

Minnesota Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (MVUUF)

APPROVED Policy

Name of Policy: CONFLICT RESOLUTION GUIDELINES

Board of Trustees Approval Date: November 11, 2009

This policy is: NEW

The covenant central to our U-U community is our promise to trust and support each other. Most disputes can be quickly and respectfully resolved by the parties themselves. The covenant gives us the right and responsibility in time of conflict to return to the promises we have made to each another.

To fulfill our promise of trust and mutual support, each MVUUF member agrees to adhere to the following conflict resolution guidelines.

STEP ONE – Parties to a conflict will:

- Examine their role in a disagreement and honestly assess their motives and contributions to the conflict;
- *Not* complain to a third party about the other party (triangulate);
- Talk directly with the other party at a mutually acceptable time and place as soon as possible after the conflict arises; and/or, invite a mutually-agreed-upon Neutral Observer* to meet with them if either party believes this would make the parties' meeting more respectful and productive. (*The minister will select and maintain a list of "Neutral Observers" whose sole role is to ensure that parties meeting to resolve a conflict are respectful and reasonable.);
- Use "I" statements ("I felt hurt, angry, etc. . . .") and listen actively and compassionately to each other.

A conflict that is more about job performance than personal interaction, how one person is treating another, should be referred to the proper supervisor of the volunteer leader, paid staff, etc. whose performance is being questioned.

STEP TWO – If the conflict is not resolved, the parties shall jointly meet with the minister who may:

- Recommend the parties attempt to resolve the conflict in the presence of a neutral observer if they have not done so;
- Counsel the parties and mediate the dispute;
- Refer the parties to the Conflict Resolution Team. **

Conflicts that involve the minister will be referred to the Committee on Ministry (COM) which will follow its own guidelines and procedures for conflict resolution. If, however, the minister or any party involved in the conflict with the minister objects to conflict resolution by the COM, the conflict will be referred to the Conflict Resolution Team.**

STEP THREE – If a conflict is unresolved by the previous steps, the minister shall convene the Conflict Resolution Team and refer the matter to them.

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** The Conflict Resolution Team (CRT) is a standing committee appointed by consensus of the minister, Board of Trustees (BOT) and Committee on Ministry (COM) within the first month of each church year. Members will be selected for their mediation skills and knowledge of various aspects of Fellowship functioning, and will serve on an “as needed” basis for three-year terms. The minister, BOT and COM may recruit additional members as necessary. Team members will receive training, if necessary, which will be the expense of the Leadership committee budget. Members will excuse themselves from any conflict for which they have an inherent bias based on the individuals or the topics involved. A single member, the entire CRT, or any combination thereof can be employed to resolve a conflict. The CRT will report to the Committee on Ministry in a timely manner the nature and resolution of any conflict referred to the CRT. If the CRT has been unable to resolve a conflict, it shall report to both the Committee on Ministry and the Board of Trustees. The Committee on Ministry will determine a record-keeping format that provides an abstract of events while allowing for privacy considerations.

The Conflict Resolution Team is empowered to make judgments about the situation and make recommendations, including written agreements on acceptable behavior. It is not limited to achieving compromises. When the CRT believes that there exists a situation in which there are behaviors harmful to the Fellowship or incompatible with its collective values, the CRT may recommend counseling, limits to participation in Fellowship life, or other behavior changing strategies. Should one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, the behavior is unchanged and/or the belief of the Conflict Resolution team is that the behavior is a threat to the Fellowship, the matter will go directly and immediately to the Board for consideration.

STEP FOUR -- The Board of Trustees will consider matters coming from the Conflict Resolution Team and take action as it deems appropriate. The Board may solicit assistance from Prairie Star district and the UUA and may:

- Endorse and enforce the CRT’s behavioral recommendations or set its own behavioral recommendations for enforcement.
- Take action to exclude a person from attending MVUUF for a period of time based on a refusal to honor our covenant with each other.
- Exclude a person for just cause from MVUUF and its premises and remove his/her name from MVUUF membership.
- Specify conditions for returning as a welcomed member of our community and set criteria for evaluation of compliance.

Assent of the Board of Trustees will be required for return to the MVUUF community.

The Board may call a congregational meeting to address the conflict with the collective compassion and shared wisdom of the entire body.

Steps Three and Four should be necessary only when behaviors are seen to be dangerous (threatening to people or property), disruptive (interfering with essential church functions), or significantly destructive to the peace and tranquility of the MVUUF community.

Before participating in steps two to four of this process every party to a conflict and all who participate in resolution of the conflict shall sign a joint “Conflict Resolution Pledge” which includes a pledge of confidentiality, a commitment to treat all participants with compassion and respect, and a vow to act in accord with Unitarian Universalist Principles.

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