

Policy on Conflict Resolution

Maintaining Right Relationships

Purpose

The well-being, strength, and reputation of our Fellowship depend largely on the community we form and to which we are committed and how we interact with each other. Our community thrives in an atmosphere of trust, respect and cooperation. Within such an atmosphere, differences of opinion and their resolution through respectful communication can enhance a sense of community and trust for all of us.

Differences or misunderstandings that go unresolved and descend into prolonged conflict can threaten the social fabric of our congregation. Recognizing that conflicts will arise from time to time, how we manage and resolve them is very important, since it directly affects the quality and sustainability of our fellowship. Conflicts may occur between members, members and staff, members and minister, staff and minister, between or within UUFP groups, or between or among children. This document identifies recommended steps to follow when conflicts arise.

As a Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, we affirm and promote the UU Principles and Purposes, as well as our own mission. As UUFP members, we expect ourselves and each other to:

- *deal directly and respectfully with each other*
- *speak gently and honestly*
- *listen attentively*
- *be creative in problem solving*
- *maintain a sense of compassion*
- *respect boundaries*
- *respect confidentiality*
- *refrain from harmful talk about others*
- *allow for human fallibility*
- *when necessary, seek assistance*

Ultimately, we are all accountable for our relationships with each other and for the health of our congregation.

Dealing with Conflict

When a conflict arises, the recommended first order of action is direct conversation amongst those involved, whenever possible. If the conflict involves children, it is recommended that parents advocate for their children to the parents of other children involved, whenever possible. When the conflict is between adults, regardless of position within the Fellowship, the most effective method of resolution is direct and respectful communication, which should always be attempted first.

When a conflict situation is too difficult, or if for any reason one of the parties involved in the conflict is not comfortable with direct dialogue, it is recommended that a third UUFP party trusted by all participants be asked to consult with the involved parties, to try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution that is aligned with our UU Principles.

The following people are designated as trusted intermediaries. Any of them can be contacted to help with such consultations:

- The Minister
- The Director of Religious Education (primarily conflicts involving children)
- One member of the Board of Trustees

- The Youth Advisor (only conflicts involving children)
- The Children's Advisor (only conflicts involving children)

The names of UUFPP people who can serve as trusted intermediaries will be listed in each monthly UUFPP Newsletter, and will be posted on the UUFPP web site (www.uupok.org). When seeking a third party, persons seeking help can choose from this list.

If an ongoing or escalating conflict exists within a committee or another UUFPP group, it is first suggested that the parties attempt to work through the conflict as a group. If there is no resolution, it is suggested that one of the trusted intermediaries be brought to the committee/group to help reach a resolution.

If the conflict involves the Minister or the Director of Religious Education and direct communication has not resolved the problem, the Ministerial Relations Committee is the appropriate group to approach for help in reaching a resolution.

If the conflict involves paid staff other than the minister, a member of the Board of Trustees should be contacted, so the UUFPP Personnel Committee can help resolve the conflict.

Seeking Outside Help

In cases where a conflict cannot be resolved within the UUFPP family, it is recommended that the parties in conflict contact the Mediation Center of Dutchess County (845-473-7213), with whom the UUFPP has a long, beneficial, and respectful relationship. The MCDC's work is totally independent of the UUFPP and they are required by law to maintain strict privacy and confidentiality about all cases that they mediate.