

CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY 5.18.2024

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inescapable part of human relations and community life. In striving for good relations with each other, our challenge is not to prevent or avoid conflicts but rather to manage and resolve differences of opinion, personalities, or objectives in ways that build rather than diminish our community.

Often it is helpful to seek support and assistance when there are differences and/or conflict

When to contact different groups in the congregation:

Safer Congregations Team:

- When someone's behavior is destructive/detrimental to the congregation.

Caring Team or the Minister:

- When you are concerned about the wellbeing of another congregant.

HeaRT:

- When you are in conflict with another congregant or group within the congregation and you need support in resolving it. The Healthy Relations Team (HeaRT) will assess issues brought to its attention, serve as trained volunteer facilitators, and help the individuals or groups involved identify next steps.

STEPS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Step One: Self-Reflection (possibly including consultation with HeaRT)

Step Two: Direct Dialogue Between Concerned Persons

Step Three: Request Help from HeaRT

Step Four: Facilitated Conversation with members of HeaRT

Step Five: Concluding Actions (Impasse or Referral to the Board)

Step 1 Self-Reflection

- a. A person experiencing conflict is encouraged to spend time on self-reflection. Issues to consider include:
 - What are the facts of the situation that I'm concerned about?
 - What are my feelings regarding the situation? Why is this matter important to me?
 - Are my feelings in proportion to the issue or are they amplified by some other situation or condition?
 - What is my own role in contributing to the conflict or concern?
 - What possible outcomes might bring resolution (remembering that the idea is not to "win" or "be right" but to come to a better understanding of each other and a mutually satisfying and peaceful solution to the problem.)
- b. If the individual now feels ready to discuss the situation directly with the other(s) involved, proceed to Step 2.
- c. If necessary, individuals can ask a member of HeaRT to help them process their concerns. The HeaRT member will listen calmly, stay neutral and support the individual to decide how they want to proceed.

Step 2 Direct Dialogue Between Concerned Persons

- a. Individuals are encouraged to address concerns directly with the other(s) involved.
- b. Communicating face-to-face is best or over the phone (if necessary). Avoid communicating via email or text as these modes of communication lack important emotional content.
- c. Approach the person(s) with a request to discuss a concern you have. Be prepared to offer a succinct summary of the issue and to coordinate on a time to talk, once the other person has had an opportunity to process the situation and prepare for a productive conversation.
- d. If any of the involved parties are not satisfied with the resolution found in direct dialogue, they may contact the Healthy Relations Team (HeaRT@uubinghamton.org)

Step 3 Consultation with HeaRT

Person A and/or B requests help by emailing HeaRT@uubinghamton.org

- a. A member of HeaRT will respond within 2 days to acknowledge that they are aware of the issue, and to begin looking for times to meet. Ideally, two members of HeaRT will meet with the individual(s) within two weeks, as schedules allow.
- b. If Step 2 has not already occurred, HeaRT can:
 - Help individuals clarify their understanding of the conflict or concern.
 - Help individuals prepare to talk with the person directly.
- c. If Step 2 has occurred, without a satisfactory resolution, HeaRT can:
 - Contact all parties involved in the conflict to gain more information about the situation.
 - Assess whether a facilitated conversation is appropriate at this time. Facilitated conversations may not be appropriate if one or more parties decline to participate, or if HeaRT assesses that individuals are not ready for the process.
- d. If appropriate, HeaRT will support all parties involved to prepare for a facilitated conversation.
- e. If a facilitated conversation is not appropriate, next steps could include contacting a trained outside mediator, declaring an impasse, or referring the conflict or concern to the Board or the Safer Congregations Team.

Step 4 Facilitated Conversation with members of HeaRT

- a. The purpose of a facilitated conversation is to hold space for the parties in conflict to communicate their respective concerns, feelings, and needs. It is hoped that the parties will be able to come away from the process with greater understanding of themselves, the other(s), the situation, and likely scenarios going forward. It is ultimately up to the parties involved, not the facilitators, to identify and arrive at any potential resolutions.
- b. HeaRT will select two facilitators for the process from its members.
- c. Steps in a facilitated conversation:
 - The facilitators will begin by stating the purpose of the conversation, the behavioral expectations, and the time schedule.
 - Each party will be allowed to present their issue, uninterrupted.
 - The facilitators will reflect what they heard and understood.
 - The circle process will be repeated as needed until all parties feel they have been heard and understood.

- There will be a final round in which participants will decide if the situation is resolved, or if further steps are required.
- The facilitator will assist the parties, if relevant, in articulating goals for future interactions.

Step 5 Concluding Actions if conflict remains unresolved after HeaRT assistance.

- a. Declaration of an Impasse: An impasse will be declared when further attempts at resolution are recognized as futile and the following criteria have been met:
 - The congregation's Conflict Resolution process has been followed
 - The parties in conflict have met face-to-face to attempt resolution
 - Each party involved feels that they have said what needs to be said to the other
 - HeaRT has been involved in the attempts toward resolution
 - The minister and the Board are aware of the conflict and attempts toward resolution, either through direct involvement or through consultation with HeaRT.
 - The majority of the parties in conflict, HeaRT, and the minister agree that an impasse has been reached.
- b. If involved parties agree to uphold UUCB's Behavioral Covenant, they can remain in right relationship with each other and the congregation
- c. To that end, the parties shall enter into an agreement called a Commitment to Covenant regarding how they will treat each other in all public settings. This may also specify limitations on communications with or about each other within the community, as the situation requires, and will articulate the terms of confidentiality expected.
- d. The Commitment to Covenant will be made in writing, signed by the parties in conflict, witnessed by a member of HeaRT and submitted to HeaRT for final approval.
- e. Any action that, in HeaRT's judgment, violates the spirit or letter of the agreement shall be referred to the Board and Safer Congregations for further discernment.