



Conflict Management Policy for the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, New York

I. Policy Statement

The sense of community and fellowship among the members, participants and Staff of The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn can only thrive in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and cooperation. Within such an atmosphere, differences of opinion and their resolution through compromise or consensus can enhance a sense of community. However, disputes, differences and misunderstandings that go unresolved and descend into prolonged conflict can threaten the social fabric of the Society. The congregation is committed to providing a safe environment where the open exchange of ideas can flourish. The Committee on Ministries recognizes that real or perceived threats to the physical, emotional or spiritual well-being of participants in the community may arise. When conflicts do arise, their thoughtful and timely management and resolution are important. Accordingly, the Committee on Ministries has established a Conflict Management Policy to facilitate conflict resolution by promoting healthy communication and by implementing a conflict management process which will respond to conflicts and potential conflicts promptly and fairly.

II. Definitions

As used in this Policy,

“Board” shall mean the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn.

“COM” shall mean the Committee on Ministries of The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn.

“Complaint” shall mean a report of serious concerns with congregational life, including grievances related to the actions of the clergy, Staff, the Board, or any Member.

“Conciliation Process” shall have the meaning set forth in Section V of this Policy.

"Conflict" shall mean differences or misunderstandings between individuals or groups of congregants of such a serious nature that the conflict:

- Undermines or threatens the atmosphere of trust, respect and cooperation that is necessary to the well-being of the Society;
- Is prejudicial to the operations of the Society or its programs or services;

- Is divisive or harmful to the good name and reputation of the Society within the larger community or within the Unitarian-Universalist movement.

“Conflict Conciliation Meeting” shall have the meaning set forth in Section V of this Policy.

“Conflict Management Team” or **“CMT”** shall have the meaning set forth in Section IV of this Policy.

“Confidential” or **“Confidentiality”** shall mean not discussing, except with members of the Conflict Management Team, the Committee on Ministries, the clergy, and Board members as necessary for the successful implementation of the Conflict Management Process and congregational safety, the names of persons involved in the Conciliation Process and the content of Conflict Conciliation Meetings.

“Disruptive Behavior” shall mean any action that disturbs and impairs the Society’s ability to serve current and future Members. Disruptive Behavior can include:

- Any activity that interrupts or creates a distraction during worship services, meetings, or other congregational activities;
- Any activity that creates concern for the physical or emotional safety of the Members, congregants, clergy and Staff;
- Yelling at, cursing or insulting clergy, Staff, congregational leaders, Members, congregants or visitors;
- Intentionally spreading misinformation which may injure or discredit clergy, Staff, congregational leaders or Members;
- Any acts of physical violence, threats of physical violence, intimidation or any behavior which constitutes verbal or emotional abuse toward clergy, Staff, Members or congregants;
- Repeated instances of acting in a disrespectful manner.

“Member” shall mean a person who has been accepted into formal membership by the Society.

“Mental Health Counseling” or **“Therapy”** shall mean the application of psychotherapeutic techniques designed to treat mental or personality disorders and shall include the provision of explanations and interpretations of behaviors, thoughts and internal mental and emotional states.

“Policy” shall mean this Conflict Management Policy for the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, NY.

“Purpose” shall mean the purpose statement of the Society.

“Respectful Behavior” shall mean any action which is consistent with the Society’s Right Relations Covenant, attached hereto as Exhibit A, and aligns with UU Principles, attached hereto as Exhibit B, and the ethical, moral and spiritual traditions of the Society.

“Society” shall mean The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn.

“Staff” shall mean any person employed by the Society.

III. Disruptive Behavior Management Process

For the safety of the congregation and the Society's ongoing ability to serve its Purpose, it is important that Disruptive Behavior be addressed as promptly as reasonably possible. Members shall attempt to identify Disruptive Behavior as it occurs and shall make reasonable efforts to intervene to deescalate such behaviors whenever possible. Ideally, the Member who notices Disruptive Behavior should speak directly to the person behaving disruptively to point out the behavior and express his or her concerns regarding the behavior. Members making such expressions should endeavor to be direct and honest regarding the behavior, but should always address those behaving disruptively with compassion, respect and the dignity to which all persons are entitled. Members are encouraged to be mindful of the congregational Right Relations Covenant in such situations. However, no Member should intervene directly in any threatening situation if such Member believes that his or her own safety or the safety of others would be at risk as the result of any such intervention. Nor should any Member intervene in a situation in which such Member feels that he or she cannot successfully manage the encounter. If the immediate intervention of Members has not adequately curtailed the Disruptive Behavior; or if Members have identified Disruptive Behavior but have been unable or unwilling to intervene at the time of such behavior or immediately thereafter, then that Member should promptly report the Disruptive Behavior to the Conflict Management Team, which will treat the matter as a potential Conflict pursuant to this Policy.

In cases of extreme Disruptive Behavior, Members should attempt to bring the matter to the immediate attention of a member of the Board, clergy, Staff or CMT. **In emergency situations, it may be appropriate to call police or other security services to remove any person exhibiting violent or threatening behaviors. Nothing in this Policy shall limit the rights of any Member or other individual and nothing herein should inhibit any Member or other individual from calling emergency services on his or her own behalf or on behalf of others perceived to be in immediate danger.**

The Conflict Management Team shall ensure that the Conciliation Process and this Policy are appropriately publicized within the congregation so that Members are aware of the Society's standards of Respectful Behavior and have the information to address and/or to report Disruptive Behavior. The Conflict Management Team will not address anonymous reports of Disruptive Behavior.

IV. The Conflict Management Team

The COM shall appoint a Conflict Management Team (the "CMT"), consisting of no fewer than four and no more than seven members, including at least two COM members and at least one member of the Pastoral Care Committee. The CMT shall always include at least two Members who are not also members of COM. CMT members shall be selected based on their communication ability, mediation skills and knowledge of various aspects of congregational functioning. Each member of the CMT shall participate in conciliation training before engaging in the committee responsibilities set forth in this Policy. Once appointed to the CMT, the term of membership shall be indefinite, but, for the sake of continuity, reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that at least three members of the committee continue service from any given year to the next.

The Conflict Management Team shall be a standing committee which will meet at least quarterly and as required to:

- Determine practices and procedures appropriate for handling various types of conflict.

- Review and address any Conflicts and potential Conflicts brought to its attention.
- Ensure that this Conflict Management Policy is appropriately publicized within the congregation.
- Determine appropriate methods of educating the congregation regarding issues related to conflict management; arrange and promote workshops or skill training sessions to encourage Respectful Behavior.
- Periodically review this Conflict Management Policy and make recommendations for revision to the COM whenever appropriate.

V. The Conciliation Process

When Members or affiliated groups have Complaints or find themselves in Conflicts that they are unable to resolve, they are expected to seek the assistance of the CMT. The CMT shall review all Conflicts and Complaints which are brought to its attention through the Disruptive Behavior Policy or upon the request of Members, groups, or other individuals. Upon review, the CMT shall consider any Complaint a Conflict for the purpose of implementing a conflict resolution strategy as outlined in this Policy, and all other complaints shall be addressed appropriately as determined by the CMT. The CMT shall designate two or more of its members to develop a conflict resolution strategy. CMT members shall recuse themselves from any Conflict for which they have an inherent bias based on the individuals, groups or topics involved.

The CMT shall use its discretion to determine the best approach to each particular Conflict, bearing in mind the unique circumstances and personalities involved. Any particular conflict resolution strategy may include any one or more of the following:

- soliciting and engaging other congregational resources, such as supervisory staff or committee leaders to intervene;
- meeting individually with the complainant;
- meeting individually with the person who is the subject of the Complaint;
- meeting collectively with all those involved in Conflict;
- arranging and facilitating conflict conciliation for those in Conflict.

Any Conflicts involving or alleging sexual abuse or child endangerment shall be passed immediately to the Board without efforts by the CMT to resolve. Any Conflicts involving or alleging illegal activity, including but not limited to theft, misuse of congregational property, and fiscal malfeasance, shall be passed immediately to the Board without efforts by the CMT to resolve.

Conflict Conciliation Meeting

When appropriate as determined by the CMT, a Conciliation Meeting shall be arranged for those in Conflict, with one or more members of the CMT acting as facilitators. The goal of the Conciliation Meeting shall be to promote understanding among all participants, to recognize and encourage the acceptance of responsibility for those behaviors contributing to Conflict, and to agree to specific future actions intended to avoid future Conflict.

The format of the Conciliation Meeting may vary in different situations, but it is anticipated that the general approach will include the following elements:

- the facilitator(s) will establish a safe environment by reminding all participants of the confidentiality of the forum, encouraging honest and respectful communication, and emphasizing the shared values of all involved;
- the facilitator(s) will encourage participants to identify and articulate their own feelings, to speak in specifics, and to avoid generalizations and criticism of others;
- the facilitator(s) will encourage active listening and clear communication among all participants, which may take the form of each party restating what they heard from the other;
- the facilitator(s) will encourage each party to explore understanding his or her own relationship to the Conflict, to take responsibility for his or her own contribution to the Conflict; the facilitator(s) will assist him or her in respectfully expressing that position to the other party, and will guide each party to better understand the other;
- the facilitator(s) will work with the participants to find areas of agreement and compromise, to identify solutions and to agree to specific actions each will take to resolve the current Conflict.

Following the Conciliation Meeting, the CMT facilitator(s) shall report back to the CMT. The CMT shall be empowered to make recommendations, set standards and formulate behavior contracts among all parties in Conflict and shall not be limited to achieving compromises. If, in the good faith determination of the CMT, any Conflict has not been or cannot be resolved through a Conciliation Meeting or other methods at the disposal of the CMT, including the refusal of any Member to participate in a Conflict Conciliation Meeting or to abide by the rules and behaviors established in any previous Conflict Conciliation Meeting, or it becomes apparent that any Conflict presents serious and immediate harm to the Society or its Members, the CMT shall refer such Conflict to the Board for further resolution. Any such referral to the Board shall be accompanied by a report summarizing the history of the Conflict, efforts taken to attempt resolution, and specific recommendations for further action. Such recommendations may include, but are not limited to, referral to appropriate Mental Health Counseling or Therapy, proposed limits to participation in congregational life (e.g., removal from committees and offices), or legal intervention.

VI. Confidentiality

All meetings, deliberations, and discussions of the CMT, including the content of all Conflicts and all Conflict Conciliation Meetings, shall be kept strictly Confidential. A member of the CMT shall keep records of any Conflicts and related Conflict Conciliation Meetings. All records pertaining to mediation, dispute outcomes, and agreements will be maintained as Confidential information by the CMT until the situation is resolved as determined by the CMT, referred to the Board for further action, or the dispute results in one or both parties seeking legal action. The CMT may request the Board's permission to destroy files that are closed and that, in the opinion of the CMT, no longer need to be retained. Notwithstanding the resolution of any Conflict or the destruction of materials related to any Conflict, the Confidentiality obligations of the CMT with respect to such information shall continue in perpetuity and shall not be restricted to any member's period of service on the CMT or the COM.

VII. Other

Although as part of the Conflict Conciliation Meeting, CMT facilitators may assist parties in Conflict in identifying and understanding their actions, behaviors and relationship to others, CMT members shall not engage in Mental Health Counseling or Therapy in connection with any Conflict

among Members or Staff that they are seeking to resolve. Should any party desire or require further assistance, the CMT may assist him or her in identifying and securing suitable help.

In fulfilling its responsibilities, the CMT and its members shall at all times adhere to the Purpose Statement and By-Laws of the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn and the UU Principles. It is the hope of the COM that most, if not all, Conflicts can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to live our shared values as reflected in our Right Relations Covenant and that all parties will interact directly, honestly and compassionately with those with whom they are in Conflict. When no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the Society as a whole shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any one individual.

This document is effective as of August 30, 2016 and replaces the Conflict Management Policy for the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn adopted by the Board in August 2007.