



Fellowship Matters

Thoughts on Fellowship and
Ecclesial Membership

Isaiah 42:3

*"a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench"*

Preface

1 John 4: 15-21

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Copyright

Christadelphian Support Network UK@2018

Charity Number 1089965

Unit 7355, PO Box 15113, Birmingham, B2 2NJ

Web Site: www.chsn.org.uk Email: admin@chsn.org.uk

Phone admin: 01555 705099

Helpline 0800 9545 099

September 2018

The authors acknowledge the contributions of many individuals in the preparation of these notes including members of the committee of the Christadelphian Support Network UK

Foreword

In recent years, it has become apparent during CSN work in counselling, support and mediation both with individuals and ecclesias, that there is a need for more information, guidance and scriptural consideration of the principles and practice of fellowship within the community.

There have been times where it has become apparent that the scriptural principles of fellowship and the purpose of and reasons for exclusion from membership were neither appreciated nor understood.

This booklet seeks to cover the subjects of fellowship, ecclesial membership and aspects of ecclesial discipline in a way that is designed to be thought provoking and to stimulate discussion, rather than being dogmatic in areas of difference.

From its original conception in early 2017 to its present form, the booklet has undergone numerous drafts and the CSN committee is very appreciate of the input of many brothers and sisters who have reviewed, criticised, commented and added to the original content.

As part of CSN's objectives to raise awareness of difficult issues and to encourage compassionate care in our community, we offer this booklet with our prayers that it will help to bring about a greater spirit of resolution and restoration, reflecting the love of the Father shown towards each of us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The CSN Committee

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	4
Serving the Ecclesia	5
What do we understand by shared fellowship?	6
The process to be followed in dealing with serious concerns.....	8
The scriptural basis of withdrawal or suspension of membership.....	16
The process of coming to a decision.....	18
Repentance	22
Reasons for withdrawal of membership.....	23
Consequences	24
The letter of resignation.....	25
Publicising decisions	26
Withdrawal by constitution	27
Long term non-attendance.....	28
Responding to a request for re-membership	32
Rebuilding the ecclesial community	33
Summary	34
Appendix 1 The concept of keeping the ecclesia “pure”?	36
Appendix 2 What is the spiritual meaning of dis-fellowship?.....	38
Appendix 3 Implications of GDPR on ecclesial records?	40

Introduction

What do we mean by fellowship and ecclesial membership?

First and foremost, fellowship relates to our individual relationship with the Father and Son. This fundamental relationship informs our attitudes and behaviours both to ourselves and others as is clearly set out in the extract from 1 John 4 shown in the preface. Our individual understanding of fellowship with the Father and Son sets the

What do we mean by fellowship and membership? tone for our relationship with others, particularly in our shared fellowship expressed within the context of membership of an ecclesial community.

Sometimes fellowship and shared fellowship or membership are treated as one and the same. However, the distinction is an important one. Fellowship relates to our individual image of God and Jesus and the privileges and responsibilities which flow from that relationship. Shared fellowship or membership relates to the way in which we put fellowship into practice in our relationships with others. It is possible to experience fellowship in isolation. However, it is most fully explored within the context of the shared fellowship of membership of an ecclesial community.

By making the distinction between fellowship and shared fellowship or membership we place responsibility for the quality of our shared fellowship squarely upon ourselves and our individual relationship with God and Christ. This fundamental and loving relationship is not an emotion but a state of being, a state of mind: the mind of Christ.

Where difficulties arise in relation to shared fellowship or membership, this can usually be traced back to issues relating to personal fellowship, where we have become separated from the love of God and the mind of Christ or have chosen to ignore the fundamental privileges and responsibilities of the relationship which we have to the Father and Son.

Serving the Ecclesia

It is a privilege to be called to serve the ecclesial community including in the office of recorder or secretary and as a member of an arranging committee. The purpose of these various responsibilities is to ensure the well-being of the ecclesia in both its care for members and their spiritual welfare and in witnessing to the wider community.

It is a privilege to be called to serve the ecclesia

Whilst sometimes spiritual welfare is reduced to the consideration of attendance, the responsibility of shared fellowship goes well beyond that. Importantly, lack of attendance is usually the symptom of a deeper issue within the body of Christ. Those serving the ecclesia have a responsibility to ensure fellowship and the promotion of relationship with the Father and Son are at the core of ecclesial activities.

As examples of some of the matters which may influence the quality of our shared fellowship, the following questions are offered for consideration, in the context of both our formal and informal ecclesial activities:

- Is prayer given its due importance both individually and in a shared or collective context?
- Is meditation and quiet consideration of faith and its challenges addressed?
- Does the programme of activities address the spiritual needs relevant to each member?
- Is a spirit of love and concern evidenced within the ecclesial family and to those with whom we have dealings?
- Do we appreciate and respect differences between individual members?
- Does the language we use to each other reflect our 'fellowship'?
- Is sufficient time set aside to consider the overall spiritual welfare of the ecclesial family?

- Are we aware of the practical difficulties being faced by individual members?
- How do we care for the 'little ones': those on the edge of ecclesial activities?

These are just some of the matters we may consider in ensuring that the ecclesial community is a place of true fellowship.

The Aim of this booklet

Occasionally, these responsibilities will include facing difficult and challenging situations regarding membership.

The aim of this booklet is to consider the teaching of scripture on the subjects of fellowship and membership. It is designed to be thought provoking and to stimulate discussion. Our prayer too, is that it will help to bring about a spirit of resolution and restoration following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The teaching of scripture, with reference to Matthew 18, makes it clear that each member of an ecclesial community has a responsibility to consider and act over the continuation in shared fellowship of a member or members if their actions or attitudes become a serious cause of disharmony.

The ²Ecclesial Guide available from the Christadelphian Office is a long standing source of help in considering this.

What do we understand by shared fellowship?

The shared fellowship within our community is precious. Each ecclesia is autonomous but united by an acceptance of our shared commitment and Statement of Faith. At its best, through our shared fellowship, we experience the joy, comfort, support and the love of fellow brothers and sisters, not just in our own ecclesia but in our local area, country and throughout the world. As part of our wider ecclesial community, each ecclesia acknowledges and seeks to fulfil its responsibilities in its actions and decisions and so preserve a unity of spirit between ecclesias whilst recognising that there will be differences of opinion, judgement and practice.

The Greek word translated as fellowship also means, communion, partnership, and sharing. Shared fellowship is therefore evident in:

- individuals working together in a generous sharing of friendship;
- kindness and empathy shown to each other;
- respecting our differences; being non-judgmental and with positive regard for each other;
- showing respect for one another's views and opinions and
- in patient forbearance and forgiving of one another.

However, our fellowship is first and foremost our individual relationship with the Father

Fellowship is first and foremost with the Father and the Son

and the Son. Our shared fellowship with each other, as part of the body of Christ, reflects our individual fellowship.

Shared fellowship is reflected through a common purpose; a common belief and hope which binds believers together. It is a sharing together in a spirit of love and harmony, of life experiences and of our relationship with the Father and the Son.

It is through our shared fellowship that:

1 Corinth 12:25-26

members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.

It is a place to demonstrate the fruits of the spirit toward each other;

Ephesians 4:2-3

with all lowliness and meekness with patience forbearing one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

And it is through our shared fellowship that we encourage one another;

Ephesians 4:15-16

we grow up in every way onto him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body ... makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love.

Although, ultimately, responsibility for the quality and preservation of our fellowship falls on each of us as individuals and the choices we make, we also have a clear responsibility to each other;

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Paul tells us to, 'always seek to do good to one another and to everyone' and this places a responsibility upon us to ensure that the ecclesial community is a place of nurture and encouragement for the disciple of Christ and not a place of contention and that which is not 'good'.

What happens if the ecclesia is continually disrupted by a member with their own agenda?

- But what happens if the harmony of this shared fellowship is disrupted in some way?
- What happens when the behaviour of an individual or individuals within the ecclesia gives rise to concern?
- What action does the ecclesia take when made aware of a serious accusation against a member or members?
- What happens when a member ceases to communicate with the ecclesia?

The process to be followed in dealing with serious concerns

A member or members of the ecclesial community may become aware of actions or activities which appear to be inconsistent with the principles of scripture and shared

fellowship, and which are serious enough to mature and objective minds to threaten the harmony of the ecclesia and 'the unity of the body in the bonds of peace' (Ephesians 4v3)

These actions may include:

- Relationship issues which are considered to impact adversely upon members.
- Abusive or contentious behaviour towards others in and associated with the ecclesial community.
- Disruption to ecclesial harmony by the forceful expression of views which are clearly contrary to Bible teaching and its commonly held understanding across our ecclesial community, or through a disproportionate response to another's sincerely held but different personal interpretation

Care should be exercised in each case to reflect whether the matter is genuinely an ecclesial one or rather a personal matter, which should be resolved in other ways. This is particularly so in relationship matters or when there appears to be a difference of belief.

Misunderstandings can all too easily arise over personal circumstances or how we personally choose to interpret scripture, and what we interpret as being another's belief. We may misunderstand the context and circumstance in which a discussion has arisen. Relationships are not all the same and there are many ways of reading and interpreting scripture, and much new learning and insight to be gained, especially if explored considerately together in a spirit of love and learning.

We would all do well to reflect quietly and humbly on such matters with both open minds and Bibles, rather than react with fear or judgment.

In situations of genuine ecclesial concern, our Lord Jesus Christ has placed before us a clear way forward and an objective as set out in Matthew 18:10-17. The scriptural

context is of interest: the attitude of our Heavenly Father to the little ones and restoring the lost sheep.

v10 See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven...

v14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

The prime consideration in any matter of ecclesial disharmony is both in the restoration of those concerned and the harmony of the body of Christ.

The same passage outlines the way in which such matters should be dealt with in the ecclesial community:

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

It is very important to remember that the way in which the ecclesial community handles such matters can have long term implications both on the individuals concerned and the whole membership. So, it is worthwhile to take time to ensure that any actions are taken carefully, prayerfully and lovingly from the very outset. Rushed actions in the spirit of something needs to be done, may well be regretted later.

The Lord sets out for us, a clear process for dealing with matters of concern within the ecclesia in which there are three stages:

Stage 1	An informal 'one to one' meeting
Stage 2	An informal meeting with one or two independent 'observers'
Stage 3	A more formal 'Church' meeting

Let us examine how each of these stages could be conducted in a spirit of reconciliation.

Stage 1

The one making the accusation initially makes a direct approach to the individual whose behaviour is thought to be a cause of disharmony. This should provide the opportunity for honest and candid discussion of the matter with the aim of producing understanding and reconciliation in private between the two individuals.

The first move is not to tell others and/or complain to the recorder, secretary or arranging committee members.

There may be some exceptions to this:

- ³ if we do not feel safe to make this direct contact then in confidence to share with another to help and guide us in the approach
- If a child or vulnerable person is at risk. Here the Safeguarding Procedure agreed by the ecclesia will require the accuser to immediately contact the ¹Designated Safeguarding Lead who will review the risk and may contact the Local Authority Safeguarding Team for advice. The purpose of this is to protect the child and the person being accused, who may suffer serious damage to their reputation, family and employment if the accusations are made public at this early stage, even to the arranging committee

Where more than one person is aware of the matter then who makes this initial approach will depend upon the circumstances and the individuals concerned but the

purpose remains to raise the matter in a spirit of loving kindness and concern for the spiritual welfare of all. The one delegated to carry out the task of reconciliation must be respected by and well disposed towards the other.

There is a clear example of this action in scripture. God sent Nathan the prophet to speak to David when his mind had become separated from God, which ultimately led to his adultery with Bathsheba

2 Samuel 12:12

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.

Notice the manner of the approach: a story is told, and it is only after the story has had its effect upon David, that Nathan then tells him "You are the man!" This indicates that the approach is to prick the conscience of the other rather than to lay down the law. If this is achieved, then an early resolution may be possible.

There may be a need for more than one Stage 1 meeting to take place to allow time for the issue to be fully considered and for a move towards reconciliation to take place.

Stage 2

If the initial individual meeting is unsuccessful or is avoided, then an approach is made a second time with one or two independent witnesses. The purpose of these witnesses is not to join the argument on one side or the other but to establish the facts.

Is the incident credible? Are the facts agreed? Are there mitigating factors? Is there remorse? Again, the response to this meeting may enable a positive way forward to be determined. Only if these more private approaches fail will the ecclesial community need to consider becoming involved.

Stage 3

It is only at this stage after prior attempts at reconciliation have failed that the matter may come before the ecclesia. The ecclesial community will confidentially consider the matter seeking the prayerful co-operation of those concerned. This may involve the appointment of certain individuals to consider the matter, in confidence, and report back. This is important as accusations can lead to uninformed opinions and the damaging disruption of fellowship. In cases of relationship breakdown, great discretion will need to be exercised as hasty or uninformed actions could prejudice an eventual restoration of the relationship.

The aim is always to seek restoration in a spirit of gentleness.

The overall aim of this process is not punishment but always to seek restoration in a spirit of gentleness.

Galatians 6:1

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

The body of Christ, in this situation the ecclesia, will together seek to restore. See too where the responsibility to act in humility and gentleness is placed: upon those who are trying to restore the individual or individuals.

Paul encouraged the Galatians to work together as a team. If someone is struggling, seek to restore them in a 'spirit of gentleness'. But also consider how you would like to be treated if you yourself were struggling or tempted.

He then continues;

v4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each will have to bear his own load.

Paul assumes we all have burdens. The word used means 'heavy burdens'. It is a wide-ranging term that would cover issues common to each of us including; suffering, illnesses, physical disabilities, sorrows, grief, worries, responsibilities (financial and other), temptations, errors, doubts, weaknesses and failures (moral and other). In other words, it includes every load that is hard to bear.

So, we seek restoration, fully aware of each other's burden, and the gift of grace we share.

Conducting a meeting as part of the process of reconciliation.

This is not a trial and both the format and location of the meeting should not give this impression. The aim is reconciliation and not retribution and a neutral venue may well encourage this attitude.

Avoid pre-judging the meeting by using terms like 'the accused' or 'the guilty or the wronged party'. These will not help in establishing the facts and developing an atmosphere of caring concern. Avoid taking sides and indicating any hostility, show sympathy and love, listen to both sides avoiding jumping to conclusions.

The aim of the meeting is to investigate the matter and to listen to both parties, ideally with both present, seeking to understand the issue and the reason and motive for the apparent behaviour. Whilst we may be tempted to think that there may be no excuse for what has happened, there may be circumstances that need to be considered: circumstances such as health (mental and physical), bereavement, loss of employment, addiction, debt, or breakdown in a relationship with possible safety issues which has led to the situation.

Both parties should be encouraged to have someone with them to offer personal support. If a sister is concerned, it is essential that she is supported by another sister in the room. Initially the meeting should be restricted to at most two or three representing the ecclesia and will be as informal as possible. Where a sister is involved, a majority of sisters would be expected to be at the meeting and brothers should have the sensitivity to withdraw if the truth will only be shared with a sister. The required spirit of gentleness would prohibit a sister being interviewed on her own before a committee of brothers.

The meeting will have a chairperson to facilitate the meeting and to ensure it is conducted in calmness without hostility. The chair should remind those involved of the spirit in which the meeting should progress and to aim for a length not exceeding two

hours. Nothing will be gained from a longer meeting. A further meeting can always be arranged.

At the commencement of the meeting, it should be agreed by all parties, that what is said will be confidential, except for a brief written summary, agreed by all, which will be made available to the arranging committee and made known (although not necessarily circulated) to the ecclesia.

If the issue involves a couple, then ideally, they will be seen together rather than separately however, from a practical point of view this may not always be possible.

The scriptural basis of withdrawal or suspension of membership

There are a number of scripture quotations which illustrate the types of behaviour which after investigation, may warrant action being taken:

Titus 3:9-11,

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Romans 16:17-18

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

1 Corinth 5:1-5

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

1 Corinth 5:9-11

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

It can be seen from these verses, that there are a whole range of matters which can threaten the unity of the body of Christ and the basis of shared fellowship. As we know, Paul was fully aware of his own weakness and need for personal forgiveness and was certainly not suggesting that members must be perfect and that those who were not should be shunned. Instead, he was concerned about the individual who had lost sight of their personal relationship with the Father and Son and as a result was ignoring the impact of this and their consequent actions upon themselves and through their shared fellowship, upon other members of the body of Christ.

It is for this reason, that if the matter is not resolved scripturally, satisfactorily and in a spirit of loving kindness by the informal process suggested by Jesus in Matt 18, then a more formal meeting of the ecclesia may need to consider either a temporary withdrawal of membership or a sanction which will meet the needs of the parties and the members of the ecclesia and allow a breathing space for all involved.

The purpose of a withdrawal of membership, a temporary suspension of membership, a sanction or a limitation of membership is to protect the members of the ecclesia from a disruptive brother or sister and to challenge and encourage them to review their behaviour and its effect upon the ecclesial community.

It is never to punish the individual or to cleanse the ecclesia. (See Appendix 1) It must arise from love and a desire to restore and is not a means of retribution.

It should also be noted that true fellowship relates to an individual's relationship with God and so this fundamental relationship cannot be withdrawn or suspended by others. This remains a matter between the individual and our Lord.

The process of coming to a decision

What does our Lord mean when he states that we must not judge?

Matthew 7:1-5

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

We cannot and are not able to judge the individual's heart, reason or motives

The members of an ecclesia have a responsibility to come to a judgment but that can only be of an individual's behaviour. We are not able to judge the individual's heart, reason or motives. Only the Father knows the heart.

How then do we come to a conclusion and make decisions about a brother's or sister's actions which may impact upon their membership?

As examples of where we might allow our own personal feelings and opinions to get in the way of a 'Christ-like' view we might prayerfully and honestly consider the following:

Our age and background	Different generations have different challenges, attitudes and experiences that might not be to our personal taste, but are they incompatible with discipleship?
Our marriage circumstances	Those who have enjoyed a happy and fulfilled marriage and a family may not appreciate the struggles of those who do not or who are alone?
Our personality	Are we 'easy going' or do we like things done 'our way'. Do we empathise with others or are we quick to judge?
Our circumstances in life	Perhaps we have led a 'comfortable life' without major financial concerns and other worries and anxieties. Can we sympathise with others whose experiences are very different?

Is it possible that some of our attitudes and behaviours have been forged within a Christadelphian culture, with little knowledge of the life experiences of others? For example; the pressures on young people; those with difficult relationships, the impact

of bereavement and loss, financial problems, the consequences of poor physical or mental health, addiction, anxiety and sexuality issues.

It can be too easy to judge the actions and behaviours of others when we have no appreciation of their struggles. Could we be consciously or unconsciously, prejudiced against them?

Or perhaps there may be a conflict of interest because of family or other connections which could influence our opinions?

These issues should be borne in mind when faced with circumstances with which we are unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

It may be that we are concerned by what other people will think, and that our judgement will take this into account.

Are we primarily concerned, not about the issue, but what people will think about our part in the investigation and decision? If this is the case can we consider carefully this attitude before ever becoming involved? Other people, perhaps in other ecclesias, will not be aware of all the circumstances and therefore should not express opinions. This can be a concern when our decision tends towards gentleness and compassion in accepting a repentant heart when others are expecting a legalistic approach.

Are we strong enough to stand by a decision which others, who are not as well informed, may disagree with?

The advice in the Ecclesial Guide should be given careful consideration. Those charged with serving the ecclesia will also consider the effect on the faith of other members and will express this responsibility to the parties involved.

When it is agreed that the actions of the individual are inappropriate then they require to be challenged. If the individual shows no concern for others, no regret and argues to

justify their behaviour, then some action by the ecclesia may be necessary to restore a sense of harmony.

However, it is important not to rush to decisions.

- Beware of having an agenda to complete the matter by the next business meeting. Individuals need time to consider the options before them and perhaps to make changes. First reactions and initial responses can be reconsidered. There may need to be a 'cooling off' period. Evidence of the ecclesia's care and prayerful, gentle interest and response can bring about change.

What about continued unrepentant behaviour?

- Is it an option to ignore this? To do so may not bring about the self-examination desired by the ecclesial community and may result in a continuing state of disharmony or even division. The decision to act or not will depend upon the response of the individual concerned, the issue and the ongoing impact which it may be having upon others.

In 1 Corinthians 5 above, Paul refers to the brother as being delivered to satan for a period and then sought after to be restored. He uses the term satan elsewhere to indicate the Roman world and government. He uses the expression "not to eat with them". Both indicate a temporary removal from the ecclesial community and its shared fellowship.

This will be for an agreed period with some contact maintained following which the individual should then be sought after for a return to membership.

2 Cor 2:6-8

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So, I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

Repentance

We understand the concept of repentance which literally means a change of direction along with an expression of regret and a seeking for forgiveness.

When action is taken over membership it is in expectation and hope of a change of heart. We expect, pray for and hope to see an ending to the behaviour which is the cause of concern and to see the evidence of the broken and contrite heart.

We expect, pray for and hope to see evidence of the “broken and contrite heart”

James 5:19-20

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

However, repentance can be challenging both for the individual and the ecclesia:

- Are we able to believe the words of repentance, do we have a choice?
- Will this repentance be accepted by all members of the ecclesia?
- Should withdrawal take place to see if there is evidence of repentance over a period?
- What if there follows evidence of a falling back?

How often shall we forgive our brother when he repents? The words of our Lord Jesus Christ appear clear:

Luke 17:3

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.

To deny shared fellowship simply because we do not believe our member's statement of repentance would suggest we are judging their heart and motives. Only God can do that.

Does unrepentant behaviour include situations where there is a disagreement over the interpretation of scripture or doctrine? Care will need to be exercised here as it can sometimes be the accuser who is causing the disharmony and division rather than the one who is the subject of the enquiry.

Reasons for withdrawal of membership

a) Should withdrawal take place as a way of showing the concern of the ecclesial community for previous unacceptable behaviour?

This would suggest a punishment for past events rather than providing support and encouragement in the present.

As discussed further in Appendix 1, the concept of a pure ecclesia being contaminated by a sinner is unscriptural.

Without Christ and God's grace we are all unclean. Shared fellowship is challenging. Christ requires us to love both the 'lovely' and the 'unlovely'.

Fellowship is challenging. Christ requires us to love the unlovely

b) Should withdrawal take place to relieve the ecclesia of a problem?

The easy option may be to remove them from the ecclesia. This may bring temporary relief but is it avoiding our wider responsibilities? It will also remove crucial emotional and spiritual support from them perhaps when facing great personal challenge. It denies them the Lord's table and the companionship of their brothers and sisters at a time of personal vulnerability. Surely the Christ-like way is to come alongside them, to encourage, help and support them in their trials as each of us would hope for ourselves were we the one overtaken in adversity.

- c) Should withdrawal take place to give the ecclesia a period of freedom from the presence of one who is factious and disruptive?

Perhaps an alternative might be to seek to set a boundary of behaviour or a condition of restricted attendance, for a period, or to hold separate meetings with them outside the formal ecclesial setting.

- d) Should they be asked to move to another ecclesia?

Some may see this as a pragmatic response to an issue but is this just avoiding ecclesial responsibility? Could this imply a relationship problem rather than a shared fellowship issue? In these circumstances all parties may need to reflect maturely and prayerfully upon the real source of the problem. In any event what form of commendation could be given to the new ecclesia in the case of a disruptive member?

Consequences

Even when there is repentance and forgiveness, there may be consequences following an individual's behaviour. The consequences of David's adultery and the murder of Uriah followed him to the end of his life. The ecclesia could decide to regularly review the attitude and behaviour and/or place restrictions on the membership of the repentant one for a period.

For example, if the issue has been disruption through an individual's anger, then there may be a requirement that the individual seeks help to manage their anger. With other problems, individuals can be directed to an appropriate source of professional support such as couple counselling, debt management assistance or addiction therapy.

In situations that might cause family conflict or areas of serious risk, it may be necessary to impose boundaries on the form of attendance. Someone placed on the Sex Offenders

Register must be monitored to ensure they comply with court requirements, cannot work with children or young people and do not put others at risk.

In some cases of divorce, it could be regarded as insensitive to allow attendance at a meeting where a former partner is a member.

There are many situations where there will be an ongoing requirement to consider carefully the spiritual and emotional welfare of the individuals directly concerned and of the ecclesial community.

The letter of resignation

Frequently when an issue comes to light, the individual may choose to resign rather than face an enquiry and possible withdrawal. They may be filled with guilt and shame and wish to spare the ecclesial community the need to investigate and come to a decision. They may merely see resignation as a tactical ploy. It is important that such situations are individually and carefully assessed.

Sometimes the stress placed on an individual by the ecclesia seeking to investigate an issue will lead to a resignation rather than remain as a member or seek to explain their behaviour, even though they may be innocent or deeply repentant.

Resignations are often met with relief in the ecclesia. But though someone can resign from membership can they resign from fellowship? Is this a scriptural principle? Fellowship in its fullest sense, is not like belonging to a club or a society where members can join or resign at will as in a social club. Fellowship is our personal relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a relationship which is always available to us even when we may feel separated and alone.

The options regarding resignation letters received include:

- a) **Wait:** put the letter of resignation on file, acknowledge its receipt but express regret, asking if anything can be done to help and include a request for permission to keep in touch. There is no public announcement of the ending of membership.
- b) **Inform the ecclesia.** After a formal meeting, the ecclesia may decide either to wait or to accept the letter. Where it is accepted, the ecclesia will write, confirming the resignation and express regret including a request for permission to keep in touch. Then membership of the ecclesia and the wider ecclesial community is at an end. An announcement is made to the members.

Our responsibility as an individual member and as an ecclesial community is to follow up, offering support in all cases after the cessation of membership. The principle is to endeavour to restore the individual. The Ecclesia can set up formal processes for this with suitable individuals appointed for this work but the most important factor in the successful restoration and reconciliation is always the individual acts of kindness, friendship and love expressed towards those who have left the community. This is quite contrary to a mindset of rejection and exclusion seen in some religious communities.

See Appendix 2. What is the spiritual meaning of withdrawal?

Publicising decisions

The ecclesial practice has been to make membership decisions public through the Christadelphian Magazine. Whilst it may be necessary that the wider community be advised, we should consider our motives and the consequences of providing reasons. Why should we give a reason for our decision? Disorderly walk, divorce, married out of the faith, non-attendance, all of these and more, might question the interest of the ecclesia in the restoration of former members and may advertise to the community more about the mindset of the ecclesia concerned.

In a society, where electronic records may be permanent and easily accessed, care should be taken to avoid a public link with a name and behaviour. How will this impact

upon our brother or sister in the future should they wish to resume membership? Could such comments be regarded a defamatory?

See Appendix 3 on the implications of 'GDPR' (the general data protection regulations introduced across the European Community in 2018) upon ecclesial information and notices.

Withdrawal by constitution

Some ecclesial communities may conscientiously include in their constitution a process of automatic withdrawal following certain events, such as a member becoming divorced or remarrying after divorce. The ecclesial community may then respond automatically to such matters, and not make efforts to consider each case prayerfully and with loving kindness, taking account of the causes of such actions and behaviours in individual situations.

A cautionary lesson comes from an experience some years ago when a young sister faced a traumatic decision. She was in a physically abusive marriage and both she and her children were in real danger. She had to leave the family home but was financially dependent on her unsupportive husband. Only if she divorced him would the court award maintenance. She felt she had little alternative but to do this even though she knew that as a divorcee she would be removed from her sole source of spiritual, and emotional support within her ecclesial family.

Rules sound simple at the time and that is what they are: simple, until people are involved. She lost her ecclesia, and in consequence, the support of her brothers and sisters, even that of her parents and ultimately, her faith.

Did the ecclesia show concern and act with justice and gentleness in this case?

Should any constitution include provision for 'automatic' removal of a member?

Was there another way?

Such rules though often introduced to prevent dissent can provide a tragic hostage to future situations. Each situation needs careful and prayerful consideration taking full account of the circumstances and the individuals involved.

Long term non-attendance.

The ecclesial family has a responsibility to consider why individual members are not attending and provide practical and spiritual support to those who may be struggling in their lives.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 the author writes:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good work not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

To be in Christ, in the fullest sense brings a joyous opportunity and an expectation of shared fellowship to encourage and strengthen one other.

So how does the ecclesia act with love and consideration to those who choose not to come or feel that the ecclesial community is not meeting their needs?

There is no doubt that all members have a responsibility to each other to encourage shared fellowship together, a responsibility which goes beyond physical attendance at the weekly breaking of bread meeting. Generally, this responsibility is focused upon the arranging committee. To this end a process should be in place to promote the spiritual welfare of members which will include considering situations of non-attendance in good time to help.

But caring for one another is the responsibility of each of us and the outworking of our individual fellowship and love of God. As such we should not leave it to others when we see a need developing.

However, as part of the formal ecclesial process there may be a welfare committee with appointed individuals who take responsibility to contact and support those who have not attended or may be struggling with personal or other issues.

There are many reasons for non-attendance. Being aware of the lives and circumstances of each member may provide opportunity to offer support and ensure the needs of each are addressed in both formal and informal ecclesial activities.

Loneliness, depression, grief and a deep-rooted sense of loss, lack of understanding and support, doubts and personal 'shocks' to our lives, a feeling of the loss of the relevance of faith - all can contribute to a feeling of separation from God and from our fellow members. The ideal is for a loving and caring ecclesial family to be aware of these issues before they result in long-term problems and separation and address them with sensitivity and loving kindness.

But what if the support is refused or contact avoided? Hopefully there will be some means of personal contact, but if this too fails then the process may formally involve the arranging committee and possibly a letter issued expressing loving concern and perhaps offering practical assistance in easing their return to the ecclesial family.

This can lead to three possible results:

- a) **the individual will write, resigning their membership.** This may be because they are no longer interested, have lost their faith or perhaps have joined another church. But it may also be because they are lost and struggling and cannot face monitoring or an ecclesial enquiry. Such a letter requires careful consideration. *the ecclesia will be faced with a choice of options*
- b) **There will be no reply.** If this situation continues it is usually followed up with further letters. Or ideally,
- c) **there is a desire for shared fellowship to be resumed.**

With the first two responses, the ecclesial community is faced with a choice of options:

1 **Withdrawal of membership**

If there is no reply, then there will be a series of letters, culminating with a penultimate letter stating that regretfully membership may be withdrawn by the ecclesia due to their long-term absence. If a resignation letter has been received, then it will be acknowledged and placed before the ecclesia. The letters sent will express the hope that at some time in the future they will wish to return.

In cases of both long-term absence and resignation the ecclesia will consider the case for continued membership, and if removal is confirmed by the members, then the cessation of membership will be confirmed by letter, again leaving the way open for a return in the future. A note is then usually sent to the Christadelphian Magazine stating that membership has ceased with the hope of a change of heart.

But the effect of receiving such a letter is that they can no longer attend any ecclesia or break bread with fellow brothers and sisters, some they may have known all their lives. It effectively imposes a barrier on the individual for any future attendance without first undergoing a formal interview. Is this the intention of the ecclesia?

The question arises - How is this fulfilling the words of Paul that *“you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness”*?

The aim of a cessation of membership is always to seek restoration. It is never to “tidy up the ecclesial register”.

The aim is always to seek restoration. It is never to “tidy up the ecclesial register”

So, is there an alternative approach?

2. **Wait-** if the ecclesial letters and requests to meet are ignored or, if a resignation letter is received, the situation will be acknowledged with a request that the ecclesia may be permitted to keep in touch and expressing the hope that they will feel able to join in shared fellowship once again.

The process does not involve withdrawal at this point.

This is then regularly followed up with invitations to ecclesial events, sending out email newsletters and perhaps greeting cards at birthdays to indicate they have not been forgotten. In addition to this formal ecclesial contact, members may offer simple acts of kindness in showing friendship and an opportunity to talk and re-open the way, which with patient forbearance may lead to restoration.

However, should a member express a genuine wish to remove themselves from all contact, then this must be respected.

There is a view that, if the letters are ignored, the ecclesia has no alternative but to withdraw membership as a means of expressing the seriousness of this failure to follow the command of Christ, to meet week by week. (However, it must be said that many of us fail to follow other commandments of Christ without attracting attention or a sanction)

There is another view that by their absence the individual has effectively chosen to withdraw their membership.

But is there an alternative view?

We do not know why they have chosen to be absent as we cannot judge their heart or motives. They may be in a desperate emotional situation and just not able to cope with the additional pressure of attending. They may feel aggrieved at the way they feel they have been treated by their ecclesia or an individual brother or sister; or they may be filled with doubt and loss of faith. They may even be breaking bread alone at home. Will removal of their membership at this time help or hinder an eventual return? Are they not currently in need of greater support?

The “ordeal” of returning to the formality of ecclesial meetings after a long period of absence should also not be underestimated. The offer of a personal breaking of bread or other informal opportunity to re-connect may provide a better means of restoration.

Responding to a request for re-membership

Luke 15:24

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Paul encourages us to “restore in a spirit of gentleness”.

The request may come from a change of heart with repentance and/or a request to resume membership after resigning - possibly after many years. Sometimes there will be regular attendance at the ecclesia prior to an application for re-membership and it will usually require a decision of the ecclesia after consideration by the arranging committee.

Often a request for re-membership is made to a different ecclesia. Helpful guidance is to be found in the Ecclesial Guide Para 41. *Involved in another Ecclesia’s Trouble*.

It is desirable that discussions are opened with the original ecclesia that took the action of withdrawal and to *‘investigate the case concurrently with them’* prior to agreeing re-membership. *‘The result would tend to peace’*.

Where differences of opinion arise between or even within ecclesias it may be helpful to use the services of a ‘mediator’ who can seek to bring the sides to a mutually agreed position. Such individuals can be found by contacting the offices of the CMPA or the CSN.

However, the decision to accept membership is ultimately that of the receiving ecclesia who may come to a different decision than the original ecclesia. Where such differences of opinion arise, these should be accepted by both ecclesias who should respect each other’s independence of opinion and act with grace accordingly.

Rebuilding the ecclesial community

Matters of fellowship and membership often prove unsettling and upsetting to ecclesial life; sometimes the effects can continue for many years and may leave individuals feeling emotionally “bruised and broken”. How the ecclesial family resolves such matters can have ramifications beyond the confines of the membership with children, friends and family witnessing the behaviour and actions which are taken.

In the aftermath, many may just wish to put the matter behind them, but this is the time to review what has happened: what lessons have emerged and could matters have been considered differently. Most importantly, how can the members of the ecclesial family be supported and encouraged both now and in the future.

Matters for consideration will include: are our services reaching out to each of our members, including those on the periphery of ecclesial life? Is there a need for better or more comprehensive pastoral care? How do we strengthen the bonds of shared fellowship and friendship? Should our talks and discussions cover more topical and challenging subjects? How do we exercise loving care to those who may be involved in similar situations in the future? How do we engender a greater spirit of kindness and mutual support in all that we do?

Each of these are matters which can be considered in the aftermath of an issue of membership. But hopefully, discussion of these matters without the pressure of an actual incident will help us to explore our attitudes and question whether our initial reactions would be helpful both to the ecclesial community and those involved. We owe it to each other and to our Lord Jesus Christ to continue to grow together in bonds of harmony and peace.

Summary

The aim of this booklet is to share thoughts and concerns about the difficult and challenging subject of ecclesial membership and individual fellowship.

Some of these thoughts may be considered controversial but hopefully will stimulate discussion within the ecclesial community which may be helpful when future need arises.

It is a privilege to be called to serve the ecclesial family. We would all wish to carry out those responsibilities, faithfully and in a spirit of loving care, which will lead to the wellbeing of the ecclesia both in the physical and spiritual welfare of its members and in witnessing our faith in action. These responsibilities may include consideration of difficult and challenging situations regarding membership.

Roles involving responsibilities can, at times be both lonely and stressful not just on the individual but also on their families. It can be a real struggle to maintain harmony in an ecclesial family and to consider the needs of everyone within the ecclesial community.

Let us remember this in our prayers and not unduly criticise those who willingly take on these sometimes-challenging responsibilities.

We should also remember both in our prayers and in practical actions, those from whom membership has been withdrawn, for we have a continuing responsibility towards them. We are called to seek restoration in a spirit of gentleness.

To this end, the ecclesial family should have in place a process (with the agreement of the individual) to regularly and both formally and informally develop and maintain contact with our former members.

May our Heavenly Father bless this work of restitution.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Appendix 1 The concept of keeping the ecclesia “pure”?

There is a view that we must keep the ecclesia free from the influence of the world. Perhaps this comes from the concept in the Law of Moses that access to the presence of God was restricted.

“Speak to Aaron, saying, none of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God.

Leviticus 21:17

At the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, Herod’s temple had both a Court of the Women and a Court of the Gentiles. The unclean and the disabled were forbidden access to the Temple altogether. The Pharisees were challenged by him for their judgemental attitude to “sinners”

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:9-14

There may be an unspoken notion that we may be contaminated in some way by the presence of the “sinner”. This may lead to a desire to remove this “sin” from the ecclesia. But scripture clearly teaches that sin is not from the world outside, but when we are “of the world”. So, sin comes from within ourselves and not by association with others.

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that

And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander,

pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

Mark 7:20-21

These are of the heart and are common to all of us. Some sins are more obvious than others and cannot be hidden. But we are all under sin.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Romans 7 :18

As we are all under sin it is quite impossible for any action we take to “cleanse” the ecclesia. It is because we are all under sin that we meet in a shared fellowship of need, in and through the grace of our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a deep spiritual need for every one of us to be in fellowship with the grace and love of the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said “Healthy people don’t need a doctor – sick people do. I have not come to call those who think they are righteous.

But those who know they are sinners. (Mark 2:17 NLT). The Body of Christ is a community of people in need of forgiveness and a place where forgiveness flows freely, because forgiven people forgive (the Lord’s prayer). As someone once wrote “Our ecclesia is not supposed to be a museum that displays perfect people, walking around looking holy. It is called to be a hospital where the wounded, hurt, injured and broken find grace and healing”.

God loves us because he is love and even though ‘we’re all sin-infected, sin-contaminated. Our best efforts are grease-stained rags’ (Isaiah 64:6, MSG).

Appendix 2 What is the spiritual meaning of dis-fellowship?

There can be confusion between what is meant by fellowship and membership.

Our fellowship must be an individual matter with each of us and our God. Membership is another matter. Our shared fellowship or membership depends upon our individual fellowship with God. When issues arise, it is usually because individuals have lost their fellowship with God which then results in attitudes and behaviours which bring into question their membership.

What do we mean by “withdrawing fellowship” from a brother or sister?

*It is never to
punish the
individual nor to
“cleanse” the
ecclesia*

Our decision to accept the call of the gospel: to repent, seek forgiveness and to be baptised, is the beginning of a journey “In Christ”. Our journey is not alone. We are now part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:25-27) each member with different abilities. We are built into the Temple of the living God (Ephesians 2:19-22) “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”

As part of the body of Christ we are joined together in shared fellowship as a member of an ecclesia. Paul frequently refers to “the ecclesia in the house” of a brother and sister. Within the ecclesia there is shared fellowship. Between ecclesias there is shared fellowship.

Does disfellowship mean a withdrawal from membership of the ecclesia or from fellowship with the Father and Son -the state of grace?

We are in grace because we have faith, a faith which ebbs and flows throughout the challenges of life. Through faith in Christ, “we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:2).

When there is withdrawal, what are we doing? Are we removing an individual from being “in Christ” denying their fellowship with the Father and removing them from Grace? -Surely this cannot be the case-

In the passage from Matthew’s gospel dealing with these issues our Lord says:

If he refuses to listen even to the church (ecclesia) let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:17-20

In this quotation, our Lord Jesus Christ refers to Gentiles and Tax-Collectors whom the Jews regarded as dogs and beyond redemption. But this was not the attitude of Jesus evidenced in his behaviour to those who were regarded by the religious authorities as ‘outcasts’. The quotation also goes on to refer to ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ or ‘judgements’. Rather than saying that the judgements we make on earth will also apply in heaven is it not rather saying that the same judgement (mercy) which we exercise on earth to others will in due course be shown to us in heaven? In other words ‘be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:36

Every possible way will be sought to seek repentance and restoration

Someone once said “Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve, and Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve.

The love, grace and mercy which have been shown to each of us are at the heart of our individual fellowship with the Father and Son and the showing of love, grace and mercy to others should be at the heart of our shared fellowship and in matters of ecclesial membership too.

Appendix 3 Implications of GDPR on ecclesial records?

The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) came into effect on 25th May 2018. Under this EU legislation, all organisations (including ecclesias) that hold personal information/data on individuals are required to comply with its requirements.

Personal data can be held on paper or electronically and the legislation covers both. Personal data includes: name, address, phone number, date of birth, date of baptism, date of marriage, DBS records, finance contributions such as standing orders and Gift Aid and any notes held on the person including those resulting from meetings held with them or about them.

The ecclesia needs to know what data it holds and where it is stored (it should be in a central, secure depository, and not on personal computers or devices of individual members or arranging committee members). An individual has the right to receive a copy of their data records, have any errors corrected or have some or all of their data deleted (Note: deleted not archived).

To comply with this legislation, individual ecclesias should already have contacted everyone (members, former members, preaching contacts etc) on whom they hold personal data to advise them that their information is being held, and that a copy of their data can be requested by them, errors corrected, amended or the records deleted in part or whole.

GDPR legislation therefore has implications for ecclesias wishing to maintain contact with both current and former members, particularly if the cessation of membership was not harmoniously agreed. If a member, former member or contact asks for some, or all, of their data to be deleted, the request must be respected. In such cases, the desire to 'keep in touch' described in this booklet would present challenges.

Clearly this legislation also has implications for the nature and content of records which are kept upon individuals since this is now in the knowledge that copies of such records may be requested by the individual at any time.

Ecclesias should bear on mind that non-compliance with GDPR carries a fine of 2% of ecclesial income. Additionally, any such event could result in adverse publicity both for the ecclesia and the ecclesial community.

Further information is available on the website of the Information Commissioner's Office.

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

Notes

¹Designated Safeguarding Lead. A template Safeguarding Policy is available from the Christadelphian Support Network

Cover Picture image: A broken reed does not make a good walking stick. Photo by Ferrell Jenkins. 2013

Unless otherwise stated, “Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

Scripture marked (MSG) is taken from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

²*Ecclesial Guide Section 32 Cases of Sin and Withdrawal. Third Paragraph*

“Withdrawal, too, when it comes is not expulsion. It is an apostolic form of separation which though practically equivalent to expulsion in its effects on the separated, is more in harmony with the spirit enjoined by Christ upon His house than the form in vogue among professional bodies of all sorts. Withdrawal means that those withdrawing do so modestly and sorrowfully step aside from the offender for fear of implication in his offence. Expulsion means thrusting out which is a different thing and implies and generates the arrogant attitude of ecclesiastical excommunication. The careful preservation of right forms in these things is a help to the preservation of the right spirit”.

Editor’s note

We draw attention to the phrase ‘for fear of implication in his offence’. In this context we suggest that ‘fear of implication’ does not equate to ‘contamination’ or ‘association’ but rather in the failure by the individual to acknowledge the implication of the matter in terms of shared fellowship.

Ecclesial Guide Reprint 1975. With permission of The Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association, at 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 8SZ, UK.

³This line has been added following feedback 27/12/18