

First Church Unitarian, Littleton Conflict Resolution Procedural Guidelines

1. Purpose: The purpose of this document is to spell out recommended steps for addressing conflict at FCU. These recommendations apply to all congregants (members, friends and visitors) and staff at FCU.

2. Understanding and recognizing conflict:

Whenever we live a life of vision and values, something other than conformity to an agreed upon set of behaviors and opinions, we inevitably encounter differences, disharmonies and interference. Differences lead to disagreements and often misunderstandings. All of these are to be expected at FCU and elsewhere.

Conflict is typically seen as a struggle between opposing parties or interests. Familiar signs of conflict are disruptive behavior, raised voices, chronic avoidance, and other expressions of hostility. Milder forms of conflict may be experienced as simply disagreements accompanied by feelings of discomfort, irritation and frustration. These are often preceded or followed by a breakdown in communication, cooperation and consideration.

Conflict, as the experience of differences and disharmonies, can also be seen as the natural accompaniment to all meaningful creative, learning and social change endeavors. Whenever we can turn frustration into fascination and put aside blame to seek understanding, we can move closer to becoming a loving and compassionate community with all our diversity.

3. Handling disruptive behavior:

- A. Before, during and immediately after worship - handled by the Minister or Head Deacon. If neither is present, then the situation is handled by the Standing Committee chair or another member of the Executive Team.
- B. All other FCU events - (committee meetings, concerts, etc) - handled by the chair of the committee sponsoring the event, who may consult with or call upon additional resources as needed. Chairs of committees sponsoring large public events should plan ahead how they will manage possible disruptions.
- C. If there is an immediate threat of violence or crime, the police should be called. Anytime the police are involved, the Minister and a member of the Standing Committee need to be informed.
- D. Any incidents of intimidation, coercion, sexual harassment, or verbal, emotional, sexual or physical abuse should be reported to the Minister, the Director of Religious Education or any member of the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. Please refer to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Policy (Adopted May 2005, amended October 2005).

4. Handling ongoing or escalating conflicts between people at FCU:

- A. If there is an ongoing or escalating conflict between people that is adversely affecting those around them at FCU events, creating an atmosphere of tension and interfering with communication, cooperation and consideration, a witness affected by such an altercation may offer assistance to reduce tension and encourage participants to seek help. Sometimes, just offering a listening ear at the needed time and place is all that is required to diffuse a situation.
- B. If there is sufficient rapport, a friend or fellow congregant may suggest that the person in conflict seek assistance from resources provided by the Committee on Conflict Resolution, or talk with a mediator or the Minister.
- C. If two or more conversations to the parties involved has not led to a satisfactory solution, a congregant affected by the situation may wish to discuss it with the Minister. The Minister may handle the situation or make appropriate referrals.
- D. If the parties involved agree to work with a mediator, the mediator will listen to all sides and assist with understanding and resolving differences.

5. If an ongoing or escalating conflict exists within a committee or a committee-sponsored event:

- A. The committee chairperson or their designee should initiate a conflict resolution process.
- B. The chair may speak with the people involved themselves or ask another member of the committee, such as a mediator, to speak to one or both of the parties involved.
- C. The chair should discourage others from taking sides or otherwise complicating the situation.
- D. After an initial conversation on the topic, if the problem is not resolved and continues to adversely affect others, a second conversation with the parties involved should be initiated by the committee chair or other authority with an emphasis on strongly urging the individuals to seek help individually on the issues involved and to consider seeking mediation.
- E. For persistent or intense conflicts, the committee chair may wish to consult with a mediator, a member of the Committee on Conflict Resolution, or their Committee Liaison.

6. If someone has a problem with an FCU staff person or a volunteer in leadership at FCU (committee chair, or elected or delegated position):

- A. After some reflection and consideration, (see #7) if the situation is still viewed as significantly problematic, then it should be raised with the staff person or volunteer directly and privately. If the issue involves the Minister and the congregant does not feel comfortable approaching the Minister directly, he/she is encouraged to seek the assistance of the Committee on Ministry, or one of the mediators.
- B. The volunteer/staff person should attempt to resolve the situation, seeking assistance as needed. This may include consultation with a mediator, their Committee Liaison or Management Contact Person, or a member of the Committee on Conflict Resolution.

- C. If the problem is not adequately resolved after several meetings and allowing the volunteer/staff person time to explore options for resolution, the initiating individual may take their concern directly to the relevant member of the Executive Team: the Management Contact Person for a staff person, or the Committee Liaison for a Committee Chair. If the key person is not known or one has not been assigned, then a member of the Executive Team may be contacted to obtain an appropriate referral. If the issue involves a member of the Executive Team, then the Minister should be consulted.

7. If a philosophical, theological, cultural or policy difference creates feelings of conflict or a sense of division in the congregation:

- A. Congregants can express their concerns and requests to the Minister or another member of the Executive Team in private conversation or in writing.
- B. Any member of the Executive Team contacted with a concern or request will make sure that the congregant receives a thoughtful response. This may include referral to the Committee on Conflict Resolution or elsewhere for further discussion or problem solving. If the issue is referred to others, the results should be reported back to the Executive Team. The Executive Team has final authority for handling conflicts at FCU. Not all conflicts will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.
- C. Proposals from individuals, committees, task forces, and ad hoc groups may be brought before the congregation for a vote at Warranted and Annual Meetings. Advanced notice and opportunities for discussion before the Warranted or Annual Meeting are strongly recommended.

8. If any congregants have conflicts with other congregants, even if this problem may not be noticed by others, they should:

- A. Make an effort to clarify their own feelings, assumptions, needs, and wants with assistance as needed from a friend, or mediator.
- B. Consult the resources and recommendations available from the Conflict Resolution Committee. There are many helpful strategies available for understanding and reducing reactivity and developing one's ability to perceive situations from different perspectives.
- C. Do what they can, with assistance as needed, to connect with the other person in a positive way, understand their point of view, work together to solve any remaining problems, and accept differences.
- D. Not hesitate to seek help if they have not been able to resolve the situation on their own. If they would like a referral to an appropriate mediator or other conflict resolution resources, they should contact a member of the Committee on Conflict Resolution.

9. Confidentiality:

All those involved in any ongoing conflict (including all participants, mediators and incidental observers) should strive to limit the sharing of information to only those who need to know in order to facilitate resolution.