

Second Unitarian Church of Omaha
Committee on Ministry
Conflict Resolution Policy and Process
Revised December 2022

Introduction

We recognize that conflict is a normal part of being in our church community and a part of all personal and congregational growth. When conflict arises, we ask that all parties involved abide by our Unitarian Universalist Principles and our Congregation's *Covenant of Right Relations* as they seek to resolve the conflict. It is our aim that all involved will deepen their understanding of living in right relationship by following this policy for conflict resolution.*

We acknowledge that it is ideal when congregants are able to solve the conflict themselves with minimal involvement from the Committee on Ministry (COM). However, when congregants identify that they may need some assistance to achieve this goal, the COM is available for consultation and support to aid people in working through the steps below to resolve conflict. Additional written materials to help facilitate this policy, such as the *Guidelines for Right Relationships*, are available.

Step 1. We Work It Out

A. Both parties examine and take ownership of their role in the conflict

- Questions to ask yourself:
 - Why is this matter important to you?
 - Is there a larger underlying issue?
 - What is your expectation and is it reasonable?
 - What are you asking of the other party to the conflict?
 - Is that request reasonable?
 - Is there room for compromise?
- Refer to the *Guidelines for Right Relationships* resource for guidance and support
- Each party may want to seek a reality check in confidence from a trusted person not involved in the conflict. Describe the situation to them as objectively as possible and compare your perceptions. Do they see it or hear it in the same way, or is there room for another interpretation? Do not ask the person with whom you speak to address the other party, as that would be indirect communication, or triangulation, which is inherently unhealthy. The purpose of this conversation is to help you get clear and grounded as to what happened before you approach the other party.
- Avoid using communication about the conflict using electronic media.
- Talk directly with the person with whom you have the disagreement
- Allow time for emotions to settle and gain perspective, but not so long as to become entrenched

in your perspective.

- If you need assistance on how to approach the other person, you may contact the COM for coaching, consultation, and support.
- Request to meet at a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in person and in private.
- In explaining your point of view, use “I” statements in your discussion (“I feel” rather than “You did”).
- In listening to the other person’s point of view, try to view the issue from their perspective.
- Seek mutual understanding and regard for differences. This may be sufficient for resolution. If you need to formulate a compromise, summarize how the compromise will be carried out to ensure mutual understanding and agreement.
- Please try to avoid using electronic media when communicating about the conflict.

Step 2. We Need Assistance

The goal of the COM is to empower the parties themselves to reach the resolution. If the congregant is not satisfied after attempting to resolve the situation independently, or feels unable to take this approach, the COM can provide resources, such as:

1. Coaching

- The COM provides suggestions for the congregant on how to approach the person with whom she or he has a concern. The aim is to help the congregant gain skills and techniques for dealing with conflict.

2. Facilitated Discussion

- Once both parties have agreed to mutually work toward resolving the conflict, the parties may request the involvement of the COM in facilitating a conversation led by at least two COM member(s) to insure that both parties are equally heard, to encourage respectful dialogue, to help them in understanding each other and the issues, with the goal of potentially reaching resolution.
- The focus will be on the parties’ willingness to solve the problem rather than assigning guilt or fault. Since it is a collaborative effort between the parties in dispute, the process helps the parties clarify misunderstandings and improve communication.

If a Resolution is Not Reached

When no resolution satisfying both parties is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety, and stability of the whole Congregation shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any individual or group of individuals.

Sometimes the best that can be achieved in resolving a conflict is for the parties to define limits to their own behaviors that will minimize the impact of the conflict for themselves and within the Congregation. For example, parties might agree to end all written or verbal communication for a time; refrain from discussion of the matter with others or each other; or voluntarily suspend participation for

a time in activities that have given rise to the conflict in order for tensions to subside. The emphasis at this point is for all parties to be involved in setting any boundaries that would allow each person room for their struggle to be authentic, yet exist within the context of and with an emphasis upon the greater welfare of our Church community.

Resources:

Hamilton, D. M., Wilson, G. M., and Loh, K. M. (2020). Compassionate conversations: How to speak and listen from the heart. Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Sofer, O. J. (2018). Say what you mean: A mindful approach to nonviolent communication. Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Sofer, Oren Jay. How to Stop Arguing. <https://www.orenjaysofer.com/stop-arguing>

* It is important to understand that physical, verbal, and emotional harassment or assault are not “conflicts” that would be resolved through parties using the *Covenant of Right Relations* and/or this Conflict Resolution Policy. When people experience physical, verbal, or emotional harassment or assault, that behavior would be addressed through the use of the Congregation’s *Disruptive Participants Policy* or *Safe Congregation Policies and Procedures*, depending on the circumstances.