

10 (plus one) Rules for Respect

In our baptismal covenant, we pledge to “respect the dignity of every human being.” That is about how we treat one another ... and that begins within the Christian community. But what does that look like?

A friend, Bishop Greg Rickel of Olympia, found these 10 “Rules for Respect” in an article by Church of the Nazarene pastor Charles Christian and shared them with me. He has incorporated them into covenants wherever he has worked and I think they are quite helpful in framing our communication and life together. I have taken them basically as is (amending slightly), but have added an 11th rule that I think is the most critical of all.

I vow to do my best to follow them and invite you to do the same. We will all fail, but through gentle challenge and loving encouragement these can become a foundation for healthy communication for us all.

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 Mike together. I am sure he 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. Assume the best of me and ask if you have questions about my intentions.
6. **I will be careful how I interpret you.** I will assume the best of you and ask if I have questions about your intentions.
7. **If it’s confidential, don’t tell.** If you or anyone comes to me in confidence, I won’t tell unless a) the person is going to harm himself/herself, b) the person is going to physically harm someone else, c) a child has been physically or sexually abused. 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 (she 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.

... and the 11th Rule

11. **Pray for one another.** That's not just a throwaway line. Lifting one another to God in prayer is how we learn, slowly and sometimes painfully, but ultimately joyfully, to see each other with God's eyes, hear each other with God's ears and love each other with God's heart. My holding you in prayer will always include me asking God to love you through me. Pray that for me and for one another.