

CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDELINES (2015)

Our Covenant of Right Relations affirms that we treat each other with respect, that we listen, speak, and act with integrity and compassion, and that we communicate openly with one another. When conflicts and differences of opinion inevitably occur, the sense of community is enhanced when resolution is achieved through compromise and/or consensus. When differences or conflicts are allowed go unresolved, they threaten the health of our congregation. These guidelines are intended to identify steps that should be taken when conflicts arise.

STEP 1: Talk directly with the person (member, minister, staff) with whom you have the conflict.

- Anonymous complaints are not acceptable. Own the issue.
- Examine your role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Get clear in your mind what happened and why. Write your thoughts.
- Email is not an acceptable means of communication in a time of conflict.
- As soon as possible after the incident, agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private with the other person(s) involved.
- During the discussion, use “I” statements (“I feel” not “you did”). Actively listen to the other person. Repeat what the person says to you in order to verify that you have heard her/him correctly. Communicate to achieve understanding.
- If you feel that safety is an issue, or that the conversation is too difficult to manage alone, seek the assistance of an appropriate, mutually acceptable, third party. The Committee on Fellowship Ministry has members who are available to help.
- If the conflict is not with the person, but with how that person is performing a job (staff, RE teacher, etc.), address your concern to the Minister.

STEP 2: If, after having a direct discussion, the issue remains unresolved, go to the Minister

- Counseling by the Minister must be acceptable to all parties. If the Minister is not appropriate or available, seek a member of the Right Relations Team (RRT).
- If the conflict involves the Minister, the issue should be taken to the Committee on Fellowship Ministry (CFM) with strong encouragement to direct them back to the minister, or offer to go with them to the minister. CFM would let the minister know regardless of which direction the person would choose.

STEP 3: If, after ministerial counseling, the issue remains unresolved, the parties involved should seek the services of the Covenant Committee.

- At least two members of the CC will meet with those involved in the conflict to facilitate mediation.
- If resolution is achieved, the parties will sign a statement that the conflict has been resolved to their satisfaction. This statement will be kept in a confidential file accessible only to the CC and the Minister.
- If the conflict is not resolved, the CC is empowered to recommend outside mediation or counseling.

- Should one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, or if behavior is unchanged, and it is the belief of the CC that the behavior is a threat to the Fellowship, the matter will go to the Board for action.

STEP 4: The Board, in consultation with the Minister, will consider matters coming from the Right Relations Team and take appropriate action

- The Board may endorse the CC recommendations.
- The Board may solicit assistance from the PNWD and/or UUA.
- The Board may take action to exclude a person from attending, for a period of time, based on a refusal to honor our Fellowship's Covenant.
- The Board, given just cause, by a two-thirds majority may exclude a person from the Fellowship and the Fellowship premises and remove his/her name from membership.
- The Board may specify conditions for returning as a welcomed member of our Fellowship and set criteria for evaluation of compliance.
- Assent of the Board by a two-thirds majority will be required for return to the Fellowship.

Conclusion

- It is expected by the Fellowship and the Board of Directors that conflicts can and will be resolved respectfully by the individuals involved, acting in alignment with Unitarian Universalists Seven Principles.
- STEPS, 3 and 4, will be implemented when behaviors are seen to be dangerous (threatening to people or property), disruptive (interfering with essential Fellowship functions), or image tarnishing (repeated aggressive, hostile or demeaning behavior toward guests or members, including unwelcome sexual advances).
- Finally, when no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the Fellowship as a whole shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any individual.

Addendum:

- The Covenant Committee is comprised of members selected for their mediation skills and knowledge of various aspects of the life of the Fellowship. Members of the CC will be appointed in consultation with the Minister, and the Board. As needed, the CC members will receive training from internal sources or an external consultant which will be an expense identified in the annual budget.
- Members will recuse themselves from any conflict for which they have an inherent bias based on the individuals or the topics involved. Additional members may be recruited, if necessary.
- The CC will report to the Board on the nature and outcome of all unresolved conflicts. Such reports will be held in strictest confidence. The CC will determine a record-keeping format that provides an abstract of events while allowing for privacy considerations and will be the custodian of all confidential records.