

First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo Conflict Resolution Policy



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Preamble

Conflicts arise naturally simply because we are different from one another. As Unitarian Universalists, we honor and celebrate differences but often struggle with how to manage them. Effectively managed conflict has many positive results. When people can disagree with each other and lobby for different ideas, our church is healthier. Disagreements often result in a more thorough study of options and better decisions and direction.

Underlying this policy and process is the belief that most conflicts can and will be resolved by individuals and groups at the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo (FUFON) practicing our Covenant of Right Relations and Unitarian Universalist (UU) Principles. It is expected that all members, friends and leaders (Congregants) will use the Covenant of Right Relations and UU Principles to inform their own actions and will treat everyone with compassion, respect and dignity.

I. Purpose

The purpose of the FUFON Conflict Resolution Policy is to embrace a healthy approach to the management, resolution and transformation of conflict. In the spirit of the Covenant of Right Relations and UU Principles, this policy and process seeks to:

- A. Foster and maintain harmonious relations within FUFON
- B. Mitigate conflict through education, facilitation and training for the Congregation
- C. Establish a process and structure for resolving conflicts

II. Guidelines



The guidelines that support this policy and process are:

- A. Parties finding themselves in conflict should:
 - Take responsibility upon themselves to resolve the conflict
 - Use the conflict resolution process to mend relationships and provide healing
 - Use conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth
- B. Persons asked to assist in resolving conflicts should:
 - Respect and offer compassion to all of the parties
 - Listen with an open mind
 - Approach the matters raised with impartiality
 - Explore the facts with care
 - Excuse themselves from matters in which they have an interest or bias
 - Utilize best practices in dealing with the parties and their conflict
 - Offer the least intrusive intervention necessary to resolve conflicts
 - Apply the least restrictive alternative
 - Balance strict confidentiality and transparency with the safety of the parties in conflict and the Congregation
 - Refer individuals to pastoral care, counseling or other services, as needed

III. Scope

The scope of this policy and process includes conflicts between congregants and other congregants, groups, ministers and/or staff. The scope also covers group-to-group conflicts. If a conflict arises, an ad-hoc committee may be formed with volunteers that have skills in mediation. The Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM) may appoint such members to the ad-hoc committee.

The scope does not generally cover conflicts between staff and between the Minister and staff, as these are covered in the Employee Handbook. However, the Personnel Committee may refer any such conflict to COSM, if appropriate.

This policy and process does not cover complaints regarding matters of church policy. Such complaints may be addressed to the Board.

This policy and process does not supersede authorities given to the Board.

IV. The Conflict Resolution Process



The conflict resolution process consists of two levels. When a conflict arises, the process is to employ the lowest level needed to resolve the conflict. Throughout the process, all relevant persons, including members of the COSM, will be treated with respect and compassion consistent with the FUFON Covenant of Right Relations and UU principles.

Level 1. We Work It Out

The expectation is that the vast majority of conflicts will be resolved at this level. At this level conflict is resolved directly by the people involved, without external intervention. In many instances, this will be achieved utilizing the knowledge, skills and abilities obtained through the COSM's education and training efforts. Suggestions for how parties can resolve conflicts themselves are provided in the Appendix.

Level 2. We Need Help (Facilitator or Mediator Process)

Assistance from the COSM may be requested.

- a. A confidential request may be made to the COSM. Such request may be made by:
 - i. a written request delivered confidentially to a COSM member,
 - ii. electronic submission to a COSM member via e-mail,
 - iii. telephoning a COSM member, or
 - iv. an in-person meeting with a COSM member.
- b. The COSM will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, meet with requestor, and where appropriate, conduct preliminary fact gathering.
- c. For each request received, the COSM will endeavour to recommend next steps. Options include:
 - i. Coaching – One or both parties may benefit from the help of a person experienced with conflict resolution to help them gain additional skills or techniques to resolve the situation themselves.
 - ii. Facilitated Discussion – In some instances, parties may simply wish to have a third party lead a conversation for the purpose of assisting parties in understanding each other and the issues, and potentially reaching resolution.
 - iii. Voluntary Mediation - Mediation seeks to focus on parties' willingness to solve the conflict rather than finding out if someone is at fault, meeting individually with the parties involved. Since it is a collaborative effort between the parties in conflict, the mediation process helps the parties clarify misunderstandings and improve



communication. With the aid of the mediator, the parties themselves determine the resolution.

- d. In furthering any of the above recommendations, the COSM may seek a mediator, coach and/or facilitator. COSM may recommend that the parties share any cost of such recommendations.

V. Confidentiality

Without the express approval of the all parties, the COSM, facilitators, mediators and related aides shall not disclose the content or substance of matters brought to it unless disclosure is reasonably believed to be necessary to avoid physical or substantial financial harm, or is required by law. Any documentation relating to a conflict is to be kept in a secure, locked cabinet held by the Minister, or their designate.

VI. Amendments

The FUFON Board of Directors and the COSM are jointly responsible for maintaining and upholding this policy and process. Amendments to this policy and process shall be recommended by the COSM and approved by the Board of Directors.

Appendix - Suggestions for Conflict Self-Resolution (Level I)



Self-Reflection

- Examine the roles of each party in the conflict.
- Reflect on why the matter is important.
- Acknowledge your role in the conflict.
- Consider putting your thoughts in writing
- Get a “reality check” from a trusted third party and compare perceptions.
- Seek to understand the perspective(s) of the other person(s).

Tips for Active Listening

- Talk directly with those whom you are in disagreement with.
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible.
- Use "I" statements and active listening in discussions (e.g., “I felt that I was prejudged and anything I said was going to upset you”); do not use “You” statements, which carry an accusatory connotation (e.g., “You’d already made up your mind about what happened”).
- Listen actively and carefully to the other person(s).
- Be with the other person(s), fully present and focused.
- Give the other person(s) good eye contact.
- Take some notes. Avoid having other papers or reports present that may distract you.
- Let the other person talk and allow for silence between sentences.
- Don’t interrupt or respond while the other person is explaining their side of the conflict.
- Do ask clarifying questions.

Tips for Creating Safe Conversation Spaces

- Consider the meeting place, public or private, ensuring neutrality in the meeting place.
- Try to set the chairs up so that you are seated beside each other, or at an angle.
- Try to avoid sitting opposite or having a table or barrier between you.
- Adopt an attitude of curiosity, and assume that others have adopted the same.
- Eliminate distractions, such as phone, pager, and email pings.

The Process

- Define the issue under discussion clearly and neutrally.
- When the other person finishes telling their side of the conflict, reflect back what you think you just heard.
- Respond to what the other person is saying.
- Explore together what is important to each of you.
- Search for options that meet each other’s needs.
- If the above does not result in resolution, see if you can agree to disagree with each other on this issue respectfully.