

FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF CHICAGO

Policy on Conflict Resolution

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.

This document identifies the steps that should be followed in our church when conflicts arise. These are:

- Step One: Direct Dialogue Between Concerned Persons
- Step Two: Request Help from the Good Relations Committee (GRC)
- Step Three: Facilitated Conversation with members of the GRC
- Step Four: Concluding Actions (Impasse or Referral to the Board)

This Conflict Resolution Policy, which applies to adults only, fits within a set of documents, [one of which is still under development], including:

- The Bylaws of the First Unitarian Society of Chicago
- The Policy Manual of the First Unitarian Society of Chicago, including the Policy on Disruptive Behavior
- Congregational Behavioral Covenant [under development]

The Good Relations Committee has the role of implementing and managing the Policy on Conflict Resolution, as described. The Committee will not serve as professional mediators, nor adjudicators, nor investigators. The Committee will assess issues brought to its attention, make recommendations for resolution, and serve as trained volunteer facilitators.

The four types of conflict that we address are:

- 1) Between/Among Members/Friends of the Congregation (*chart 1 attached*)
- 2) Between Member/Friend of the Congregation and Church Staff (*chart 2 attached*)
- 3) Between Member/Friend of the Congregation and Minister (*chart 3 attached*)
- 4) Disruptive or Dangerous Behavior (*chart 4 attached*)

We have incorporated a Glossary of terms used, for common understanding, and four charts that provide a graphic representation of the process to be followed in each type of conflict. Additionally, we have included Tools for Self-Mediated Conflict Resolution.

We expect and hope that most conflicts and concerns can and will be resolved by effort on the part of individuals to treat each other with dignity and respect, follow our Congregational Behavioral Covenant, and seek resolution when conflicts arise through the processes articulated in this policy, thereby strengthening the social fabric of our community and our ability to live out our mission.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

STEP ONE: Direct Dialogue Between Concerned Persons

When you have a conflict or concern with another individual or church body, including with another congregant, minister, staff member, or committee you are asked to:

- First address your concern directly with the person or persons involved. If you do not know who is responsible for your area of concern, consult this policy or check with a minister, member of the Good Relations Committee, or member of the Board.

The simplest, most effective path to conflict or concern management is one-on-one, face-to-face, open communication. This honors confidentiality and allows each party to address the issues without involving unrelated third parties that can lead to gossip and escalation of the conflict.

Communicating face-to-face is best or over the phone (if necessary). Avoid communicating via email or text.

- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk one-on-one and as soon as possible after the incident. Use the "Ground Rules" and "Preparation Suggestions for Successful Resolution" included at the end of this policy to prepare for and engage in a productive conversation.
- If you are uncomfortable meeting directly with the person with whom you are in conflict or with whom you have a concern (e.g., if safety is an issue), the individual refuses to meet or use the ground rules, or a meeting does not resolve the conflict, move to Step 2.

STEP TWO: Request Help from the Good Relations Committee

Often it is helpful to involve other skilled people to advise and assist parties in conflict to resolve their differences in positive ways. First Unitarian's Good Relations Committee is chartered to fill that role.

If you have a conflict or concern that you are unable to address by direct dialogue, you may take your conflict or concern to the Good Relations Committee for their confidential help in resolving the conflict or concern. You may email the GRC chair or email [goodrelations@firstuchicago.org] to schedule a meeting. A member of the GRC will respond to your request within two weeks.

If, for any reason, you are not comfortable with bringing your issues to the Good Relations Committee, then talk to a minister or member of the Board who will provide direction on taking the next appropriate step.

When communicating with the Good Relations Committee, you will be required to describe in writing your concern or conflict stating:

- A brief description of the conflict or concern, including the person(s), committee or situation you are having difficulty with (anonymous complaints are not acceptable--be prepared to take responsibility for your concerns)
- What steps you have taken to resolve the conflict or concern
- What outcome you would like to see

(Assistance in writing up and submitting the conflict or concern summary can be available, as needed, from the GRC.)

As in Step 1, use the "Ground Rules" and "Preparation Suggestions for Successful Resolution" described at the end of this policy to engage in productive conversations with members of the Good Relations Committee about the conflict or concern.

Members of the Good Relations Committee working with you will do their best to listen carefully, try to understand the nature of the conflict or concern, and make recommendations regarding how the GRC can help.

After assessing the situation, the Good Relations Committee may:

- Help you clarify your understanding of the conflict or concern
- Help you find words to talk with the person directly
- Help you to prepare to meet with the other party
- Contact other parties to the dispute or concern and offer the services of the Good Relations Committee to them as well

If the initial steps taken by the Good Relations Committee are not able to resolve the conflict or concern, the Good Relations Committee will consider next steps in conflict resolution, which could include facilitated conversation, declaring an impasse, or referring the conflict or concern to the Board.

In the following cases, the matter will go directly to the Board:

1. One or both parties refuse to participate productively in the resolution process;
2. The conflict or concern is perpetuated by unchanged behavior;
3. The conflict or concern involves behavior covered by the Policy on Disruptive Behavior.

STEP THREE: Facilitated Conversation by GRC Facilitators

If the Good Relations Committee (GRC) believes that a more formal process would be justified in managing the conflict or concern, the GRC can make a recommendation to the parties that a facilitated conversation be pursued.

- *Selection of a facilitator*
The GRC will select one or more Facilitators from among the members of the Good Relations Committee or other congregants skilled in conflict resolution if approved by the GRC.
- *Purpose of Facilitated Conversation and Role of the Facilitator(s)*
The purpose of a facilitated conversation is to make space for the parties in conflict to communicate their respective concerns, feelings and needs. The role of the facilitator is to create space for the parties to voice, and potentially hear, the concerns of the other, but does not extend beyond that. While it is hoped that the parties will be able to come away from the process with greater understanding of themselves, the other, 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 going forward.
- *Format of the Conversation*
The facilitator(s) will introduce themselves to the persons in conflict, specify the purpose of the conversation, the behavioral expectations, and the time schedule. Each party will be allowed to present their issue, uninterrupted; the facilitator will reflect back to the presenter what they heard and understood. The other party will be allowed to speak, uninterrupted, and the facilitator will reflect back in the same fashion. The facilitator will assist the parties in understanding the nature of their conflict or concern and, if relevant, help them articulate an agreement that will help resolve the issue.
- *Agreement*
Any agreements reached to resolve the dispute will be documented by the GRC facilitators to ensure a common understanding among the parties. The agreement that the parties arrive at will be filed with the chair of the Good Relations Committee. Revisions may be made to the agreement **only** if **both** parties agree to the changes. If the agreement is violated by either party, the matter will be referred to the Board.

If the conflict or concern is beyond the scope and/or skills of the Good Relations Committee but the GRC believes that mediation would be justified in managing the conflict or concern, the GRC can make a recommendation to the parties and/or the Board that external mediation resources be pursued. The Board will determine whether it is appropriate to allocate church resources for securing mediation services.

STEP FOUR: Concluding Actions (Impasse or Referral to the Board)

If the conflict or concern remains unresolved even after receiving help from the Good Relations Committee, the GRC will declare an Impasse or refer the matter to the Board.

A. Declaration of an Impasse

There may be times in our congregational life when parties seeking conflict resolution find that they are at an impasse. An impasse will be declared when the following criteria in conflict resolution have been met:

- The congregation's Conflict Resolution Process has been followed
- The parties in conflict or concern have met face-to-face to attempt resolution
- Each party involved feels that they have said what needs to be said to the other party
- The Good Relations Committee has been involved in the attempts toward resolution
- The minister(s) is/are aware of the conflict or concern and the attempts toward resolution, either through direct involvement or through consultation with the Good Relations Committee
- The majority of the parties in conflict or concern, the Good Relations Committee, and the minister(s) agree that an impasse has been reached; if the conflict or concern is with the minister(s), the Good Relations Committee is responsible for declaring an impasse.

When an impasse is declared, further attempts at conflict resolution are recognized as futile. However, if the involved parties commit to and uphold First Unitarian's Congregational Behavioral Covenant, they can remain in right relationship with each other and the congregation.

To that end, the parties in conflict or concern shall enter into an agreement called a Commitment to Covenant regarding how they will treat each other with respect in all public settings. In addition to incorporating the standards set forth in the Congregation's Behavioral Covenant, a Commitment to Covenant may also specify limitations on communications with or about each other within the First Unitarian community, as the situation requires, and will articulate the terms of confidentiality expected.

The Commitment to Covenant will be made in writing, signed by the parties in conflict or concern, witnessed by one or more members of the Good Relations Committee, and submitted to the GRC for final approval. The Chair of the Good Relations Committee will keep copies of the final Commitment to Covenant in the church's files for record and reference by current and future GRCs, the Board of Trustees, and Minister(s).

Any action that violates the spirit of the agreement shall be deemed as a failure to adhere to the signed Commitment to Covenant and will be referred to the Board for action as described below.

B. Referral to the Board

Certain behaviors require action to protect the interests of the community and the Board of Trustees is the body established, and with the authority, to address and resolve these issues under the church's existent Disruptive Behavior Policy. Examples of behaviors covered include those which the Disruptive Behavior Policy identifies as dangerous, disruptive, or damaging (see Glossary of definitions for each of these terms).

Conflicts or concerns that come to the attention of the Good Relations Committee that relate to or incite behavior that falls under the Disruptive Behavior Policy will be referred to the Board for resolution under that Policy.

If a conflict or concern is not of the nature described in the preceding paragraph and cannot be successfully managed through Steps 1-3 of this Policy, the Good Relations Committee may also refer the matter to the Board for final resolution.

The types of actions the Board may take include:

- The Board will consider matters coming from the GRC and take action as they deem appropriate
If no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the congregation as a whole shall be given precedence over the feelings or actions of any individuals
- The Board can endorse the GRC's recommendations or it can set its own recommendations and ask that the parties adhere to said recommendations
- The Board can solicit assistance from the UUA or other resources
- The Board can exclude or remove a person from church activities as specified in the Bylaws
- Information sharing
The Board will determine the extent to which information will be shared with the congregation according to the necessity of each case.

TYPICAL CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Conflict Between/Among Members/Friends of the Congregation

You are urged to follow the steps outlined in the policy, namely:

Step One: Direct Dialogue Between the Concerned Persons

Step Two: Request Help from Good Relations Committee

Step Three: Facilitated Conversation by GRC Facilitators

Step Four: Concluding Actions will apply, if no resolution is reached.

Conflict with Staff

The Good Relations Committee processes do not apply to supervised staff. Supervised staff includes the Director of Religious Education, employed teachers, Director of Operations, Nursery staff, the Director of Music, and the Sextons.

If your conflict or concern is with one of the supervised staff, you are urged to attempt Step 1, Direct Dialogue. If this does not result in an adequate solution, your next step is to go to a minister who in their role as Chief of Staff are the supervisors of staff members. If that does not produce a satisfactory result, you may contact a member of the Board.

Conflict with Ministers

If your conflict or concern is with a minister, you are urged to attempt Step 1, Direct Dialogue. If this does not result in an adequate solution, your next step is to go directly to the Board of Trustees, which is the governing body of the Society to which the Ministers report. If necessary, and with the option of consulting with the Good Relations Committee, the Board will consider whether other methodologies for conflict resolution, including denominational resources, and/or declaring an impasse are advisable.

If you have a conflict or concern with a minister regarding performance matters, policy matters or ethical issues, such as honesty, integrity, professional conduct or violation of First Unitarian's Bylaws or Policies, you are asked to:

- Submit a signed complaint in writing to the Congregation's President.
- The Board will acknowledge the complaint in writing.
- The Board will advise you in writing as to the outcome of the review and the Board's actions.

Disruptive or Dangerous Behavior

In these situations, the existing Disruptive Behavior Policy in the Church's Policy Manual applies. This Policy states in part:

" While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist: both for those on its physical property or participating in church activities elsewhere and, by its public presence and impact, for those who might be drawn to it. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions are threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons."

See https://firstchicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PolicyManual_May2018.pdf

OTHER POSSIBLE TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict or concern with/within Committees

Process for resolution: Follow Steps One through Four

Conflict or concern over decisions made by the Board of Trustees

Process for resolution: The Board of Trustees is an elected body of the Society. The Trustees establish the policies necessary for the conduct of the programs and affairs of the Society. On occasion, decisions made by the Board of Trustees may generate conflict or concern. In such instances, the complaint/concern should be put in writing to the Board of Trustees. The Board will review and respond in writing as to the results of the review. This decision may be shared with the congregation, as appropriate.

Tools for Self-Mediated Conflict Resolution

A. Preparation Suggestions

For the Party Requesting Dialogue:

- Before approaching someone about a concern or conflict, ask yourself:
 - What exactly is bothering me?
 - Why is this matter important to me?
 - What do I want the other person to do or not do?
 - 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?
- Reflect on the possible outcomes that would 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.
- 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.

For the Party Invited to Dialogue:

- When approached by someone regarding a concern or conflict, be willing to learn more about the other person's concern and experience.
- Give yourself time to consider what is being said. If you need any clarifications, ask.
- Reflect on your intent at the time of the incident and the intended as well as unintended impact on the other person.
- Decide if this is an issue that you can address directly with the person. If you decide to proceed, schedule a time to discuss the issue with the person. Prepare for that meeting by using the tools and strategies included in this document to help facilitate conversation.

B. Suggested Structure for Dialogue

Ground Rules

Together review and agree to abide by the following Ground Rules:

- We agree to talk directly with the person with whom there are concerns, and not seek to involve others in "gossip" or "alliance building."
- We agree one person speaks at a time so all parties can be heard.
- We will make a sincere commitment to listen to one another, to try to understand the other person's point of view before responding.
- We will provide time and space to say what needs to be said, listening quietly without interruption.
- We agree to try our hardest and trust that the other person is doing the same, approaching the resolution of differences with an open mind and an open heart and not rigid demands.
- We agree to focus on the issues, and not to attack the person with whom we disagree.
- What we discuss together will be kept in confidence, unless there is explicit agreement regarding who needs to know further information.

Sharing & Active Listening

For the person who initiated the conversation:

- (1) Thank the other person for being willing to meet and discuss your concern.
- (2) State the problem clearly, focusing on your understanding of the facts.
 - Speak from the first person: "This is my experience, my recollection, my perception, my point of view, my interpretation."
 - Be as specific as you can about whatever situation you are describing; give examples.
 - Speak about the behavior you observe, not someone's character or personality.
 - Avoid labels.

- (3) After presenting your understanding of the facts, share your feelings as honestly and completely as you are able.
- (4) What are the "hurts"? Use "I" messages to describe feelings of anger, hurt, or disappointment: "I am sad," or "I am disappointed." Avoid "you" messages such as "you make me angry...."

For the person invited to the conversation:

- (1) Use active listening skills--be careful not to interrupt and genuinely try to hear the other's concerns and feelings. Try to see the problem through the other's eyes. The "opposing" viewpoint can make sense even if you don't agree.
- (2) Take a moment to confirm that you understand what the person said. Try to restate what you have heard in a way that lets the other know you have fully understood.

After the person who has initiated the conversation has confirmed that they feel heard/understood, switch roles, with the invited party sharing their experience, feelings, needs from the same situation/issue and the party that initiated the dialogue actively listening and reflecting.

Devise Possible Solutions

After each party has been offered a chance to be heard, move into a conversation about potential solutions.

- The party who initiated the request for dialogue should be prepared to propose specific solutions, asking directly for what they want as well as identifying what they themselves might need to change to improve the situation.
- Invite the invited person to propose solutions, too.

Be ready for some compromise.

- Allowing the other person only one course of action will likely hinder resolution.

If you are able to reach agreement on a proposal for change, celebrate!

If you are not, consider requesting help from the Good Relations Committee.

Closing

Thank each other for being willing to try to resolve the conflict.

GLOSSARY

Assessment – The act of consulting with concerned parties to gain the fullest understanding of a conflict or concern, so that the GRC can make recommendations on how to proceed through the Conflict Resolution Process.

Agreement - Harmony of opinion, action, or character; an arrangement as to a course of action; a document detailing the course of action the parties involved reached to resolve the dispute to ensure a common understanding.

Board of Trustees – Seven members of the congregation elected to serve as the governing body of First Unitarian Society of Chicago (First Unitarian Church) for staggered terms of two or three years. As stated in the Bylaws, "The Trustees shall have the care, custody, and control of the real and personal property of the Society and shall establish the policies necessary for the conduct of the programs and affairs of the Society."

Concern - A worried or nervous feeling about something, or something that makes you feel uncomfortable or uneasy.

Confidentiality – The state of keeping or being kept private.

Conflict - Strong disagreement between individuals or groups that often results in angry argument; a difference that prevents agreement; disagreement between ideas, feelings, and more.

Congregant – A member or friend of the congregation.

Damaging - To cause damage to; to injure or harm; to drive people away from the congregation

Dangerous – Able or likely to cause harm or injury; behavior that threatens physical or emotional well-being of self or another, or church property.

Destructive - Causing or wreaking destruction, or ruin; tending to disprove or discredit.

Direct Dialogue – Speaking one-on-one with the person with whom you have a concern or conflict.

Disruptive behavior - Behavior that interferes with, or disrupts, the activities of the congregation, disruption of public events and diminishment of the appeal of the church; perceived compromise of the safety or well-being of child or adult.

Facilitated Conversation – Conversation between parties in conflict or expressing issue(s) of concern that is guided by a facilitator or facilitators chosen by the Good Relations Committee.

Facilitator – Someone who helps individuals or a group of people in conflict to understand the other's point of view and needs in order to mutually work toward a

resolution to the conflict. In doing so, the facilitator remains neutral, taking no particular position in the discussion.

Friend (of the congregation) – Individual who attends, on a regular basis, the worship service and/or activities and events sponsored by the church, but has not fulfilled the conditions of membership, as specified in the Bylaws.

Good Relations Committee – The purpose of the Good Relations Committee (GRC) is to foster a congregational culture that reflects our shared values and enables us to live out our covenant and mission. To this end, the Good Relations Committee is charged with: recommending a Congregational Behavioral Covenant for adoption by the congregation; creating a Conflict Resolution Policy; with the Board of Trustees, identifying additional steps and processes needed to help the congregation address unresolved conflicts; after receiving appropriate training, serving as a resource for congregants to turn to when they have unresolved conflicts in the church. After the adoption of a Congregational Behavioral Covenant and a Conflict Resolution Policy, the Good Relations Committee shall provide conflict resolution services to any member or friend of First Unitarian (concerned person) who desires help in getting their church-related concerns addressed. The Good Relations Committee has the role of implementing and managing the Policy on Conflict Resolution, as described. *(See Policy on Formation of the Good Relations Committee – link to website)*

Impasse - A situation in which no progress is possible.

Mediation - Intervention in a dispute in order to try to resolve it. Note: Depending on the conflict or concern, and the assessment of the Good Relations Committee regarding the skill level required to address the conflict or concern, a professional mediator might be recommended.

Member (of the congregation) – As stated in the Bylaws: “Any person who subscribes to the purposes of this Society and is approved by the Membership Committee shall become a member of the Society upon signing the Membership Book. Any person who has been a member for at least 90 days and has at least contributed \$50 of record to the Society during the 12 months preceding any regular or special meeting of the Society shall be entitled to vote at that meeting. Upon a member’s prior petition, the Senior Minister may modify for that member the financial requirement for voting.”

Minister(s) – Professional clergy “called” by congregational vote on the recommendation of an elected Search Committee, or hired. According to the Bylaws, they have control of the pulpit and general direction of the religious activities of First Unitarian.

The Senior Minister is also the chief administrator and is ex officio member of all committees. Decisions regarding the use of space in First Unitarian’s buildings are to be coordinated with the Senior Minister but are ultimately the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. According to the Minister(s) letter of agreement with First Unitarian, supervision of all staff is their responsibility, but this responsibility may be delegated

where appropriate. Other ministerial positions may include Associate, Affiliate, Minister-at-Large, Minister of Religious Education, and Ministerial Intern.

Offensive - Causing someone to feel deeply hurt, upset, or angry.

Safe – Protected from, or not exposed to, danger or risk; not likely to be harmed or lost.

Staff – Paid employees of the church; namely, the Ministerial Intern, the Director of Religious Education, the Director of Operations, Director of Music, paid RE teachers, nursery staff, the Financial Secretary, the Sextons. Note: The Ministerial Intern and the Directors are supervised by the Senior Ministers; the Financial Secretary and the Sextons are supervised by the Director of Operations, the paid RE teachers and the nursery staff by the RE Director.

[See Flow Charts 1-4 in Appendix]

Developed by the Good Relations Committee:

Lisa Christensen Gee
Jean Hester
David Hodgson
Ellen LaRue
Jim Proctor
Joan Staples
Grace Latibeaudiere-Williams, Chair
Rev. Teri Schwartz, Ministerial Advisor

Sources:

The Good Relations policies of: the Unitarian Universalist Church of West Lafayette, IN; the Chalice UU Congregation of Escondido, CA; the Hopedale Parish of Hopedale, MA; the Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, CA.

Mindful Mediation training of the Pollack Peace Center by Consultant Henry Yampolsky.

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Approved by the Board of Trustees, 4/16/20

APPENDIX

FIRST UNITARIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS
CHART 1 - Concern or Conflict Among/Between Members/Friends

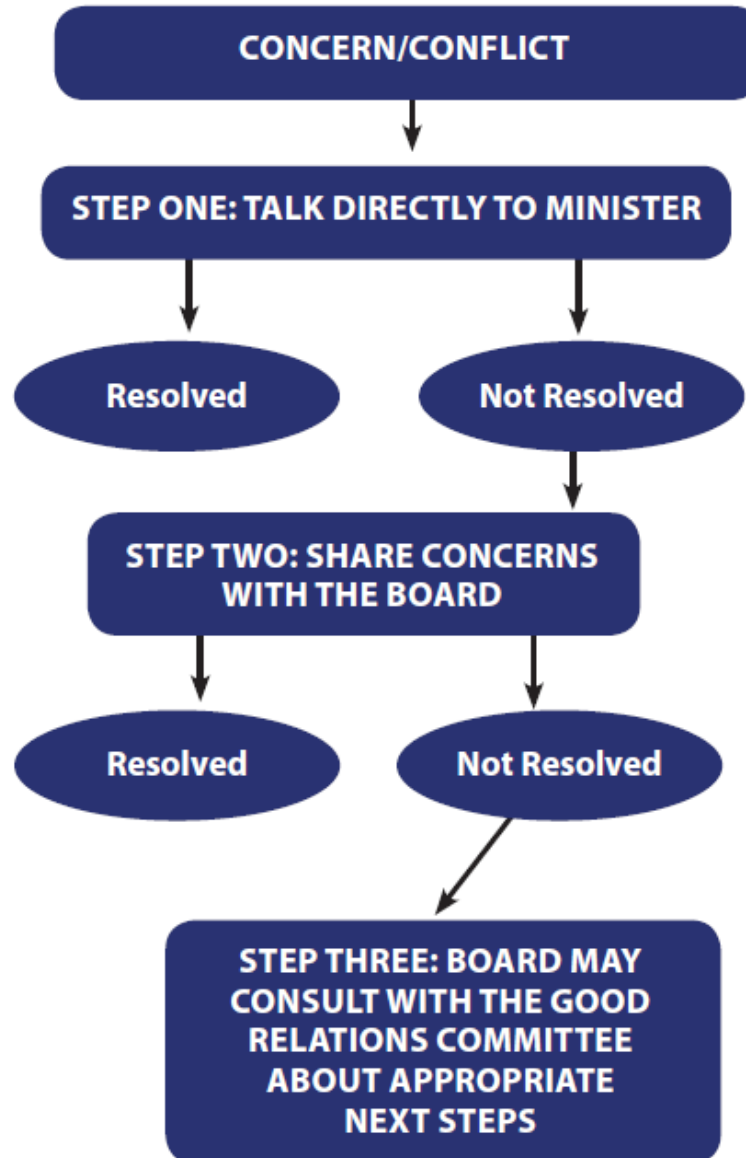


FIRST UNITARIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

CHART 2 - Concern or Conflict With Staff Member



FIRST UNITARIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS
CHART 3 - Concern or Conflict with Minister



FIRST UNITARIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

CHART 4 - Disruptive Behavior Occurring During Congregational Worship or at Meetings, Events or Activities Organized by Church Groups, Either On or Off the Church Premises

