

Conflict Resolution Process

Keweenaw Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Adapted from UU Faith Works, Summer/Fall 2003, Shared by Rev. Deborah Mero, Interim Minister (2000-2002), All Souls Church Unitarian Universalist (UU) Brattleboro, VT

Adopted by the KUUF Board on July 1, 2012

We hope that most conflicts can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to live our covenant and Principles, and that affected parties will approach each other directly. We anticipate that Steps 3 and 4 below will be necessary only when behaviors are seen to be dangerous (threatening to people or property), disruptive (interfering with essential Fellowship functions), or image tarnishing (driving people away). 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 individual.

Step 1

Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Do some soul searching.

Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Did they see it or hear it in the same way? Based on your telling of events and your feelings about it, would they feel the same way?

Talk directly with the person (fellow member, minister, etc.) with whom you have the disagreement. 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..." not "You did..."); use active listening. At this step, and at all succeeding steps that become necessary, own your issue. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable.

If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts into writing. Be available to hear the response.

If you feel that safety is an issue, use an appropriate third party or committee to provide a safe environment for the discussion as in Step 2 below.

If the conflict is less with a person than with how they are performing a job (staff, volunteer staff, religious educator, etc.), address the concern to the proper supervisor so that individuals are not being "supervised" from all sides.

Step 2

If unresolved, consider going to the minister for counseling regarding the issue.

If all parties agree that the minister is neutral and appropriate, the minister mediates.

If the minister is not appropriate, the minister will direct you to the correct mediation body.

If the conflict involves the minister, the mediation body is the Committee on Ministry.

Step 3

If still unresolved, the matter is taken before a Conflict Resolution Task Force. The minister (or mediator in Step 2) will call the Task Force into action if their mediation is unsuccessful.

This Task Force will be constituted on an “as needed” basis and chosen from a pool of 3-6 KUUF Voting Members who have received training in mediation skills. This training will be an expense identified in the annual budget. One member of the Task Force will be chosen from the pool by each of the parties involved in the conflict, with a third member chosen by the minister or mediator identified in Step 2. Members will excuse themselves from any conflict for which they have an inherent bias based on the individuals or the topics involved. The Task Force will report to the Board on the nature and outcomes of all conflicts for which it is called into service. The Task Force will determine a record-keeping format that provides an abstract of events while allowing for privacy considerations.

The Conflict Resolution Task Force is empowered to make recommendations, behavior contracts and judgments. It is not limited to achieving compromises; when it believes that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to the Fellowship, or not expressive of our collective values, it can recommend counseling, limits to participation in Fellowship life, or other behavior changing strategies. If one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, if the behavior is unchanged, and/or if the Task Force believes that the behavior is a threat to the Fellowship, the matter will go to the Board for consideration.

Step 4

The Board, in executive session, keeping documentation as it determines appropriate, will consider matters coming from the Conflict Resolution Task Force and take action as it deems appropriate. The Board can solicit assistance from the UUA.

The Board can endorse the Task Force recommendations or it can set its own recommendations and require the recommended behavior.

The Board can take action to exclude a person from attending for a period of time based on a refusal to honor our Fellowship covenant.

The Board, given just cause, by a two-thirds majority of the entire Board, can exclude a person from the Fellowship and the Fellowship premises and remove the person from Fellowship 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 of the entire Board will be required for 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.