though, for the offended party to use the process outlined in Matthew 18 (see 1.3.2 next).

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- 1.3.2. When someone sins (not necessarily against you; see especially Matthew 18:15-20 on which the following is based; also Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20):
 - 1.3.2.1. Go directly to the offender and reveal to them their sin. The person may immediately see their sin; if not they may have to be shown from Scripture or from how they have hurt HMBC or others (you?) that they have sinned. The purpose is not to condemn the offender but to convince them to repent of their sin and change their behaviour so that they can be restored to the HMBC community and/or those they have offended.
 - 1.3.2.2. If the person refuses to listen, bring one or two other trustworthy persons into the conversation. Again, the purpose is not to condemn (two-fold or more) but to emphasize the seriousness of their sin and the strong desire to see that person restored and reconciled with those they have offended and HMBC family at large.
 - 1.3.2.3. If the person still refuses to listen, bring the matter to the LTE. Again, the purpose is to restore the offender and reconcile them to the HMBC community.
 - 1.3.2.4. If the person still refuses to listen, the LTE should bring the matter to HMBC membership at a duly called meeting.
 - 1.3.2.4.1. If the offender refuses to listen to the membership, then they should be treated by the membership as a non-Christian (that is, someone who needs to come to faith in Jesus Christ in repentance and dedication for the forgiveness of sins).
 - 1.3.2.4.2. If the offender is a member of HMBC, then their membership will be placed in abeyance as a “member *not* in good standing.” As such they may not participate in ‘members only’ meetings, make or vote on motions, or serve in any capacity in the ministry of HMBC. If there is no satisfactory resolution or reconciliation within six months, then they will be released from membership.

2. Conflict between Ministry Team Members – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above along the following lines of authority:

- 2.1. One or both parties involved should take the matter to their Ministry Team Leader as their direct supervisor;
- 2.2. If the direct supervisor cannot or does not resolve the matter, one or both parties should appeal to the Core Ministry Coordinator as the next higher level of authority;
- 2.3. The highest level of authority shall be the LTE unless it is necessary to take the matter to HMBC membership (see 1.3.2.4 above)

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- 3. Conflict between congregant and congregational leader (i.e., Leadership Team (“LT”) members and pastors) – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:**
 - 3.1. The matter should first be addressed by the LTE in an effort to find a resolution and reconciliation;
 - 3.2. If the LTE is unable or unwilling to resolve the matter, then it would be brought to HMBC membership for discernment and decision.
- 4. Conflict between leaders – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:**
 - 4.1. The individuals involved in the conflict should seek resolution/reconciliation between each other;
 - 4.2. If no resolution is found, then the matter should be dealt with by the LTE;
 - 4.3. If still no resolution is found, then the LTE should bring the matter to HMBC membership for discernment and decision;
 - 4.4. Any conflict should be addressed as soon as it arises. Members should be informed quickly, if there is no immediate resolution.
- 5. In all matters, those in conflict should act with humility, follow biblical guidelines, adhere to HMBC’s policies and procedures, and be concerned with their and HMBC’s public testimony. *Appendix 2 – 10 Rules for Community* and *Appendix 3 – 10 Rules for Respect* may be used as resources helpful in avoiding conflict.**

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APPENDIX 1 - CONFLICT RESOLUTION SCRIPTURE REFERENCES - WITH COMMENTARY

These Scriptures (NIV 2011) dealing with conflict are organized by topic; with commentary from Pastor Ken Dueck.

1. Responding to those who sin against us

1.1. Luke 17:3-4

³ *"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."*

1.2. Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

1.3. Matthew 18:21-22

²¹ *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

Commentary:

The primary emphasis in these verses is on the one offended rather than the offender. It is our Christian duty (following the example of our 'heavenly Father') to extend forgiveness to those who sin against us and to keep on extending forgiveness for as often as they offend us. This requires humility on our part – not holding the person's sins against them, nor judging ourselves superior because we did not sin as they did.

The only note re. dealing with the sinner is in Luke 17:3, *"If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them..."* In context 'rebuke' has more to do with opposing evil wherever it may be found than self-righteously defending our honour.

2. Responding to those we observe sinning

2.1. Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ *"If your brother or sister sins [against you], go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*

Commentary:

Note re. v. 15: The very best manuscripts do not have the phrase "against you" after "sins"; however, there is enough evidence in favour of its inclusion that it remains uncertain (therefore, appearing in various English translations; e.g., NIV 1984, but not NIV 2011). Practically speaking this means that we can use the model of confrontation taught in

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Matthew 18 in either situation—when we see someone sinning or when someone sins against us.

Richard Gardner (Matthew; Believers Church Bible Commentary) says it well:

The first step (v. 15) in the process [when dealing with a fellow-Christian who has sinned] involves one-to-one confrontation with the member who has sinned. ... [The verb behind 'point out their fault'] suggests showing or demonstrating that wrongdoing has occurred, so as to convince another to alter personal behavior. If that happens, Matthew tells us, the offender is restored to a whole relationship with the [church] family.

If not, one proceeds to the second step (v. 16). The instruction to bring one or two witnesses into the conversation (from Deut. 19:15) ... is not to secure a legal judgment, but to buttress the attempt at fraternal correction, to make an even stronger appeal to the member who has stumbled to acknowledge sin and be restored.

If that too fails, then the issue must be brought before the church (=local congregation). This final step is also taken to restore, not punish. If one refuses, however, to heed the counsel of the congregation, separation is the end result: *'treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector'*, as one who stands outside the circle of faith. What is envisioned is not isolation from the sinner, but a radical redefinition of the relationship. From this point on, the [church] community will no longer relate to the person as a fellow disciple, but as someone of the world who has yet to be disciplined. (p. 281)

2.2. Galatians 6:1-2

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Commentary:

The sin here is not habitual or flagrant, but a one-time incident that is unusual for that person and probably causes the person to feel guilty/ashamed. The offender must be rehabilitated rather than condemned and ostracized. This rehabilitation must be undertaken only by someone who *"lives by the Spirit"* - whose life and conduct are controlled by the Spirit of Christ. This will ensure that the person doing the correcting will have sufficient self-control to not fall into the same sin while restoring the offender with gentleness (both of which are 'fruits' of the Spirit). [FF Bruce, Galatians NIGTC, p. 260]

2.3. James 5:16, 19-20

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ...

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Commentary:

"Wander from the truth" = has rejected God's revealed will and acts contrary to it, either through willfulness or because of being deceived (including by demonic powers). The call is to turn these wandering sinners back to the truth (i.e., to the true way of living).

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2.4. 1 Timothy 5:17-21

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. ²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

Commentary:

Elders are those who hold office in the church (e.g., pastors, LT members). They are "worthy of double honor" may refer both to respect and encouragement from others as well as appropriate remuneration especially for those who dedicate themselves to the preaching/teaching (and thus may have limited or no other income).

The respect for elders requires that care be taken in their discipline. Any suggestion of misconduct by an elder quickly becomes a concern within the whole church community. Therefore, no accusation against an elder should be considered unless there is clear and certain evidence.

If it is proven that an elder is sinning then the church needs to take swift, strong, and impartial measures. That elder needs to be brought before the whole church for censure and appropriate discipline.

3. Source of Conflict

3.1. James 4:1-12

¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

3.2. Proverbs 17:14

¹⁴ Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

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4. Attitude of love, humility, forgiveness etc. toward others (even enemies)

4.1. 1 Corinthians 12:21-26

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

4.2. 1 Peter 4:8

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

4.3. Philippians 2:1-4

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

4.4. Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

4.5. Ephesians 4:25-32

²⁵ Therefore [since God has made us new in the attitude of our minds; created to be like God in righteousness and holiness] each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

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4.6. Matthew 5:23-24

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

4.7. Mark 11:25

²⁵ "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

4.8. Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

4.9. Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

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5. Do not be angry, judge, or slander

5.1. Matthew 7:1-5

¹ *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

³ *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*

5.2. James 1:19-21

¹⁹ *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

5.3. James 5:9

⁹ *Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

5.4. James 4:11-12

¹¹ *Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

5.5. Proverbs 15:1

¹ *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

6. Handling disputes

6.1. 1 Corinthians 6:1-9

¹ *If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people? ² Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴ Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!*

⁷ *The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. ⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?*

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6.2. John 7:21-24

²¹ Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. ²³ Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

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APPENDIX 2 - 10 RULES FOR COMMUNITY

1. We will LOVE one another unconditionally.

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

2. We will EMPATHIZE with one another.

“God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

3. We will extend and receive FORGIVENESS from one another.

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32)

4. We will PUT one another FIRST.

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12:10)

5. We will SERVE one another.

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” (Galatians 5:13)

6. We will PRAY for one another.

“...pray for each other....” (James 5:16)

7. We will ENCOURAGE one another.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

8. We will LISTEN to one another before speaking.

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19)

9. We will CHOOSE WORDS CAREFULLY when speaking to one another.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)

10. We will SHARE with one another when in need.

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need.” (Romans 12:13)

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APPENDIX 3 – 10 RULES FOR RESPECT

1. **If you have a problem with me, come to me (privately).**
2. **If I have a problem with you, I will come to you (privately).**
3. **If someone has a problem with me and comes to you, send them to me. (I'll do the same for you.)**
4. **If someone consistently will not come to me, say, "Let's go to see them together. I am sure they will see us about this." (I will do the same for you.)**
5. **Be careful how you interpret me - I'd rather do that. On matters that are unclear, do not feel pressured to interpret my feelings or thoughts. It is easy to misinterpret intentions.**
6. **I will be careful how I interpret you.**
7. **If it's confidential, don't tell. If you or anyone comes to me in confidence, I won't tell unless**
 - the person is going to harm themselves;
 - the person is going to harm someone else (see HMBC's *Harassment and Abuse Policy*); or
 - a child has been/is being abused (see HMBC's *Plan to Protect® Policy*).**I expect the same from you.**
8. **I do not read unsigned letters or notes.**
9. **I do not manipulate. I will not be manipulated. Do not let others manipulate you. Do not let others manipulate me through you. I will not preach "at you." I will leave conviction to the Holy Spirit (He does it better anyway!)**
10. **When in doubt, just say it. The only dumb questions are those that don't get asked. Our relationships with one another, at the end of the day, are the most important things so if you have a concern, pray, and then (if led) speak up. If I can answer it without misrepresenting something, someone, or breaking a confidence, I will.**