

Conflict Management Policy

Note: Much of the below has been borrowed from the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa's Conflict Management Policy – with Rev. Pat adding some revisions in Oct 2022 for UUCL's use.

Introduction

As Unitarian Universalists (UUs), we embrace and celebrate our differences, including our diversity of ideas and opinions. We recognize that conflict is a normal part of congregational life. It is not the presence or absence of conflict that demonstrates the health of a community but the way that conflict is addressed. Effectively managed conflict has many positive results. When people can disagree with each other and promote different ideas, our congregation is healthier. Disagreements often lead to a more thorough study of options and better decisions and actions. Effectively addressing conflict can contribute to our spiritual growth and enhance our relationships with one another. Underlying this policy and process is the belief that most conflicts can and will be resolved by individuals and groups at UUCL as we focus on mission and practice our covenants and UU Principles and UUCL policies to inform our actions. Those values and principles will guide us in treating each other with compassion, respect and dignity.

Scope

The scope of this policy and process includes conflicts between congregants and other congregants as well as between congregants and the minister(s), and also covers group-to-group conflicts. The scope does not generally cover conflicts between staff and between the Minister and staff, as these are covered in the Personnel Manual. Conflicts between congregants and staff that cannot be resolved satisfactorily in a one-to-one manner, should be brought to the attention of the employee's supervisor and/or Personnel Committee and is outside of the scope of this policy. This policy and process does not cover concerns regarding matters of church policy or Board decisions. Such concerns may be addressed by the Board, or whomever the responsible author is of the policy. Any issues involving sexual misconduct or potential illegal activity will be guided by UUCL Safe Congregation policy or other relevant policy.

Guidelines

- A. It is helpful for parties finding themselves in conflict to:
- Take responsibility upon themselves to resolve the conflict
 - Seek guidance and support from the Minister, Committee on Ministry, or Personnel Committee as needed or appropriate
 - Use the conflict resolution process to mend relationships and provide healing
 - Use conflict as an opportunity for spiritual and personal growth.
- B. It is important for those asked to assist in resolving conflicts to:

- Respect and offer compassion to all parties
- Listen with an open mind
- Explore the facts with care
- Excuse themselves from matters in which they have an interest or bias
- Understand that confidentiality means that only those who need to know should be informed of the details of the matter and no one else. All parties should be transparent and inform each other of any obligations to share information.
- Refer individuals to the Minister or a UUCL Community Minister for spiritual care, counseling, or other services as needed.

Role of Committee on Ministry

One of the primary goals of the Committee on Ministry (COM) is to encourage direct and constructive communication among members of the congregation and between members of the congregation and the ministers and staff.

The COM encourages feedback, suggestions and concerns about the health of our ministry and UUCL community. When such matters are conflicts, the following process is encouraged.

The Conflict Resolution Process

Level 1: We Work It Out (One-to-One)

The expectation is most conflicts will be resolved at this level. At this level, conflict is resolved directly by the people involved, without intervention or the help of others. On receiving a report of a conflict, the COM will typically encourage the concerned party to directly approach the individual or group involved with the intent to resolve the conflict.

Level 2: We Need Help (Facilitated)

When conflicts have not been resolved, a confidential request may be made directly to the COM, or an individual COM member. The COM will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, meet with the requestor, and as appropriate gather information concerning the matter.

Depending on the situation, the COM might offer:

- Coaching** – Before talking one-to-one to the party on the other side of the conflict, one or both parties or groups may benefit from talking through the situation with a COM member and/or the Minister to gain encouragement and perspective before attempting to resolve the situation themselves.
- Facilitated Discussion** - In some instances, parties may simply wish to have a third party or parties help lead a conversation for the purpose of assisting in understanding each other and the issues, and potentially reaching resolution. The third parties may be members of the COM. Individuals involved may request the Minister to be present and/or to be accompanied by someone for support. All would need to be informed and mutually agree on who would be in attendance.

- iii. **Mediation by an External Party:** Sometimes it may be helpful to bring in the help from our Central East Regional UUA Staff or a community mediator to help resolve a conflict. Mediation is a voluntary process that seeks to focus on parties' willingness to solve the conflict rather than finding out if someone is at fault. The hope is that the mediation process helps the parties clarify misunderstandings and improve communication. With the aid of the mediator, the parties themselves determine the resolution. There is no guarantee of a resolution, nor will a solution be imposed. In some situations, UUCL may also assist with associated costs.

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