



*The First Church of Christ in Mansfield  
(Congregational), UCC  
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## **Conflict Resolution Process**

### **Rationale**

The First Church of Christ in Mansfield, CT (Congregational) UCC is a community dedicated to accepting and embracing diversity. Within this commitment there is an inherent diversity of thought and vision as to how we carry out the work of the church. For the most part, differences of opinion or thought are dealt with productively through our Behavioral Covenant. The covenant guides us to listen without judgment, value one another's ideas and feelings, speak honestly and directly, and foster growth and understanding among us, so that our actions and intentions embody God's vision.

### **Steps of the Conflict Resolution Process**

**Step One** — The first step to any disagreement or conflict is for the two parties involved to speak directly with each other, practicing the guidance offered by the behavioral covenant. Often the conflict is a result of miscommunication. It is our goal that open and honest dialogue will assist with resolution of the conflict or misunderstanding.

**Step Two-** If either party is not comfortable or willing to sit with the other party, or if direct conversation does not resolve the conflict, then a third party should be brought in. This process should be initiated by contacting one of the pastors. In the event that the conflict is with pastoral staff, then a member of the Governing Board should be contacted to identify a third party. Both parties should agree to the assignment of the third party. The conversation with the third party should take place at a time and place that is most comfortable for all involved. At any time, either party should call on a pastor for counsel if pastoral staff are not part of the conflict. If the conflict is with pastoral staff, a member of the Ministry of Caring will be available to support the member. Gossip or recruitment of members to support one's position is strongly discouraged and is not in keeping with the behavioral covenant. This is considered a confidential process.

**Step Three** — If either party is not comfortable with sitting with a third party who is a member of the congregation or if one is not available, then an independent and neutral third party from outside the congregation will be brought in.

**Step Four** — In the event that the parties are not able to reach agreement, they must agree to live in good faith with respect and acknowledgement of the position of the other party. If at any time, either party acts in a way that causes concern for the well-being, openness, safety, and stability of the

congregation, the matter will be referred to the Governing Board for consideration and possible action pursuant to the Church Constitution and bylaws.

As stated in the church by-laws — Unlawful or unsafe conduct by a church member will not be tolerated. Members are expected to act in accordance with safe church polices and to interact in good faith as outlined in the behavioral covenant. No acts of intimidation or harassment of church members or participants will be tolerated. If a member disregards the safe church polices or provisions of the behavioral covenant, that member may be censured or suspended from membership, but only after faithful efforts have been made to secure the members commitment to alter his or her conduct.

### **Guidance for the Conflict Resolution Process**

The conflict resolution process is intended for two members who have a true conflict that limits their ability to participate in the full life of the church. It is not intended to be used as a venue to air minor concerns or grievances that should be addressed with the guidance of the behavioral covenant.

The process should not be used to debate, resurrect or attempt to contest or undermine decisions made by the congregation through a congregational vote. Participating in life of the church may at times, mean speaking out about concerns, and even registering dissent from the majority perspective. However, it is incumbent on all members to express their views in a respectful manner and in a spirit of love, just as it is incumbent on all to recognize the need to respect and abide by a formal decision. If a member disagrees with a formal decision made by the congregation, they need to be able to participate in the life of the church that is bound by such decisions. They need to be able to participate gracefully in the life of the church.

At all times during the conflict resolution process, the parties need to be supported spiritually and emotionally. At all times, the parties should feel that the church is a safe and supportive place.

At no time during the conflict should either member look to solicit support by fracturing the church community. Rallying members to support or dismiss a member's feelings or claims is not in keeping with the behavioral covenant. Dismissive conversation to members of the congregation or the broader community regarding another member of the congregation will not be tolerated.

### **Guidance for Decision Making at First Church**

- We will work to create an environment of respect and support, and to foster open communication.
- We will provide written materials before discussions, being conscientious in studying the written materials before discussion.
- We will give enough time for individuals to absorb the information.

- We will plan so that there are enough meetings/occasions for dialogue to allow for adequate discussion, and so that there is adequate time for dissemination of information through the newsletter and Sunday bulletins.
- We will allow time for "key" decisions to germinate.
- We will ensure that the covenant is followed during the decision-making process.
- We will, in cases of individual conscience and/or issues that shape church identity, strive for consensus

**Supporting Documents**

First Church of Christ Behavioral Covenant

First Church of Christ Safe Conduct Policy

'Conflict Resolution Process and Procedure All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 2001.