

**All Souls Church, Unitarian
Conflict Resolution Policy and Process**

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Preamble

Conflicts arise naturally simply because we are different from one another. As Unitarian Universalists, we honor and celebrate differences but often struggle with how to manage them. Effectively managed conflict has many positive results. When people can disagree with each other and lobby for different ideas, our church is healthier. Disagreements often result in a more thorough study of options and better decisions and direction.

It is the assumption of this policy and process that most conflicts can and will be resolved by efforts on the part of individuals and groups at All Souls to live up to the All Souls Church (ASC) Covenant of Right Relations and Unitarian Universalist (UU) Principles. It is expected that all congregants will use the ASC Covenant of Right Relations and UU Principles to inform their own actions and will treat everyone with compassion, respect and dignity.

I. Purpose

The purpose of the All Souls Church (ASC) Conflict Resolution Policy and Process is to guide our church community towards a healthy approach to the management, resolution and transformation of conflict. In the spirit of the ASC Covenant of Right Relations and Unitarian Universalist Principles, this policy and process seeks to:

1. Foster and maintain harmonious relations within the Congregation
2. Mitigate conflict through education, facilitation and training for the Congregation and its leaders
3. Establish a congregational process and structure for resolving conflicts

II. Guidelines

The guidelines that support this policy and process are:

- A. Parties finding themselves in conflict should:
 - o Take responsibility upon themselves to resolve the conflict
 - o Use the conflict to mend relationships and provide healing
 - o Use conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth
- B. Persons asked to assist in resolving conflicts should:
 - o Respect and offer compassion to all of the parties
 - o Listen with an open mind
 - o Approach the matters raised with impartiality
 - o Explore the facts with care

- o Recuse themselves from matters in which they have an interest
- o Utilize best practices in dealing with the parties and their issues
- o Offer the least intrusive intervention necessary to resolve conflicts
- o Apply the least restrictive alternative
- o Balance strict confidentiality and transparency with the safety of the parties in conflict and the Congregation
- o Refer individuals to pastoral care, counseling or other services, as needed

III. Scope

The scope of this policy and process includes interactions of congregants with other congregants, groups, ministers, and/or staff. The scope also covers group-to-group conflicts.

The scope does not cover conflicts between staff, between ministers, and between ministers and staff, as these are covered in the ASC Personnel Policy.

This policy and process does not cover complaints regarding matters of church policy. Such complaints may be addressed to the Board of Trustees, per the All Souls Church Policy Governance Framework.

This policy and process does not supersede authorities given to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team under the ASC Policy Governance Framework. If a conflict arises that the CRR considers beyond its purposes, scope or skill level, it may refer the matter to the Executive Team or Board of Trustees.

IV. Organizational Structure

This Conflict Resolution Policy and Process document establishes the Committee on Right Relations (CRR), which is appointed by the Board of Trustees. The CRR has several authorities and responsibilities outlined below. One of the responsibilities is to recruit and oversee the Right Relations Team (RRT), which will assist the CRR in carrying out its mandate.

A. Committee on Right Relations (CRR)

1. Authority

The CRR is a Board Committee appointed by the Board of Trustees to execute the ASC Conflict Resolution Policy and Process.

2. Composition

The CRR is composed of three members of the Congregation. The Board of Trustees will communicate to the Congregation the names of those appointed to the CRR. CRR members will elect a chair annually.

CRR members should each be members of the congregation who:

- a. Has been a member three years or more
- b. Is respected by the membership
- c. Has served in leadership positions
- d. Has exhibited good listening skills
- e. Has demonstrated the ability to remain neutral in disputes
- f. Has experience with best practices in conflict resolution or is willing to learn
- g. Has demonstrated a willingness to serve the entire congregation

3. Term

CRR members will serve staggered terms of three (3) years with the possibility of renewing for one additional term. Terms start at the beginning of the calendar year. Vacancies that occur during a calendar year will be filled by appointment by the Board of Trustees. The Board will consult with the sitting members of the CRR in appointing new members.

4. Responsibilities

- a. The CRR oversees the conflict resolution process outlined in Section V. It receives requests for assistance, determines what assistance and resources are needed, if any, and makes them available.
- b. The CRR oversees communication to the Congregation regarding the conflict resolution process and policy. The CRR also oversees education and training in conflict resolution for the Congregation and its leaders.
- c. The CRR recruits the Right Relations Team (RRT) of volunteers and assist in carrying out the policy and process.
- d. In the event that the first two levels of conflict resolution process outlined in Section V are unsuccessful, the CRR is empowered to make recommendations for resolution, consistent with the ASC

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Bylaws and Policy Governance. It is also empowered to refer any conflicts for which a resolution cannot be reached to the Board of Trustees for disposition.

- e. The CRR may also be called upon to mediate different perspectives and varying viewpoints within the congregation. In doing so, the CRR will work to ensure that all voices are heard and that the best practices of conflict resolution are applied. The CRR will encourage the framing of these kinds of conflicts as opportunities for healing and building community.

5. Operational Guidelines

The CRR will:

- a. Respond to each request for assistance, exercising independent judgment and guided by the ASC Covenant of Right Relations, UU Principles, and the Guidelines presented in Section II.
- b. Recuse themselves from any issue to which they are a party or a stakeholder. Any CRR member may declare a conflict to exist for him/herself or for another member, and recusal will follow.
- c. Meet at least quarterly
- d. Report on activities to the Board of Trustees and Congregation at least annually
- e. Appear regularly and present at Church Council meetings
- f. Place materials regarding conflict resolution on the church website
- g. Submit an annual budget request to fund training, resources, and outside consultants
- h. Adhere to its Terms of Reference
- i. Develop additional procedures, as necessary

B. Right Relations Team (RRT)

1. Composition

The RRT will be a team of volunteer mediators, trainers, and educators. This team will support the work of the CRR in educating, facilitating, and mediating when called upon.

2. Roles of the RRT

- Promote knowledge and understanding of conflict resolution
- Provide leadership training in conflict resolution
- Serve as mediators/coaches/facilitators as assigned by the CRR
- Maintain communication with the congregation to promote awareness of the ASC conflict resolution policy and process
- Be available to ASC committees and groups that request support in such areas as interpersonal communication, listening, and dialogue

V. The Conflict Resolution Process

The conflict resolution process consists of three levels. When a conflict arises between groups or individual congregants, the process is to employ only as many levels as are needed to resolve the conflict. Throughout the process, all relevant persons, including members of the CRR, will be treated with respect and compassion consistent with the ASC Covenant of Right Relations and UU principles. In some cases, the CRR may determine that a structured process is needed and invite affected parties to submit a request.

Level 1. We Work It Out. The expectation is that the vast majority of conflicts will be resolved at this level directly by the people involved, without external intervention. In many instances, this will be achieved utilizing the knowledge, skills and abilities obtained through the CRR's education and training efforts. Suggestions for how parties can resolve conflicts themselves are provided in the Appendix.

Level 2. We Need Help (Facilitator or Mediator Process). Assistance from the CRR may be requested.

- a. A confidential *Request for Assistance Form* may be submitted to the CRR. Methods for confidentially obtaining and submitting the *Request for Assistance Form* will be determined and made known by the CRR but could include a written request

delivered securely, electronic submission to a secure e-mail address, telephoning a CRR member, or an in-person request to a CRR member for instructions.

- b. The CRR will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, meet with requestor, and where appropriate, conduct preliminary fact gathering.
- c. For each request received, the CRR will recommend next steps. Options include:
 - I) Coaching – one or both parties may benefit from the help of a person experienced with conflict resolution to help them gain additional skills or techniques to resolve the situation themselves.
 - II) Facilitated Discussion – In some instances, parties may simply wish to have a third party lead a conversation for the purpose of assisting parties in understanding each other and the issues, and potentially reaching resolution.
 - III) Voluntary Mediation – Mediation seeks to focus on parties' willingness to solve the problem rather than finding out if someone is guilty or at fault. Since it is a collaborative effort between the parties in dispute, the mediation process helps the parties clarify misunderstandings and improve communication. The parties themselves determine the resolution.
- d. The CRR may assign a mediator, coach and/or facilitator from the RRT, depending on the recommended next steps presented above.

Level 3. We Engage in a Process Leading to a Recommendation. Either party may initiate a request for a CRR conflict resolution process leading to a recommendation. Both parties must agree before commencing with this process. In some cases, the CRR may determine that a more deliberative process is needed and invite affected parties to submit a request.

When the parties seek a recommendation, the CRR will:

- 1. Send a written notice to request participation from all parties involved in the conflict.
- 2. With the consent of all parties, conduct outside information gathering, which may include interviews, meetings, discussions and review of relevant documents.
- 3. Prepare a written plan as to what the CRR believes should be done and submit it to all parties for consideration. The CRR will also meet with the parties and provide them with an opportunity to discuss the written plan.

VI. Confidentiality

Without the express approval of the all parties, the Committee, its facilitators, mediators and related aides shall not disclose the content or substance of matters brought to it unless disclosure is reasonably believed to be necessary to avoid physical or substantial financial harm, or is required by law. At the conclusion of a matter, the CRR is responsible for destroying referrals, notes, written reports, notes taken and any other documentation produced or received during the conflict resolution process, unless there is the possibility of legal matters, retention is expressly requested by all parties or required by law.

VII. Amendments

The ASC Board of Trustees and the CRR are jointly responsible for maintaining and upholding this policy and process. Amendments to this policy and process shall be recommended by the CRR and approved by the Board of Trustees.

Appendix

Suggestions for Conflict Self-Resolution (Level 1)

- Talk directly with those with whom you are in disagreement
- Examine the roles of each party in the conflict
- Reflect on why the matter is important
- Acknowledge your role in the conflict
- Get a “reality check” from a trusted third party and compare perceptions
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible
- Use "I" statements and active listening in discussions (e.g. “I felt that I was prejudged and anything I said was going to upset you.”)
- Seek to understand the perspective(s) of the other person(s)
- Consider putting thoughts in writing, if direct conversation is too difficult
- Listen actively and carefully to the other person(s). Tips for Active Listening include:
 - Be with the other person, fully present and focused.
 - Give the other person good eye contact. Don’t let your eyes roam around the room.
 - Take some notes, but don’t look at other papers or reports. Don’t take such detailed notes that you are missing the overall message.
 - Let the other person talk, and don’t worry about filling the lulls between sentences.
 - Ask clarifying questions, as opposed to questions that contain a judgment
 - Mentally put yourself in the other person’s shoes.

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- Respond to what the other person is saying.
- Eliminate distractions, such as phone, pager, and email pings.