



## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF WORCESTER (UUCW) CONFLICT RESOLUTION: GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS

To successfully practice right relations should a conflict arise at UUCW, the Congregation has established the following guidelines for responding:

### 1.0 GENERAL GUIDELINES

When a conflict first becomes apparent between yourself and another member of the community, talk directly with the person(s) with whom you are having the disagreement.

- 1.1. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable
- 1.2. Own your issue. Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Is the disagreement over content (what is being done), process (how it's being done), or interpretation (the meaning of what is happening)? Is your response being triggered by something else that bothers you?
- 1.3. If appropriate, get a reality check from a trusted third party. Does that person have an independent view of the statements or actions at issue and does s/he see it in the same way as you? Compare objective components that may be part of the conflict. Exercise caution that you are not simply enlarging the conflict by enlisting friends who will support "your side".
- 1.4. Arrange with others in the conflict for a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible after the incident at issue.
- 1.5. During your dialogue, listen for what you don't understand rather than what you disagree with. Ask for clarifications. Check on your understanding by restating and summarizing what has been said to you. Try to make yourself clear without characterizing others. Try to be descriptive rather than judgmental. Use "I statements."
- 1.6. If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your view of the situation in writing to be read by the other party to the disagreement. Be available to receive any response.
- 1.7. **If you believe that safety is at issue**, follow the relevant portions of the UUCW Disruptive Behavior Policy.
- 1.8. Any officer of the congregation or a member of the Committee on Ministry (herein after referred to as CoM or the Committee) may bring an observed or potential conflict to the attention of the Committee on Ministry Chairperson. At the next Committee on Ministry meeting, the volatility of the situation will be evaluated and appropriate action in accordance with these Guidelines may be initiated.
- 1.9. The minister shall report to the Committee on Ministry all conflicts that have been brought to him/her, and the outcome. Such reports shall not be reported by the Committee but held in confidence.

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## 2.0 CONFLICT INVOLVING MEMBERS/FRIENDS

If the conflict remains unresolved after using the General Guidelines in Section 1, the concerned congregant could invite the minister to engage in ministerial counseling to help deal with the conflict if all parties in the conflict agree that the minister is neutral on the matter at issue and appropriate for addressing it.

- 2.1 If the parties in conflict do not believe that the minister would be neutral and/or appropriate to facilitate the disputed issue, or if the minister does not believe that he or she is neutral and/or appropriate to facilitate the disputed issue, the matter may be taken to the Committee on Ministry. The minister may also recommend use of an outside mediator to assist in the conflict if it is the minister's judgment that there is no internal person(s) who would be able to act as a disinterested third party.
- 2.2 The Committee on Ministry may suggest that one of its members or a member of the church community be asked to act as a disinterested third party to assist in resolving the conflict. All parties to the conflict must agree to that suggestion and the proposed third party or parties.
- 2.3 If the parties cannot agree on a disinterested third party from the church community to assist in resolving the conflict, the Committee on Ministry will suggest that the parties retain the services of an outside professional mediator. Such services would be paid for by the parties themselves or by the Board of Management at its discretion.
- 2.4 If either party in the conflict is being disruptive to the church community, the relevant portions of the Disruptive Behavior Policy shall be applied.

## 3.0 CONFLICTS CONCERNING THE STAFF (excluding the Minister)

If the conflict concerns how a person (staff, religious educator) is performing his/her job or duties under his/her position, first consider talking with the person following the General Guidelines in Section 1.

- 3.1 If the conflict remains unresolved, it is recommended that the concerned congregant speak to the staff person's supervisor. If the problem is not resolved to the congregant's satisfaction, then the congregant should contact a member of the Committee on Ministry.
- 3.2 If the conflict remains unresolved, the concerned congregant may request a meeting with the full Committee. The Committee will notify the staff member(s). The staff member(s) may also request a meeting or be invited to meet with the Committee at another time. The Committee will provide the concerned congregant with its understanding of the dispute and may make suggestions for resolution and/or referral to the Human Resources Committee. The Human Resources Committee shall follow its own procedures as it deems appropriate. More than one meeting may be held with or without the concerned congregant and the staff member(s). After the final meeting, the Committee will let the parties know of any outcomes.

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- 3.3 At any time, the Committee may suggest that one of its members or a member of the church community be asked to act as a disinterested third party to assist in resolving the conflict. All parties to the conflict must agree to accept that approach and the proposed third party or parties before this approach may be implemented.
- 3.4 The Committee shall keep a record of all meetings with them, those meetings or conflicts in which it is involved, and the outcomes of those conflicts. Such records shall not be reported by the Committee, but shall be held in confidence for five years before being destroyed unless there is a legal requirement or a Board of Management Policy that another practice be followed.
- 3.5 If the conflict concerning the church staff remains unresolved despite the efforts of the Committee to facilitate a resolution, the Committee on Ministry may refer the matter to the Board of Management or suggest seeking the assistance of an outside mediator. The mediation process requires that parties enter it voluntarily. Such services would be paid for by the parties themselves or by the Board of Management at its discretion.

### **4.0 CONFLICTS BETWEEN STAFF AND REPRESENTATIVE(S) OF COMMITTEES/TASK FORCES/OTHER GROUPS WITHIN THE CHURCH**

If a conflict arises between staff and a representative of a sub-group of the church, the General Guidelines in Section 1 should be followed.

- 4.1 If the conflict remains unresolved and it is appropriate, the conflict might be taken to the Program Council or minister for assistance. The Program Council may be able to facilitate a resolution or it may make a referral to the Committee on Ministry. The minister may engage in ministerial counseling to deal with the conflict or make a referral to the Committee on Ministry.
- 4.2 If the Program Council or minister is not appropriate to consult on the conflict or is unable to facilitate a resolution, any party involved in the conflict may present it to the Committee on Ministry.
- 4.3 The Committee on Ministry will notify the party(ies) in the conflict of the request. The staff or group may also request a meeting or be invited to meet with the Committee at another time. Committee on Ministry will provide its understanding of the conflict and may make suggestions for resolution. More than one meeting may be held with or without the disputants. After the final meeting, the Committee will let the parties know of any outcomes. The Committee will provide the concerned congregant with its understanding of the dispute and may make suggestions for resolution and/or referral to the Human Resources Committee. The Human Resources Committee shall follow its own procedures as it deems appropriate. Note that the staff person may consult with and use any and all Unitarian Universalist Association resources at his/her disposal to assist in resolving the conflict.

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- 4.4 At any time, the Committee may suggest that one of its members or a member of the church community be asked to act as a disinterested third party to assist in resolving the conflict. All parties to the conflict must agree to that approach and the proposed third party or parties.
- 4.5 The Committee shall keep a record of the meetings with them, those meetings or conflicts in which it is involved, and the outcomes of those conflicts. Such records shall not be reported by the Committee, but shall be held in confidence for five years before being destroyed unless there is a legal requirement or Board of Management Policy that another practice be followed.
- 4.6 If the groups are not able to resolve their conflict despite the efforts of the Committee to facilitate a resolution, it may refer the matter to the Board of Management or suggest seeking the assistance of an outside mediator. The mediation process requires that parties enter it voluntarily. Such services would be paid for by the parties themselves or by the Board of Management at its discretion.

### **5.0 CONFLICTS BETWEEN COMMITTEES/TASK FORCES/OTHER GROUPS WITHIN THE CHURCH**

If there is a conflict between sub-groups of the church, the General Guidelines in Section 1 should be followed.

- 5.1 If the conflict remains unresolved and it is appropriate, the conflict might be taken to the Program Council for assistance. The Program Council may be able to facilitate a resolution or it may make a referral to the Committee on Ministry.
- 5.2 If the Program Council is not appropriate to consult on the conflict or is unable to facilitate a resolution, any party to the matter may present it to the Committee on Ministry.
- 5.3 The Committee will notify the other party in the conflict of the request. Those group(s) may also request a meeting or be invited to meet with the Committee at another time. The Committee will provide its understanding of the conflict and may make suggestions for resolution. More than one meeting may be held with or without the disputants. After the final meeting, the Committee will let the parties know of any outcomes.
- 5.4 At any time, the Committee may suggest that one of its members or a member of the church community be asked to act as a disinterested third party to assist in resolving the conflict. All parties to the conflict must agree to accept that approach and the proposed third party or parties.
- 5.5 The Committee shall keep a record of the meetings with them, those meetings or conflicts in which it is involved, and the outcomes of those conflicts. Such records shall not be reported by the Committee, but shall be held in confidence for five years before being destroyed unless there is a legal requirement that another practice be followed.
- 5.6 If the groups are not able to resolve their conflict despite the efforts of the Committee to facilitate a resolution, it may refer the matter to the Board of Management or suggest seeking the assistance of

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an outside mediator. The mediation process requires that parties enter it voluntarily. Such services would be paid for by the parties themselves or by the Board of Management at its discretion.

### 6.0 CONFLICTS CONCERNING THE MINISTER

If the conflict concerns how the minister is performing his/ her job or duties, first consider talking with the minister following the General Guidelines in Section 1.

- 6.1 If the conflict remains unresolved, the Committee on Ministry should be consulted.
- 6.2 The Committee on Ministry will meet with the congregant and notify the minister that a matter involving him or her has been brought to the Committee on Ministry's attention. The minister may also request a meeting or be invited to meet with the Committee at another time. The Committee will provide its understanding of the conflict and may make suggestions for resolution. More than one meeting may be held with or without the disputants. After the final meeting, the Committee will let the parties know of any outcomes or recommendations. Note that the minister may consult with and use any and all Unitarian Universalist Association resources at his disposal to assist in resolving the conflict.
- 6.3 At any time, the Committee on Ministry may suggest that one of its members or a member of the church community be asked to act as a disinterested third party to assist in resolving the conflict. All parties to the conflict must agree to that suggestion and the proposed third party or parties.
- 6.4 The Committee shall keep a record of the meetings with them, those meetings or conflicts in which it is involved, and the outcomes of those conflicts. Such records shall not be reported by the Committee, but shall be held in confidence for five years before being destroyed unless there is a Board of Management Policy or legal requirement that another practice be followed.
- 6.5 If the conflict remains unresolved, the Committee on Ministry may suggest use of outside mediation or refer the matter to the Board of Management. The mediation process requires that parties enter it voluntarily. Such services would be paid for by the parties themselves or by the Board of Management at its discretion.

### 7.0 OUTSIDE MEDIATION

The Committee on Ministry will compile a list of sufficiently trained persons who are not members or associates of the UUCW congregation and have specifically agreed to mediate resolutions of conflicts within the UUCW community. The Board of Management and the minister shall review the list of proposed mediators and shall have the ongoing power to remove a person from the list for good cause.

**Note well:** *Mediation is defined as an informal process which is voluntary, confidential, honors the principles of informed consent and self determination, and rests on mediator neutrality/impartiality.*

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- 7.1 Parties to a conflict may accept the minister's recommendation of a mediator or co-mediators from this list or may agree to another mediator/co-mediators from the approved list.
- 7.2 The mediator(s) shall determine how the mediation shall be conducted consistent with accepted principles of mediation. Exceptions to confidentiality set forth in MA General Law Chapter 233, Section 23C, are when disclosure by the mediator(s) is required under federal or state law or situations where there is suspected child or elder abuse or neglect or the planned commission of a crime. The mediator(s) shall produce a written report stating whether mediation has been held and additional information agreed upon by the disputants. It is expected that the first mediation session will include a conversation about what information from and about the mediation will be shared and with whom the information will be shared. The conversation should include consideration of whether to share information about the nature of the resolution of any issues, issues that have not been resolved or only resolved partially, and new issues that have been identified. Copies of the mediators' report shall be provided to the parties and to the Committee on Ministry in confidence.
- 7.3 If the mediator(s) believes that safety is at issue, the matter shall be returned for internal action and the appropriate portions of the UUCW Disruptive Behavior Policy and Safe Congregations Policy should be followed.
- 7.4 All matters that go to outside mediation shall be reported to the UUCW Board of Management in a manner that does not violate confidentiality.
- 7.5 The Board of Management may authorize that UUCW pay for the expenses of outside mediation, and is urged to authorize such expenses in matters it deems of particular importance. If the Board of Management does not authorize payment of mediation expenses, the parties using those services shall pay those expenses.

### **8.0 IF THE CONFLICT REMAINS UNRESOLVED**

- 8.1 If the conflict remains unresolved, despite all efforts described above, the matter should be presented to the Board of Management for a final determination. The Board of Management shall consult with the Human Resources Committee if the conflict involves an employee of UUCW.
- 8.2 Nothing in this section shall preclude the Board of Management from taking such action that it deems necessary and prudent for the safety, health and well being of the UUCW congregation and community.
- 8.3 The Board will follow the UUCW Disruptive Behavior and Safe Congregations Policies when/if a conflict threatens UUCW's covenant to provide a safe, healthy, open, respectful forum.