

Conflict Reconciliation Policy
Unitarian Universalist Society: East
FINAL & APPROVED – Annual Congregational Meeting 5/30/2015

Conflict Reconciliation - Process to Restore Right Relationship

Introduction

The well-being, strength, and reputation of our society depend on a sense of fellowship among members, friends, and staff. This is in keeping with the mission, vision, and covenant of the society and based upon the Seven Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). When conflict arises, reconciliation and/or resolution is essential. Conflict that is not resolved can diminish our society and hamper the achievement of our goals.

As responsible members, friends, and staff of this society, we have an obligation to directly address and resolve conflict in accordance with our covenant and within existing policies and procedures. Whether in a situation of conflict or in any other interactions within our society, all who participate in this society have an obligation to learn what those policies, procedures, and committee structures are and how they may be used to promote beloved community. Conflicts which cannot be resolved by reliance on society policies and procedures must then become a subject for this Reconciliation Process.

This Reconciliation Process is recommended to any society member, friend or staff in conflict and we urge all parties to readily participate in the reconciliation process.

In the event that conflicted parties are unable or are unwilling to resolve their conflict by the steps outlined in this policy, and the Board determines that the ongoing nature of the conflict is damaging to the health of UUS:E, then the Board may act to resolve the conflict. Such action may include up to barring one or more of the parties of the conflict from participation in the Society. As deemed appropriate by the Board, public communication of results will be provided to the congregation.

Process for Reconciliation – Restoration of Right Relationship

Step 1 – Direct Conversation

- Talk directly with the person (fellow member, staff member, minister, etc.) with whom you have the conflict to try to resolve the issue in a timely manner
- Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? What do our principles and purposes say to you about this conflict?
- Own your issue
- Get a reality check from a trusted third party by providing an open and honest disclosure. Compare your perceptions
- Avoid gossiping about the matter and deal directly with the person(s) involved
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private with the person(s) with whom you are in conflict
- Be respectful at all times and use positive language
- Use “I” statements in your discussion (“I feel...” not “You did...”); use active listening
- If a direct conversation is too difficult, put your thoughts into writing. Be available to hear the response

- If you feel uncomfortable or that a sense of safety is an issue, use an appropriate third party or committee to provide a safe environment for the discussion as noted in step 2 below
- If the conflict is less with a person than with how they are performing a job, (staff, religious educator, etc.), address the concern to the proper supervisor or society committee so that individuals are not being “supervised” from all sides

Step 2 – Seek Help From A Third Party

If a resolution or reconciliation is not achieved through direct conversation with the individual(s) in step 1, the persons involved are asked to seek mediation by a third party member of the society or to contact the minister for counseling regarding the issue.

- If all parties agree that the minister is neutral and appropriate, the minister may act as the mediator at his or her option. If the minister is not appropriate or declines to mediate, the minister will direct the parties to an appropriate mediator
- If the conflict involves the staff, the mediation body is the minister and/or a member of the Personnel Committee
- If the conflict involves the Board or a decision of the Board, then the mediators shall be a past member of the Board chosen by the aggrieved party as well as two current Board members
- If the conflict involves a committee of the society or a decision of a committee, then the mediator shall be a member of the Board chosen by the Board

Step 3 – Outside Mediation

If the parties used both steps 1 and 2 in good faith and if the situation is still not reconciled, upon agreement of the parties, the matter may be taken to one or more independent Board appointed mediators.

The mediator(s) are empowered to set standards and formulate behavior agreements for consideration by the parties in conflict. They are not limited to achieving compromises. When the mediator(s) believe that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to our society, or demonstrated behaviors do not express the mission, vision, covenant, and values of our society, the mediator(s) may recommend one or more of the following:

- Counseling to one or more of the parties involved
- Suggestion of other demonstrable and/or observable behavior
- A change in strategy for one or more of the parties involved
- Specific limitations on the participation in the active life of our society by one or more of the parties involved, including but not limited to suspension or termination of membership or employment

Step 4 – Board Action

If one or both parties refuse to participate in the process described above within a timely manner or if the mediation process does not resolve the conflict, the issue will be brought directly to the Board, in executive session, for consideration and resolution. The Board may consider recommendations coming from the mediators and shall hear directly from the parties. However, the parties involved shall not be present for the Board deliberations unless approved in advance by all Board members. The Board may take one or more of the following actions:

- solicit assistance from the UUA

- call a congregational meeting for resolution
- take other actions when it is believed that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to our society, or demonstrated behaviors do not express the mission, covenant, vision and values of our society
- or take no action

Other than a call for a congregational meeting, in all other cases, any action by the Board shall be taken in executive session to protect the privacy of the persons involved to the greatest extent possible. The names of individuals involved shall not be published in the official minutes of the Board unless approved by a three-quarters majority vote of all members of the Board. Communication of such Board action shall be done so as to preserve the confidential nature of these actions to the greatest extent possible. The Policy Board will provide public communication of results or actions as deemed necessary with a timely and appropriate communication to the congregation.

Role of Mediator

The mediator has the responsibility to bring the conflicted parties together for discussion of the ways in which the conflict can be resolved and to facilitate an agreement, if possible, which meets the needs of the parties and the society. The mediator is not a judge and cannot force a resolution of the conflict on the parties, make awards or advocate on behalf of one side or the other. The mediator can discuss society values, covenant, and principles with the parties and lead discussion, express opinions, suggest compromises when appropriate, and recommend solutions or settlement to the conflicted parties. The mediator shall report findings, recommendations and impressions of the conflict to the Board in Executive Session, and may report to committee chairs or society staff as appropriate. The mediator also may make other findings and recommendations as set out in Step 3, above. Other than these reporting options, all meetings and discussions between the parties and the mediator are confidential.

At all steps listed above:

- The mediator(s) will excuse themselves if they cannot act impartially about the conflict
- The mediator(s) will report to the Board in executive session on the nature and outcomes of all conflicts brought before them
- The mediator(s) will also keep records in a format which provides an abstract of events while allowing for privacy considerations

Concluding Comments

The society expects that most, if not all, conflict can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to live our covenant and principles and to directly interact with the individual with whom they are having a conflict.

We further anticipate that all who participate in the process will use the Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes to inform their own actions and will treat everyone with compassion and dignity.

Finally, when no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the congregation as a whole shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any one individual.