
Purpose

To build and maintain healthy, respectful relationships at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton (UCE)

Definitions

Conflict is present when people are unable to “agree to disagree.” When people are in tension over personality differences, a decision or direction, or a matter of opinion, they might be in conflict. Conflict is normal and healthy when addressed with maturity. We value a diversity of views and perspectives and affirm that “we do not need to think alike to love alike.”

Right Relations Team (RRT) is made up of three members who have knowledge and skills in the areas of justice-making, restorative practices, mental health, or similar fields. In addition to being responsive to concerns, the Right Relations Team is charged with reminding and encouraging the congregation to keep the covenant, engage conflict in healthy ways, and practice restorative and healing justice in the church and in the world. Growing the congregation’s capacity to handle both conflict and harm with spiritual maturity and healing skills is part of their charge.

Guiding Principles

In the spirit of its Covenant of Right Relations and Unitarian Universalist principles, UCE acts to foster and maintain harmonious relations within the congregation.

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 managed.

Effectively managed conflict has many positive results. When people can disagree with each other and promote different ideas openly and respectfully, our congregation is healthier. Disagreements often lead to a more thorough study of options and better decisions and actions. Addressing conflict effectively can contribute to our spiritual growth and enhance our relationships with one another.

Underlying this policy is the belief that most conflicts can and will be resolved by individuals and groups at UCE practicing our covenant and UU Principles to inform their own action.

It is the collective responsibility of all those involved with UCE to create and maintain respectful relationships within all UCE settings.

Scope

This policy addresses three types of conflict:

1. Between members/friends of the congregation
2. Between member/friend of the congregation and church staff
3. Between member/friend of the congregation and minister

This policy does not cover complaints regarding matters of church policy or board decisions. Such complaints may be directed to and addressed by the minister or the board, depending on who is responsible for the policy or decision.

Policy – Visual Summary

Chart 1 – Conflict Between Members/Friends



Chart 2 – Conflict with Staff Member

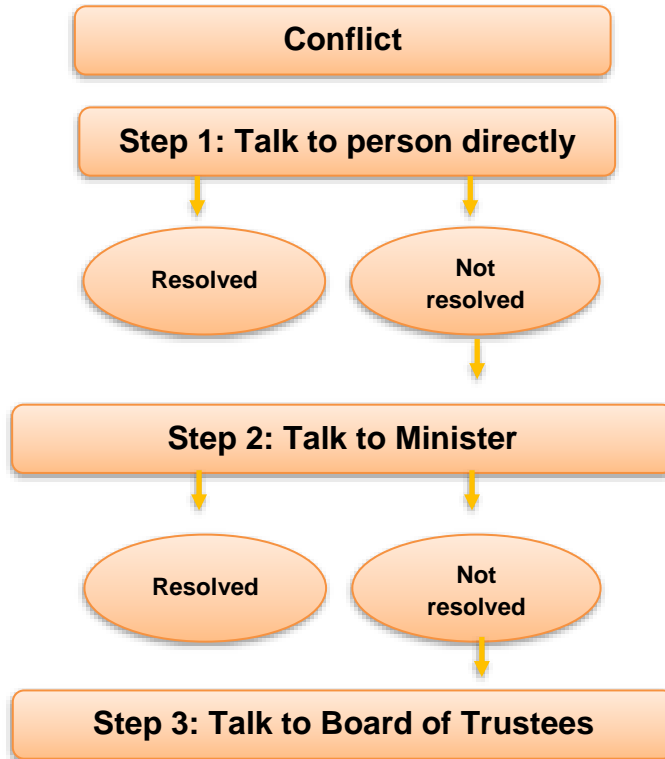


Chart 3 – Concern with Minister



Policy – Detailed

When you have a conflict with a **UCE member, friend, group or committee**:

1. First share your concern directly with the person or persons involved.
 - If you are uncomfortable meeting directly with the person with whom you are in conflict (e.g., if you feel safety is an issue), the individual refuses to meet, or a meeting does not resolve the conflict, move to Step 2.
2. If you have a conflict that you are unable to address by direct dialogue, take your conflict to the Right Relations Team (RRT) for their confidential help.

After assessing the situation, the Right Relations Team may:

- Help you clarify your understanding of the conflict
- Help you find words to talk with the person directly
- Help you to prepare to meet with the other person
- Contact other parties to the conflict and offer the services of the Right Relations Team to them as well

If, for any reason, you are not comfortable with bringing your issues to the Right Relations Team, then talk to the minister or a board member who will provide direction on taking the next appropriate step.

If the initial steps taken by the Right Relations Team are not able to resolve the conflict, they will consider next steps in conflict resolution, which could include facilitated conversation, declaring an impasse, or referring the conflict to the board.

In the following cases, the matter will go directly to the board:

- One or both parties refuse to participate productively in the resolution process
 - The conflict is perpetuated by unchanged behavior
 - The conflict involves behavior covered by the Destructive Behavior Policy
3. If the Right Relations Team believes that a more formal process would assist in managing the conflict, they can recommend to the parties that a facilitated conversation be pursued.
 - The RRT will select one or more facilitators from among the members of the RRT or other congregants skilled in conflict resolution.

The RRT facilitator will document any agreements reached to resolve the conflict to ensure a common understanding among the parties. The agreement that the parties arrive at will be filed with the church administrator. Revisions may be made to the agreement **only** if **both** parties agree to the changes. If the agreement is violated by either party, the matter will be referred to the board.

If the conflict is beyond the scope and/or skills of the RRT but the RRT believes that mediation would be justified in managing the conflict, the RRT can recommend to the parties and the board that external mediation resources be pursued. The board will determine whether it is appropriate to allocate church resources for securing mediation services.

4. If the conflict remains unresolved even after receiving help from the Right Relations Team and a mediator, the RRT will declare an impasse or refer the matter to the board.

A. An Impasse

An impasse will be declared when the following criteria have been met:

- The congregation's Conflict Resolution Process has been followed
- The parties in conflict have met face-to-face to attempt resolution
- Each party involved feels that they have said what needs to be said to the other party
- The Right Relations Team (RRT) has been involved in the attempts toward resolution
- The minister is aware of the conflict and the attempts toward resolution
- The majority of the parties in conflict, the RRT, and the minister agree that an impasse has been reached

When an impasse is declared, further attempts at conflict resolution are recognized as futile. However, if the involved parties commit to and uphold UCE's Covenant of Right Relations, they can remain in right relationship with each other and the congregation.

To that end, the parties in conflict will enter into an agreement called a Commitment to Covenant regarding how they will treat each other. In addition to incorporating the standards set forth in the congregation's Covenant of Right Relations, a Commitment to Covenant may also specify limitations on communications with or about each other within the UCE community, as the situation requires, and will articulate the terms of confidentiality expected.

The Commitment to Covenant will be made in writing, signed by the parties in conflict and submitted to the Right Relations Team for final approval. The church administrator will keep copies of the final Commitment to Covenant in the church's files for record and reference by current and future Right Relations Teams, the board, and minister.

Any action that violates the spirit of the agreement will be deemed as a failure to adhere to the signed Commitment to Covenant and will be referred to the board for action as described below.

B. Referral to the Board

Certain behaviors require action to protect the interests of the community and the Board of Trustees is the body established, and with the authority, to address and resolve these issues.

The types of actions the board may take include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Endorsing the RRT's recommendations or setting its own recommendations and asking that the parties adhere to said recommendations
- Soliciting assistance from the CUC or other resources
- Excluding or removing a person from church activities

The Board will determine the extent to which information will be shared with the congregation according to the necessity of each case.

If no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the congregation as a whole will be given precedence over the feelings or actions of any individual.

5. If your conflict or concern is with one of the **staff**, you are urged to attempt Step 1, direct dialogue. If this does not result in an adequate solution, your next step is to go to the minister, who is the supervisor of staff members. If that does not produce a satisfactory result, you may contact a member of the board.
6. If your conflict is with the minister, you are urged to attempt Step 1, direct dialogue. If you have a conflict that you are unable to address by direct dialogue, take your conflict to a member of the Right Relations Team for their confidential help.

If the conflict remains unresolved after speaking with the Right Relations Team, they will refer the matter to the board.

Note: *UCE would like to acknowledge the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and First Unitarian Society of Chicago whose conflict resolution policies informed the creation of this policy.*

Effective date: (Board of Trustees approval date)

Last reviewed:

See also:

Destructive Behaviour Policy

Safe and Inclusive Visitor, Member and Employee Policy

APPENDIX 1: Best Practices for Sharing Concerns

- One-to-one communication honors confidentiality and allows each party to address the issues without involving unrelated third parties that could lead to gossip and escalation of the conflict.
- Communicate face-to-face. Phone or digital communication make it difficult to see body language, capture nuance and maintain focus.
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk one-on-one and as soon as possible after the incident.

Before you meet...

For the party requesting Dialogue:

- Before approaching someone about a concern or conflict, ask yourself:
 - What exactly is bothering me?
 - Why is this matter important to me?
 - What do I want the other person to do or not do?
 - Are my feelings in proportion to the issue or are they amplified by some other situation or condition?
 - What is my own role in contributing to the conflict or concern?
- Reflect on the possible outcomes that would bring resolution, remembering that the idea is not to "win" or "be right" but to come to a better understanding of each other and a mutually satisfying and peaceful solution to the problem.
- Approach the person(s) with a request to discuss a concern you have. Be prepared to offer a succinct summary of the issue and to coordinate a time to talk once the other person has had an opportunity to process the situation and prepare for a productive conversation.

For the party invited to dialogue:

- When approached by someone regarding a concern or conflict, be willing to learn more about the other person's concern and experience.
- Give yourself time to consider what is being said. If you need any clarification, ask.
- Reflect on your intent at the time of the incident and the intended as well as unintended impact on the other person.
- Decide if this is an issue that you can address directly with the person. If you decide to proceed, schedule a time to discuss the issue with the person.

APPENDIX 2: Suggested Structure for Dialogue

Together review the following Ground Rules. Make any deletions or additions you need and then agree to abide by them:

- We agree to talk directly with the person with whom there are concerns, and not seek to involve others in "gossip" or "alliance building."
- We agree one person speaks at a time so all parties can be heard.
- We will make a sincere commitment to listen to one another, to try to understand the other person's point of view before responding.
- We will provide time and space to say what needs to be said, listening quietly without interruption.
- We agree to try our hardest and trust that the other person is doing the same, approaching the resolution of differences with an open mind and an open heart.
- We agree to focus on the issues, and not to attack the person with whom we disagree.
- What we discuss together will be kept in confidence, unless there is explicit agreement regarding who needs to know further information.

Sharing & Active Listening

For the person who initiated the conversation:

1. Thank the other person for being willing to meet and discuss your concern.
2. State the problem clearly, focusing on your understanding of the facts.
 - Speak from the first person: "This is my experience, my recollection, my perception, my point of view, my interpretation."
 - Be as specific as you can about whatever situation you are describing; give examples.
 - Speak about the behavior you observe(d), not someone's character or personality.
 - Avoid labels.
3. After presenting your understanding of the facts, share your feelings as honestly and completely as you are able.
4. What are the "hurts"? Use "I" messages to describe feelings of anger, hurt, or disappointment: "I am sad," or "I am disappointed." Avoid "you" messages such as "you make me angry...."

For the person invited to the conversation:

1. Use active listening skills--be careful not to interrupt and genuinely try to hear the other's concerns and feelings. Try to see the problem through the other's eyes. The "opposing" viewpoint can make sense even if you don't agree.
2. Take a moment to confirm that you understand what the person said. Try to restate what you have heard in a way that lets the other know you have fully understood.

After the person who has initiated the conversation has confirmed that they feel heard/understood, switch roles, with the invited party sharing their experience, feelings, needs from the same situation/issue and the party that initiated the dialogue actively listening and reflecting.

Devise Possible Solutions

After each party has been offered a chance to be heard, move into a conversation about potential solutions.

- The party who initiated the request for dialogue should be prepared to propose specific solutions, asking directly for what they want as well as identifying what they themselves might need to change to improve the situation.
- Invite the invited person to propose solutions, too.
- Be ready for some compromise. Allowing the other person only one course of action will likely hinder resolution.

If you are able to reach agreement on a proposal for change, celebrate!

If you are not, consider requesting help from the Right Relations Team.

Closing

Thank each other for being willing to try to resolve the conflict.