

First Unitarian Universalist Church, San Diego

Conflict Resolution Guidelines

Expectations

The Covenant of Good Relations for our Church affirms that we treat each other with respect, that we listen, speak, and act with integrity and compassion, and that we communicate openly with one another. Differences of opinion are part of the life of an active church, and our sense of community is enhanced when these are resolved through consensus or compromise. However, if differences or conflicts go unresolved, they can threaten the well being of our Church community. This document is intended to identify the steps that should be taken if unresolved conflicts arise.

Step 1: Talk directly with the person (member, minister, staff) with whom you have the conflict.

- First, own your issue. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable.
- Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Do some soul searching; try writing down what happened and why, to get it clear in your own mind.
- Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Did this person see or hear it in the same way? Based on your telling of events and your feelings, would they feel the same way?
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible after the incident.
- During the discussion, use “I” statements (“I feel” not “you did”). Actively listen to the other person; if necessary, repeat what the person just said to make sure you heard it correctly.
- If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts in writing, again using “I” statements. (Email is not appropriate for this sort of writing.) Be available to hear the response.
- If you feel that safety is an issue, or that the conversation is too difficult to manage alone, use an appropriate third party; the Good Relations Committee has members who are available to help.
- If the conflict is not with the person but with how that person is performing a job (staff, RE teacher, etc.), address your concern to the proper supervisor of that person. See the “Who to Contact” information at the end of this document.

Step 2: If the conflict remains unresolved, go to the minister or associate minister for counseling regarding the issue.

- If all parties agree that the minister is neutral and appropriate, the minister or associate minister mediates.
- If the minister is not appropriate, the minister will direct you to the appropriate mediation body.

Step 3: If still unresolved, take the matter to the Good Relations Committee (GRC).

- The GRC will make every effort to resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of the participants. When conflicts are resolved, the parties to the conflict will sign a statement agreeing that the conflict has been resolved to their satisfaction, and the GRC will keep on confidential file a brief record of the conflicts and the persons involved. Such records will be shared only with the ministers. In the case of unresolved conflicts, the GRC will send a detailed report to the President of the Board, the ministers, and the parties involved in the conflict. These reports must be held in the strictest confidence.
- The GRC is empowered to make recommendations to the parties involved in a conflict. However, the GRC is not limited to achieving compromises. If the GRC believes that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to the Church community or not expressive of our UU principles, the Committee can recommend counseling, limits to participation in Church activities, or other behavior-changing strategies.

Step 4: If still unresolved, take the matter to the Board.

Should one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, or if the behavior is unchanged and/or the GRC believes that the behavior is a threat to the Church community, the matter will go to the Board for consideration.

Conclusion

The Good Relations Committee trusts that most conflicts can be resolved in good faith by the efforts of individuals who live by UU principles and adhere to our Covenant of Good Relations, and that Steps 1 and 2 will be enough for most conflicts. We anticipate that Steps 3 and 4 will be necessary only when behaviors are seen as dangerous (threatening to people or property), disruptive (interfering with essential Church functions), or hostile (repeatedly aggressive or demeaning behavior towards guests or members, including unwelcome sexual advances). We further anticipate that all who participate in the process of resolving conflicts will use our UU principles to inform their own actions and treat everyone concerned with compassion and dignity. However, if there is a conflict where no resolution is possible, concern for the well being, openness, and safety of the Church community shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any individual.

Adapted from the Rogue Valley UU Fellowship Conflict Resolution Guidelines, with permission. Their document in turn was adapted from UU Faith Works, UUA, Boston, MA

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