

Conflict Resolution: Guidelines and Suggestions for Success

Preface

In any human community, differences of opinion and outlook will always arise, and these can often lead to growth and expanded opportunities. When that does not immediately occur, this set of Guidelines for Conflict Resolution is set forth here to help solve any momentary difficulties within our church family.

The intention is that this guidance follow such Unitarian Universalist principles as recognizing the dignity of every person, the need for justice and compassion, acceptance of each other, the right of conscience, and the use of democratic processes.

Observance of these ideas should provide a responsible approach to resolving disagreement or conflict, whether it be interpersonal, organizational, or policy-related. The ultimate goal is to help maintain a community in which members feel that they are heard, that their contributions are valued, and that their views are respected. The success of this effort depends on open and honest communication by all parties; therefore, anonymous comments or complaints cannot be entertained.

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Step One

1. Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Do some soul searching. What actions or outcomes do you want?
2. Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Would someone else see it or hear it in the same way? Based on your telling of events and your feelings about it, would that person feel the same way? Have you considered the other party's feelings and point of view?
3. Consider putting your thoughts and reactions into writing. It may be beneficial to do this, but remember that the written document will not take the place of a face-to-face meeting. Given the importance of face-to-face discussion, electronic communication is highly discouraged.
4. With the person(s) involved, agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private and as soon as possible after the incident. Use "I" statements in your discussion ("I feel..." rather than "You did..."). Practice active listening. Let the other person(s) know that you hear what they are saying. Ask what action is desired.
5. Address your concerns directly with the person or group with whom you have a disagreement. What outcomes or actions do you want?
6. If the conflict is less with a person than with how they are performing a job (staff, religious educator, etc.), you may need to include his/her supervisor in the discussion.
7. At this step, and at all succeeding steps that become necessary, own your issue. If you feel the matter is worth pursuing, then you must take responsibility for it. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable.

STEP 2

1. If the matter remains unresolved, go to the minister for counseling regarding the issue. If all parties agree that the minister is neutral and appropriate, he/she can facilitate parties in reaching a resolution.
2. If the minister is not appropriate, the Committee on Ministries will direct you to the correct facilitation body.

STEP 3

1. If the issue is still not resolved, the Committee on Ministries will refer the issue to the Conflict Resolution Team.
2. This Conflict Resolution Team will be an *ad hoc* body consisting of at up to three members appointed by the Committee on Ministries. A single member, the entire committee, or any combination thereof can be employed in seeking conflict resolution. Members of the Conflict Resolution Team shall include: a. a Member of the Committee on Ministries, b. a Member of the Board of Trustees, and c. a member of the congregation selected for his/her mediation skills(if available), and/or a member of the congregation selected for expertise in counseling(if available).
3. The purpose of the Conflict Resolution Team is to help the parties in conflict reach an understanding that resolves their disagreement. This can be done through activities such as facilitating effective communication, clarifying misunderstandings, recognizing obstacles to reaching an agreement, assisting in the identifications and evaluation of alternative solutions, and providing counseling services if needed. Through such efforts, the Conflict Resolution Team can create conditions in which the parties to the dispute can engage in effective problem solving. The Conflict Management Team is not empowered to make decisions or to impose solutions on the parties. Any decisions resolving the dispute must be made by the parties to the disagreement.
4. Should one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, if the behavior is unchanged or if the Team believes that the behavior is a threat to the church, the Conflict Management Team will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

5. In the event of dangerous, egregious, or illegal activity, the issue will be referred to the Board of Trustees.

Step 4

1. The Board will consider matters referred from the Conflict Resolution Team and take action as they deem appropriate. The Board can solicit assistance from the UUA.
2. The Board can endorse the committee's recommendations or it can set its own recommendations and require the recommended behavior.
3. The Board can take action to exclude a person from attending church based on a refusal to honor our church covenant.
4. The Board, given just cause, by a two-thirds majority can exclude a person from the church and the church premises and remove his or her name from church membership. The Board may specify conditions for returning as a welcomed member of our community and set criteria for evaluation of compliance. Assent of the Board by a two-thirds majority will be required for a person's return to the community. The Board can call a congregational meeting to address the conflict with the collective compassion and shared wisdom of the entire body.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PRINCIPLES,
ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE BOARD WILL OBSERVE SUCH POINTS AS THE
RIGHT OF PERSONS TO BE HEARD, DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, REASONABLE
DOUBT, AND FAIRNESS.