

Unitarian Church of Calgary
Conflict Management Process
Adopted by the Board, October 7, 2009

Any group of people in a community will experience similarities and differences. It is normal for conflict to arise. It is what you do to manage the conflict that makes all the difference. We want to avoid destructive conflict and help create proactive approaches to facilitate constructive conflict within our congregation. We believe that creating processes to manage conflict is best done from the grassroots up. Until we have gone through a congregational process to create these procedures, we propose the following as interim documents to use until we have our own UCC process and accompanying documents.

A. Taking a Proactive Approach – Congregational Guidelines

In a healthy congregation, it is useful to have some agreed upon ways of relating to one another. Until our congregation has developed our own guidelines, we are going to use the Beacon Unitarian Church's Guidelines (see Appendix A). By using these guidelines, we aim to uphold a set of promises about how we will behave toward one another and to various groups and individuals within the congregation. The ultimate objective is to foster a climate that is courteous, supportive, respectful of others, open, honest, and, above all, safe.

B. When Conflict Occurs

1. Interpersonal Conflict

What do you do when you have a conflict or a difference of opinion with someone? The best thing is not to avoid the conflict but to find a healthy way to attempt to resolve your differences. Attached is Appendix B, an "Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Model" (from the Justice Institute of B.C.'s Centre for Conflict Resolution Training). This document offers a process people can use to walk through the stages for resolving their conflict. It offers ways for people to talk about their views of the issues and interests in the area to be resolved, as well as how to problem solve.

2. Where do you go in the congregation with your concern?

Often people do not know the appropriate place to take their concern and instead talk to others about it, rather than to the person/people who needs to hear about it. Appendix C, "Compliments and Concerns and where to take them" offers some direction as to who to talk to for what.

3. What is an appropriate process for handling conflict in our congregation?

Appendix D "Conflict Management Process for the Unitarian Church of Calgary--a Transitional document" is a process for us to use while we are educating ourselves about conflict, and considering other models. The Safe and Healthy Congregation Task Force will be asked to work out a process that the congregation can use in the long-run. Until this time, this document can be used.

Appendix A

BEACON CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION AND BEING IN RELATIONSHIP Adapted for use at the Unitarian Church of Calgary Recommended for all UCC Meetings

SHOW EACH OTHER RESPECT

- Honour the diversity of opinion in the group.
- Honour the differing abilities and disabilities in the group.
- Listen until the other person has finished. Give people the space to finish their own thoughts.
- Avoid put-downs, blaming or labeling. People have the right to be wrong or to make mistakes.

COMMUNICATE FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Use “I” statements: “I think... I feel... I need...” Own your own feelings and opinions. Speak your own thoughts. Let others speak for themselves.
- Describe the behaviour you are reacting to.
- Check out assumptions. Ask for clarification. Do this for both ideas and feelings.
- Bring your good will. Hear the content through your heart.

PARTICIPATE WITH TRUST AND COMMITMENT

- Ask for what you want or need.
- If you are a talker, limit your own contributions so that you can make room for others; invite others to speak.
- Hang in there when the going gets tough. With trust you will be able to hear each other and come to resolution.
- Avoid negotiating with threats.

[Developed at a Community Building Workshop on 17 Sept. 1994 and recommended for all Beacon Meetings. Now adapted for use at the Unitarian Church of Calgary.]

Appendix B – *Short Form*

Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Model

STAGE 1: Establish a positive environment.

Timing

Location

Listening Attentively

Expressing motivation to resolve differences

STAGE 2: Clarify the issues.

State your own point of view with respect to the differences

- Use 'I' statements
- Be brief

Invite the other person to state their point of view

- Listen actively when he/she is speaking
- Repeat back the essence of what you have heard, to be sure you have heard correctly

STAGE 3: Clarify Interests.

Explore probe the other persons interests (hopes, expectations, fears, concerns)

- Listen actively and restate his/her interests
- Ask open ended questions

Ask other person to now listen to your interests (hopes, expectations, fears, concerns))

- Use 'I' statements
- Use assertive expression

STAGE 4: Problem solve.

Clarify desired outcome and goal.

Invite mutual generating of options

Check standards of fairness; keep in mind that you want to meet both your interests and theirs.

Prioritize options.

Forms action plan.

If a solution is not becoming apparent, you need may need more information, more trust or energy.

- You may need to break and come back to the discussion.
- You may agree to disagree or agree that you cannot reach an agreement at this time and set a time for future discussion.
- You may obtain the needed information or work to increase the trust.

Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Model

It is important from the outset to recognize that conflict arises because issues or events trigger negative feelings. These feelings have likely gotten in the way of being in right relationship and successfully accomplishing shared goals. It is highly unlikely that this came about through intent – neither person acted or spoke with the express purpose of causing hurt or anger. It is very likely that both people are unhappy about what happened or was said.

Conflict resolution activities need to take place face-to-face and involve both of the people who are central to the conflict.

The decision to involve a mediator depends on the seriousness and breadth of the conflict. If the conflict is somewhat limited, a mediator may still be of use – but – should be involved only with the advance agreement of those people central to the conflict. The Committee on Ministry can provide you with a list of trained mediators. If mediation is not needed, it can be useful for a trusted third party to attend as witness. The role of the witness is, in a gentle manner, to keep all involved reminded of the steps in this conflict resolution model.

The process of conflict resolution rests on the principles of:

1. ‘no surprises’ – what occurs is known and agreed to by both parties – in advance. Conflict resolution requires an ‘up-front’ agenda and must happen without even the slightest hint of a hidden agenda;
2. confidentiality – what is said in this process must not be shared with those outside the conflict resolution process without the explicit permission of all those involved;
3. equity – all aspects of this process are conducted in an environment of fairness and respect. One of the important ways this is done is for people involved to commit to taking turns talking and listening.

STAGE 1: Establish a positive environment.

Timing – Set a time that is as soon as possible after the conflict arises and as convenient as possible for both of you.

Location – Set a location that is ‘neutral’ (a place where neither of you is ‘in control’ or substantively more comfortable). A place where privacy is possible is also important.

Listening Attentively – This serves two purposes: (1) you may learn something that reduces the impact of the conflict, and/or (2) it honours the other person. By listening you begin to build trust.

Purpose - Keep in mind that you’re there to resolve differences. This is the whole purpose -- to re-solve differences. It is not a time to lay blame (or receive it), not a chance to erase what has happened; it’s not even to necessarily come to agreement on a subject. The task is to understand how conflict arose, process the resulting discomfort and find a way to reduce the likelihood it will happen again.

STAGE 2: Clarify the issues.

Remember; this process is about issues, not about personalities. Clarify that each of you will have a turn to speak and agree not to interrupt the person speaking.

As a speaker:

1. Calmly state the issue that has upset you, from your own point of view. Try to stay focused on one issue/event.
2. Describe what you remember happening, in chronological order, if possible.
3. Use 'I' statements.
for example: "When ... happened, I felt and I reacted by..." or even "When you, I interpreted it to mean ... and so I felt ... and (did or said)"
4. Use objective and non-inflammatory language. Tone of voice and body language are also important because they affect how the information is received.
5. Be brief.
It is not necessary to belabour or repeat a point. Assume the other person is listening as carefully as you intend to listen to them.

As a listener:

1. Listen actively when the other person is speaking.
Keep your body relaxed, look at the other person most of the time, nod when they say something that is true for you, and don't respond at all if you disagree with them because it's not your turn.
2. Once the speaker has finished, summarize the essence of what you have heard, to be sure it was heard correctly.
To do this, ask permission first by saying something like – "I want to be certain I understand what you've just said. I heard that Am I correct?"
Use a mild, non-judgmental tone of voice.
This is neither an opportunity to argue, nor to correct the speaker's view or memory. The only reason you, as a listener, speak is to ensure you understand what the speaker is saying.

STAGE 3: Go deeper into the event / issue and discover what triggered the problem.

This stage takes courage – but it is the key to success of the conflict resolution process. If a mediator or witness is present they may help by facilitating.

1. Take some time to think about the issue/event in light of your hopes, expectations, fears, and concerns.
2. Consider how these hopes, expectations, fears, and concerns are involved in what happened.
3. Take turns telling each other what you have discovered. Use 'I' statements and active language.

Active language uses yourself as the subject and an active verb, not a passive verb with you being acted on. Passive language would be ‘A mistake was made.’ Active language would be ‘I made a mistake.’

4. Seek to fully understand the other person. Once they’ve finished speaking ask open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions lead a person to explain things more fully. A closed-ended question leads to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. For example: “What are your fears and concerns?” is an open-ended question; whereas, “Are you concerned that I’m not telling you everything?” is a closed-ended question.

STAGE 4: Problem solve.

Again, take turns doing the following. If a mediator is present, they could facilitate. Remember, this is about ‘resolution’ – not ‘winning.’

1. Come to consensus on the desired outcome and goal.
It would be ideal if both people shared a single outcome and goal, but that is not a requirement for problem solving. Initial positions may need adjustment so as to allow consensus. By definition, consensus means that goals and outcomes do not conflict and that they are tolerable to both people.
2. Mutually generate options that help achieve the desired outcome(s).
Use creative thinking techniques such as brainstorming. If you get stuck, try thinking of options that definitely wouldn’t work; then focus on their opposite.
3. Check standards of fairness. Keep in mind that you want to address both your hopes and concerns and theirs.
4. Prioritize options.
5. Form an action plan and a timeline for its implementation.
6. Act on the plan.

If a solution is not becoming apparent, you may need more information, more trust or more energy. This may mean that the resolution process cannot be completed in a single meeting.

1. You may need to obtain more information and set a time for further discussion.
2. You may need to take a short break and come back to the discussion.
3. You may agree to disagree, if this will not adversely affect future interactions. If you cannot reach an agreement at this time, you may set a time for future discussion.
4. If both of you do not feel that the problem has been adequately addressed, it may be time to approach the Committee on Ministry to request their help.

STAGE 5: Recognize the work the two of you have done together.

Regardless of whether everything is settled, the two of you have each given it 'your best shot' and that is an accomplishment! Even though we may not solve every disagreement, at least we have gained a better understanding of what happened, from both perspectives.

Both of you need to try to let go of the conflict. Otherwise, things build up over time.

Conflict happens in human community. It is what we do with it and afterwards that can impede or help build the health of our community.

[Developed by the Unitarian Church of Calgary from the document
'Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Model' by the Centre for Conflict Resolution
Training, Justice Institute of BC, 1991]

Appendix C

Compliments and Concerns and Where to Take them

At the Unitarian Church of Calgary, you may have compliments to offer for things well done and concerns to express about things you wish had gone differently. We want to offer you suggestions about where to go for what.

Compliments that are never heard by those who need to hear them are missed opportunities to offer encouragement and support. They can help people feel good about what they have done and give them feedback on what may be helpful to others. Similarly, new ideas cannot be acted upon if no one knows about them. If you have an idea about some improvement or initiative that our church community might benefit from or profitably undertake, , please talk with someone about it.

Concerns, too, are important ways that we learn about what is valuable to you. However, the expression of concerns, and even conflict, can help each of us, only when it is respectfully engaged in and skillfully managed. Concerns that degenerate into destructive conflict can hurt the fabric of caring community that many come to our congregation to find. So, if you have a concern about some issue or committee, or with the behaviour of someone in the congregation, here are some ways to reduce the hurt to everyone.

Enhance the skills and insights *you* bring to the situation.

- Learn how to express your concerns by expressing yourself using sentences beginning with “I” (“I am upset about what happened the other day” rather than accusing others by stating “You hurt my feelings the other day”). Learn how to use “I” statements about the issue itself, as well as about your own feelings toward it.
- Ask to hear the other side – and be prepared to really listen when you hear the story.
- Wherever possible, look for constructive solutions together with whomever you have the concern about.

Although what follows makes reference to concerns, the same advice applies to those with positive comments.

If it concerns the Minister (or the President)...

- Talk to the Minister (or the President) privately.
- If that doesn't work, talk to a member of the Committee on Ministry.

If it concerns a Staff Member...

- Talk to the staff member privately.
- If that doesn't work, talk to the chair of the Committee that works with the staff member (for the Administrator, talk to the Administration Committee chair; for the Director of Religious Education, talk to the Religious Education Committee

chair; for the Choir Director, talk to the Church Services chair; for the sexton, talk to the Physical Plant Chair).

If it concerns a Committee Member...

- Talk to the Committee member privately.
- If that doesn't work, talk to the Committee chair.
- If that doesn't work, talk to the Board Liaison for that Committee (the liaisons are listed on the inside cover of the Church Directory).

If it concerns a Board Member...

- Talk to the board member privately.
- If that doesn't work, talk to the board President.

If it concerns another member of the congregation...

- Talk to the member privately.
- If that doesn't work, talk to a member of the Committee on Ministry for advice or redirection.

If it concerns a Committee not doing its job...

- Talk to the Committee chair. You may need to try this more than once. Remember that all committee members are volunteers and the chair may not have the time to address your concern as promptly as you may wish.
- Offer to work with the Committee to resolve the issue.
- Don't preempt the Committee's responsibility. If you wonder what their mandate is, you can check any committee's terms of reference in the Church Reference binder in the office.
- If none of this works, talk to the Board Liaison for that Committee.

If it concerns an action taken or not taken by the Board of Trustees...

- Talk to a member of the Board to be sure you understand the Board's position.
- If that isn't enough, outline your concerns in writing to the Board.
- Run for office so you can help to shape church practices in the direction you think appropriate.

Quite apart from these guidelines, conflict can still happen, or the possibility of serious conflict may arise despite everyone's best efforts to keep it manageable. If this is what you are facing, and you're not sure how to proceed, contact the Committee on Ministry. They will have more current information about a conflict resolution process that is being developed.

[The above was adapted from Beacon Unitarian Church's *Bouquets and Brickbats and Where to Take them* and their source Unitarian Church of Vancouver's Guidelines entitled *Conflict Can Hurt*.]

Appendix D

Conflict Management Process for the Unitarian Church of Calgary ---a transitional document---

An otherwise constructive conflict situation can degenerate into a destructive one unless it is managed properly. The following are steps to follow when conflict occurs within our church community.

Step 1 – Have a face-to-face conversation.

Talk to the person with whom you are having a conflict. If you are not sure how to do this, review the document “Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Model.” Although you may feel anxious talking to someone about conflict; you may find its ideas on how to proceed will give you courage. Remember, if someone had a concern about something you said or did, wouldn’t you prefer they speak to you directly (rather than triangle by talking to someone else)? We encourage people to speak to one another as soon as possible after conflict occurs, so that it doesn’t fester and escalate. Speaking to someone within 2 weeks is a useful guideline. That way, what triggered the conflict may still be in the other person’s short-term memory.

Step 2 – If the conflict isn’t resolved, approach the Committee on Ministry.

Sometimes people aren’t able to resolve difficult issues on their own and need a third person to help facilitate their conversation. Both parties have to agree to this for it to work. If this is the case, then approach the Minister or a member of the Committee on Ministry. The Minister or committee member may recommend that you have a volunteer mediator assist you. The Committee has a list of names of volunteers in the congregation who have mediation training, as well as the name of an organization that offers free mediation to non-profit organizations. If a volunteer mediator cannot be found, the Minister may be asked to play this role. This mediator of the conversation is there to help you hear one another, not to take sides or offer suggestions but to further your conversation with each other. We suggest that this mediated conversation and any subsequent follow-up be done within 30 days of the conflict so that people can then move on to other things.

Step 3 – If the conflict isn’t resolved yet, ask the Board of Trustees to accept a grievance.

If the matter is considered of a serious enough nature that it infringes on the well being of a member or the health of the overall congregation, then lodge a formal, written grievance to the Board of Trustees. The Board will decide if any action is warranted (e.g., to bring in an outside mediator or arbitrator, or in extraordinary circumstances, to strike a 3-person arbitration task force of the Board). All parties must agree with those selected to be on this task force; one of whom will be a Board of Trustees member. This arbitration task force is to hear from all those involved and provide a written decision as to the most appropriate resolution to the conflict (with copies for all involved) within 30 days of receiving the written grievance. Once the Board’s arbitration task force has made its decision, that concludes the conflict management process within the congregation.

[Please note: if the conflict concerns sexual, physical or verbal harassment, the UCC procedure that deals with harassment is the one to be followed.]