OUR CALL TO PEACEMAKING IN THE CHURCH
Matthew 18

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15ff sets out a disciplinary process for dealing with sin in the community. However, it can also be read as pointing to some guidelines for our relationships within the church, and as forming a call to seek peace with one another:

1. Jesus assumes that we will face problems in our relationships within the Christian community. (18:15)
2. We need to face the tensions that arise in our relationships, and to take the initiative to address concerns directly with others. (18:15)
3. Direct dialogue is difficult and will involve critical self-reflection, courage, a willingness to be vulnerable and an openness to listen.
4. As a first step, if we have concerns with a brother or sister, it is helpful to seek them out privately at first, with the immediate objective being to listen to, and to understand each other. (18:15)
5. If a common understanding is not reached privately, that is the time to consider widening the circle to try to ensure that listening and good communication happens. Whoever else is involved needs to be able to help the communication between us. (18:16-17)
6. We note that listening is a core value of the community, and a refusal to listen risks placing us outside the community. Our goal should be to restore broken relationships, and to keep working at this even when it is difficult. (18:15-17)
7. Where a community decision or discernment is needed, the community's action carries authority from God. (18:18-19)
8. Jesus promises his presence when we engage with one another in this type of peacemaking through confrontation. (18:20)
9. We are called to establish a pattern or reflex of forgiveness within the Christian community. Forgiveness provides a vital oil to sustain relationships within the church. (18:21-22)
10. The motivation for forgiving one another comes from our own experience of God's profound forgiveness of our sin. (18:23-35)

The way that Jesus calls us to here is not easy. It is challenging, but appropriate if we are to be faithful disciples. It indicates that we are called to take the initiative to seek peace in our relationships with one another, whether we are upset with the other person, or if we know that they are upset with us: see Matthew 5:21-24. 'If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.'