

1st Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita

Conflict Resolution Policy

“When the Covenant is Not Enough”

October 2015

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Preamble

Conflicts arise naturally because we are different from one another. Not only do we have different beliefs but we are also at different stages in our spiritual journey. As Unitarian Universalists, we honor and celebrate differences but often struggle with how to manage them. Our church is healthier when our members feel safe expressing their differences in addition to their similarities.

This policy assumes that most conflicts can and will be resolved by the individuals and groups following the 1st Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita Covenant of Healthy Relations and our Unitarian Universalist Principles.

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Conflict Resolution Policy is to guide our church community towards a healthy approach to the management, resolution and transformation of conflict. This policy seeks to:

- A. Foster and maintain healthy relationships within the Congregation
- B. Moderate congregational conflict through education, facilitation, and training.
- C. Establish a congregational process and structure for resolving conflicts.

II. Guidelines

- A. Individuals or groups who find themselves in conflict should follow the 1st UU Covenant of Healthy Relations. This process should be viewed as an opportunity for healing and spiritual growth.
- B. COM members asked by congregants to assist in resolving conflict should:
 - 1. follow the 1st UU Covenant of Healthy Relations.
 - 2. approach the matters raised with impartiality.
 - 3. explore the facts with care.
 - 4. excuse themselves from matters in which they have an interest.
 - 5. offer the least intrusive intervention necessary to resolve conflicts.
 - 6. balance strict confidentiality and transparency with the safety of the parties in conflict and the congregation.
 - 7. refer individuals to pastoral care as appropriate.

III. Organizational Structure

- A. This Conflict Resolution Policy establishes that the Committee of Healthy Relations (CHR) be a sub-committee of the Committee on Ministry (COM)
- B. The responsibilities of the COM/CHR include:
 - 1. informing the Congregation of the availability of the conflict resolution process
 - 2. overseeing the conflict resolution process: receiving requests for assistance; determining what assistance and resources are needed, if any; and facilitating their availability.
 - 3. determining the needed education and training to facilitate the policy.
 - 4. recruiting outside assistance when appropriate.
 - 5. making recommendations for and/or referring conflicts to the board of trustees for resolution in the event that the first two levels of the conflict resolution process outlined in section v are unsuccessful.
 - 6. mediating different perspectives within the congregation
 - 7. encouraging the framing of conflicts as an opportunity for healing and community building.
- C. Operational Guidelines of the COM/CHR include:
 - 1. responding in a timely manner to each request for assistance, exercising independent judgment. responses will be guided by the 1st uu covenant of healthy relations and uu principles.
 - 2. excusing themselves from any issue to which they are a party or stakeholder.
 - 3. reporting on activities to the board of trustees and congregation at least annually.
 - 4. posting materials regarding conflict resolution on the church website.
 - 5. developing additional procedures, as necessary.
 - 6. keeping a list of volunteer mediators, trainers, and educators that can be called upon for assistance.

IV. Scope

- A. The scope of this policy and process includes interactions of congregants with other congregants, groups, minister, and/or staff.
- B. This policy and process does not cover complaints regarding matters of church policy. Such complaints may be addressed to the Board of Trustees.
- C. This policy and process does not supersede authorities given to the Board of Trustees. If a conflict arises that the COM (Committee on Ministry) considers beyond its purposes, scope or skill level, it may refer the matter to the Board of Trustees.

V. The Conflict Resolution Process

The conflict resolution process consists of three levels.

A. Level 1 - Individuals or groups work it out.

The expectation is that the vast majority of conflicts will be resolved at this level directly by the people involved, without external intervention using the 1st UU Covenant of Healthy Relations as a guideline.

B. Level 2 – Individuals or groups need help. Assistance from the COM/CHR may be Requested.

1. A confidential *Request for Assistance* may be submitted to COM, the church office, the minister, or a member of COM. COM members can also initiate the process if there is a concern.
2. The COM/CHR will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, meet with the requestor, and where appropriate, conduct preliminary fact gathering.
3. Additional meetings to the monthly COM meetings may be required. Meetings should include at least 3 members of COM.
4. The COM will recommend one of the following steps.
 - a. Coaching – Parties may benefit from the help of a person experienced in conflict resolution to resolve the issue themselves.
 - b. Facilitation – Parties may wish to have a third party lead a conversation for the purpose of assisting understanding of the issues, and potentially reaching a resolution.
 - c. Mediation – Parties engage a volunteer mediator to help individuals determine a solution without placing blame. Mediation facilitates a collaborative effort between the parties in dispute to clarify misunderstandings and improve communication.

C. Level 3 – Process leading to a recommendation. Either party may initiate a request to the COM/CHR for a recommendation. Both involved parties must agree in writing before the COM/CHR proceeds. At this point in the process, the COM/CHR will:

1. send a written notice to request participation from all parties involved in the conflict.
2. with the consent of all parties, conduct outside information gathering.
3. prepare a written plan as to what the COM believes should be done and submit to all parties involved for consideration. A meeting may be necessary to discuss the written plan.
4. if the above steps do not produce a satisfactory solution, the issue will be sent to the 1st UU Board of Trustees for a final resolution and recommendation.

VI. Confidentiality

Without the express approval of all the parties, the COM/CHR, its facilitators, consultants, mediators, and related sources shall not disclose the content or substance of matters brought to it unless disclosure is reasonably believed to be necessary to avoid physical or substantial financial harm, or is required by law. At the conclusion of a matter, the COM is responsible for destroying referrals, notes, written reports, notes taken and any other documentation produced or received during the conflict resolution process, unless there is the possibility of legal matters, retention is expressly requested by all parties, or required by law.

The preceding policy is based on the Conflict Resolution Policy and Process of the All Souls Church, Unitarian, Tulsa, Oklahoma.