

Unitarian Universalist Church West Lafayette, Indiana Healthy Community Team

Conflict Management Procedures and Guidelines

Covenant for a Healthy Community

I agree to communicate respectfully, honestly and directly and to listen to others with thoughtful consideration. I will take personal responsibility for my own conduct and for its impact on the health of the congregation whether I am involved in conflict or I observe conflict between others. When I am involved in conflict, it is my responsibility to first engage the other party in direct communication, with or without mediation assistance.

I agree to bring continuing conflict into the process chosen by the congregation to seek resolution and reconciliation, while ensuring all parties are heard and understood.

I will uphold and trust in the process by which we have chosen to govern ourselves and agree to allow reasonable time for this process to be completed. If, for some reason, I lose confidence in the process, I agree to maintain respectful communication while seeking an appropriate and fair way of resolving my concerns about the process.

I will recognize decisions, whether or not I agree, as the outcome of our democratic process.

I will do my best to forgive myself and others if our efforts fall short.

Approved by the Board of Trustees, Unitarian Universalist Church, West Lafayette, IN
on 3/17/2009

THE HEALTHY COMMUNITY TEAM

The Healthy Community Team (HCT) has been charged with assisting our church community with appropriately managing conflict when it arises between or among congregants, or between congregants and staff. At present, the Committee on Ministry serves as the HCT.

The clash of ideas, feelings, wills, and hopes is inevitable in human relationships and human communities. Although often uncomfortable, it is not a bad thing in itself. Good people doing good things get into conflict; it's a fact of life. Sometimes it is a creative and energizing fact of life. If mishandled, conflict can create hard feelings, drain energy, and change/damage lives irreparably. When conflict is managed appropriately, on the other hand, relationships can actually be enhanced and the resulting solutions better for everyone.

Call the church office, 765-743-8812, to request a list of Healthy Community Team members and contact information. This information can also be found on the HCT bulletin board or on the church website: uulafayette.org.

SUGGESTED STEPS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

1. Direct Dialogue

The simplest, most effective path to conflict management is one-on-one, face-to-face, open communication. This honors confidentiality and allows for each party to maintain dignity and respect. Involving third parties that are unrelated to the conflict can lead to gossip which can escalate the conflict. Direct dialogue should be the first step. A majority of problems can be handled in this fashion.

Discuss your concern with the person or committee involved. If you do not know who is responsible for your area of concern, check with the minister, the church administrative assistant, or the board president.

The following conflict communication guidelines have been found to be helpful when addressing a conflict with others:

- Tell the other person that there is something you would like to resolve, and tell them why resolving the conflict is important to you; offer suggestions of things you might need to change to improve the situation.
- Be as specific as you can about whatever situation you are describing; give examples.
- Speak about the behavior you observe, not someone's character or personality. Avoid labels. Be respectful of the other person.
- Listen carefully. Take a moment to confirm that you understand what the person said, and he or she understands what you said. It might be helpful to "restate" what you think you heard.
- "I" messages might be helpful: "This is my experience, my recollection, my perception, my point of view, my feeling, my interpretation."
- Share your feelings as honestly and completely as you are able. "I am sad," or "I am disappointed."
- Ask directly for what you want.
- Thank the person for being willing to try to resolve the conflict.

2. Getting Help

If you have a conflict with a committee, a fellow congregant or staff, which you can't or don't want to address by direct discussion, you may ask for assistance from the Healthy Community Team (HCT).

You may call or write any HCT member to schedule a meeting. The HCT will respond to your request within two weeks. When you meet, you will be asked to describe your concern or conflict stating:

- a brief description of the conflict, including the person, committee or situation you are having difficulty with;

- what steps you have taken to resolve the conflict;
- what outcome you would like to see.

Please consider the same principles described in the **Direct Dialogue** section as you engage in this step.

The HCT will do its best to listen carefully, try to understand the nature of the conflict, and make recommendations regarding how the HCT can help.

Options may include:

- helping you clarify your understanding of the conflict;
- helping you to prepare to meet with the other party;
- helping you find words to talk with the person directly;
- facilitating a meeting between you and the other person(s).

3. Mediation

If the HCT believes that mediation would be helpful in managing the conflict, the team will make a recommendation appropriate for the situation, and assist in finding a facilitator agreeable to all parties.

- All parties must agree on the selection of a facilitator. A facilitator may be selected from among the several professionally trained mediators within the congregation who have agreed on a volunteer basis to assist in managing conflicts or the selected facilitator may be entirely independent of the UUC congregation.
- Each party, including the facilitator, may be asked to sign a confidentiality statement. This confidentiality statement helps to ensure that what is said during the mediation process will not be shared with others. Agreements that are reached could be shared, if all parties agree.
- The agreement that the parties arrive at may be filed with the Healthy Community Team.
- Each facilitator has his or her own procedure and will contact all the parties involved.

4. Referral to the Board of Trustees

If the conflict can not be successfully managed, and in cases where, in the opinion of the Healthy Community Team, the conflict places persons or the church community and its mission in jeopardy, the Healthy Community Team may refer the matter to the Board of Trustees for formal resolution.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEALING WITH STAFF CONFLICT

The Healthy Community Team processes do not apply to supervised staff. Supervised staff includes the Director of Religious Education, the Administrative Assistant, the Nursery Supervisor, the Pianist/Choir Director, and the Custodian. If your conflict is with one of the supervised staff, you are urged to attempt Step 1, **Direct Dialogue**. If this does not result in an adequate solution, your next step is to go to that person's supervisor. If that does not produce a satisfactory result, you may contact the Board of Trustees.

CONFLICT WITH THE MINISTER

If your conflict is with the minister, you are urged to attempt Step 1, Direct Dialogue. If this does not result in an adequate solution, your next step is to go to the Committee on Ministry. If no resolution can be reached, the Committee on Ministry will notify the Board of Trustees of the nature of the conflict. If necessary, and in consultation with the Board, the Committee on Ministry will contact the District Executive of the Heartland District to determine whether UUA mediation is advisable..

TEAM COVENANT

In order to effectively facilitate conflict management the Healthy Community Team must maintain the highest standards of justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. This team holds the process of conflict resolution as sacred to the health and well-being of our community. To these ends, we covenant together to:

- Uphold our congregation's Healthy Community Covenant;
- Assume the good intentions of one another;
- Acknowledge our human fallibility, biases, and blind spots;
- Appreciate that we have our own unique experiences and understandings;
- Engage in compassionate connection, sincere appreciation, and mutual trust;
- Communicate to solve problems with one another honestly, directly and in a timely manner;
- Honor the privacy of people in the congregation by keeping personal information confidential;
- Cherish and support the health of the congregation above individual concerns.

At this time the Committee on Ministry is the acting Healthy Community Team.

Adopted September 27, 2011 by the Committee on Ministry