

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY<sup>1</sup>

### POLICY STATEMENT:

First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (FUCO) embraces a healthy approach to the management, resolution and transformation of conflict. In the spirit of its congregational covenant and Unitarian Universalist principles, FUCO acts to:

- Foster and maintain harmonious relations within the Congregation
- Mitigate conflict through ongoing education, facilitation and training
- Establish and maintain a process and structure for resolving conflict which includes setting up and supporting a Right Relations Team.

### RATIONALE:

As Unitarian Universalists (UUs), we embrace and celebrate our differences, including our diversity of ideas and opinions. We recognize that conflict is a normal part of congregational life; it is not the presence or absence of conflict that demonstrates the health of a community but the way that conflict is managed. Effectively managed conflict has many positive results. When people can disagree with each other and promote different ideas, our congregation is healthier. Disagreements often lead to a more thorough study of options and better decisions and actions. Effectively addressing conflict effectively can contribute to our spiritual growth and enhance our relationships with one another.

Underlying this policy and process is the belief that most conflicts can and will be resolved by individuals and groups at FUCO practicing our congregational covenant and UU Principles to inform their own action. Those principles will guide all congregants to treat everyone with compassion, respect and dignity. We also believe that the best way to mitigate the negative effects of conflict is to learn new skills that empower us to manage conflict with awareness and grace.

### POLICY DETAILS

#### I. Scope

The scope of this policy and process includes conflicts between congregants and other congregants as well as between congregants and the minister(s), staff and/or groups in the congregation. The scope also covers group-to-group conflicts.

The scope does not generally cover conflicts between staff and between the Minister and staff, as these are covered in the Employee Handbook (see C.4, Employee Complaint/Appeal Procedure). However, the Head of Staff (Lead Minister) or the Personnel Committee may refer any such conflict to the Right Relations Team with the consent of the staff involved.

This policy and process does not cover complaints regarding matters of church policy or Board decisions. Such complaints may be addressed by the Lead Minister or the Board, depending on who is responsible for the policy.

Any issues involving sexual misconduct or potential illegal activity will be referred to the appropriate authorities.

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

## **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
- Seek guidance and support from the Right Relations Team as needed
- 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
- Balance strict confidentiality and transparency with the safety of the parties in conflict and the Congregation
- Refer individuals to the Spiritual Care Team or the Minister for spiritual care, counselling or other services as needed.

## **III. Right Relations Team**

To support implementation of this policy and process, FUCO will establish and maintain a Right Relations Team (RRT). This team will be made up of trained volunteers who, guided by the congregation's covenant, will provide ongoing education, training and support to the congregation in conflict management and resolution. Members of the RRT who have appropriate training, skills and experience will also be available to act as facilitators or mediators in the conflict resolution process.

The Spiritual Care Coordinator will act as an advisor and resource to the team.

## **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 of action needed to resolve the conflict. Through the process, all relevant persons, including members of the Right Relations Team, will be treated with respect and compassion consistent with the congregational covenant 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 by utilizing the knowledge, skills and abilities obtained through the Right Relations Team's education and training efforts.

#### Level 2: We Need Help (Facilitated or Mediated Process)

Assistance from the Right Relations Team may be requested.

- a. A confidential request may be made directly to the Right Relations Team (RRT) or through the Minister. Such request may be made by:
  - i. a written request delivered confidentially to a RRT member,
  - ii. electronic submission to a RRT member via email,
  - iii. telephoning a RRT member, or
  - iv. an in-person meeting with a RRT member.
- b. The RRT will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, meet with the requestor, and where appropriate, conduct preliminary fact gathering.
- c. For each request received, the RRT will endeavor 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. Mediation: Mediation is a voluntary process that seeks to focus on parties' willingness to solve the conflict rather than finding out if someone is at fault, meeting initially 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. There is no guarantee of a resolution, nor will a solution be imposed.

Members of the RRT who have appropriate training and skills in mediation will normally act to facilitate discussions or act as mediators. Where deemed necessary, the Right Relations Team may with the consent of the parties involved seek an external mediator, coach and/or facilitator. The RRT may recommend that the parties share any costs involved.

#### **V. Confidentiality**

Without the express approval of all parties, the Right Relations Team, facilitators, mediators and any other individuals involved 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. Care will be taken to respect confidentiality in ongoing correspondence during the process (including emails). All notes and email communications will be destroyed following completion of the conflict resolution process.

The RRT may prepare a report on the nature of the conflict and how the conflict was resolved. Reports will respect the confidentiality of the parties involved. These reports will help future members of the

RRT understand their roles and what contributes to a successful process. The reports and any other records of the RRT will be maintained by the Team Leader in an appropriately secure place.

**DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY:**

The RRT will, as part of the annual budget process, submit a request for funds to support their activities. The RRT will have the authority to manage and spend within their approved budget.

**PROCEDURES:**

The RRT will put in place other procedures as necessary to support its education work and implementation of the conflict resolution process.

**MONITORING AND REPORTING:**

The RRT will submit a report annually on its activities to the Board.

**REFERENCES AND/OR RESOURCES:**

UUA Safe Congregation Handbook, <http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook>

**WHO IS CONSULTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT / AMENDMENT OF THIS POLICY:** Lead Minister, Committee on Ministry (Transition Team), Caring Network, Board

**APPROVAL:** Approved by the Board as a Working Document, April 19, 2017.

**Note 1:** FUCO would like to acknowledge the Fellowship of Nanaimo for giving consent to use its Conflict Resolution Policy as the basis for this policy.