

Resolving Disputes and/or Using a Healthy Congregation Team (HCT)

The following is a policy outline for conflict resolution between members, disputes between individuals with a committee in general, members of a committee or any other individuals that are wish to be a part of Prairie Circle Unitarian Universalist Church (PCUUC).

- PCUUC encourages members to get together to talk out their differences first.
- PCUUC puts into action a Healthy Congregation Team that is organized when an individual(s) requests assistance to resolve an issue.
- The HCT is organized by the PCUUC Board of Directors, and may be comprised of one or two members selected by the Board trained in conflict resolution, and/or may also include a member of the UU Midwest Central District.
- The HCT uses the guideline that has been provided by other UU churches.
- If either of the individuals cannot agree on a resolution the matter can be left as unresolved as long as the conflict is not determined as dangerous, disruptive or offensive to any other members.
- If a dispute becomes a serious disruption to the Church, the HCT defers to the Board, which will follow the guidelines found in the bylaws under Par. 3.04, wherein the Church reserves the right to exclude from, restrict or terminate membership of any member who is determined to constitute a threat to the welfare or safety of the church environment by unanimous action of the Church Board. If the conflict involves a board member, this individual will be excluded from voting on the action.

For more information, please see the following four page "Conflict Resolution Process" which goes into detail the recommendations and/or steps members would follow for seeking conflict resolution.

Conflict Resolution Process (approved 2.27.2011) – PROCEDURE GUIDELINES

Resolving Disputes and/or Using a Healthy Congregation Team (HCT)

Procedural Guidelines: Conflict Resolution

The HCT responds when a member or regular attendee of the church **requests assistance** from any of the team members. The team member encourages the parties to get together to talk, either on their own or with a mediating team, in order to develop solutions for working together while maintaining the principles of the community.

If either of the members is not interested in mediation, the HCT will consult to determine if the team can provide some other intervention or if it is simply a situation in which the team cannot participate.

The HCT (mediators) may be comprised of one or two members selected by the board that have been trained in conflict resolution, and/or may also include a member of the UU Midwest Central District that is experienced in conflict resolution in church congregations. It will be the members discretion as to if they will use trained church members or an outside District member.

The mediators serve as neutral facilitators. They help the parties see their areas of agreement, direct the conversation in productive ways, and keep track of the solutions that are offered. They do not offer solutions.

Conflict mediation occurs in five phases: initiation, issue clarification, mutual understanding, agreement, and closure.

While it is understandable that some people feel more comfortable initiating a complaint in an email, including complaints to other people that are not directly related to the issue is not helpful.

As soon as possible, talk directly with the person (fellow member) with whom you have the disagreement *or contact a Board member to initiate the HCT process.*

Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible after the incident.

Examine your own role in the conflict. Ask yourself, why is this matter important to you? Do some soul searching.

Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Did they see it or hear it in the same way? Based on your telling of the events and your feelings about it, do they feel the same way?

During your meeting, use "I" statements in your discussion ("I feel..." not "You did..."); be an active listener.

If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts into writing on paper and give it directly to the person involved or the HCT representative. Be available to hear his/her response.

If you feel that safety is an issue, use the HCT to provide a safe environment for the discussion.

If the conflict is less with a person than with how he/she is performing a job (staff, religious educator, etc.), address the concern to the proper supervisor so that individuals are not being "supervised" from all sides.

If the conflict involves a specific personal behavior on the part of a member of the congregation, use the following model:

Initiation: a member contacts a board member to discuss using a HCT, wherein the HCT will be assembled and make plans to contact the other member to meet to:

- Discuss the issue in a private, neutral setting.
- Provide encouragement for process and fill out intake form with individual.
- Answer questions and process of mediation and role of HCT.
- Restate and summarize individual's concerns.
- Let individual know what to expect in the process, including who is going to contact the other individual in conflict.
- If the person is an interested third party to the conflict, encourage him or her to have one of the persons in conflict call the HCT member.
- HCT members consult to decide if mediation is best intervention.
- Contact other party, fill out second intake form, and set date for mediation.

Issue Clarification: exploration of the conflict in mediation

- Schedule up to three hours in a neutral setting.
- The HCT members will make every effort to balance the participants in gender, interest, and/or experience. Both mediators should speak at beginning of the session, to give participants a feel for the mediators.
- Clarify beforehand who will do which part, to create a strong working agreement between mediators.

Mediators will:

1. Validate participants' willingness and courage in seeking mediation.
 2. Explain the process (impartiality of mediators, and goal of voluntary agreement)
 3. Go over ground rules for session:
 - Speak respectfully
 - Try to remain open to hearing the other person's point of view
 - Each participant will have equal opportunity to speak
 - Promise confidentiality
 - Any other rules which are important to participants
 4. Ask the first questions and restate the answers to clarify issues.
 5. Move conversation between participants to reduce tension and hostility
 6. Provide the survey before and after the session
 7. Clarify, validate, and follow leads, and ask about both issues and feelings
 8. Take notes and summarize issues at end of this phase.
 9. Summarize issues and ask if there is anything more before moving on.
- Transition occurs when all major issues are clarified and participants seem ready to speak to each other. The HCT mediator explains next phase and validates efforts of participants.

Finding Mutual Understanding

Mediators choose an easy issue or common ground for participants to begin this phase.

- Guide parties to speak to one another, beginning with chosen topic.
- Help them to restate the other's point before responding, especially at first when understanding is the key.
- Allow productive dialogue, but intervene when parties get stuck or break rules.
- Guide parties to speak out of hurt rather than anger.
- Help parties focus on specific issues.

Transition occurs when parties understand main concerns and they trust each other enough to work together at solutions.

Agreement

Mediators help participants develop a mutually-agreed upon resolution.

- Begin with easy issues and working towards most difficult disagreements.
- Make sure each agreement is clear, mutual, and workable
- Bring back suggested solutions from earlier phases.
- Guide participants to resolve each important issue.
- Do not suggest solutions
- Create and read aloud, point by point, a written resolution.

Closure

- Affirm and encourage both parties and their work in the session.
- Give a copy of the agreement to both participants or let them know when they will receive it.
- Determine which of the mediators will follow up with participants in 2-4 weeks.

Note: If a conflict becomes dangerous, disruptive or offensive:

- We strive to accept skilled help when we cannot reach agreement or reconciliation with another member. If either or both parties in an ongoing conflict refuse to engage with the HCT process, and the conflict has created a disruption to the church that is deemed dangerous, disruptive or offensive, the HCT defers to the PCUUC board and in accordance with our bylaws may enact the following for a given time period (**if the conflict involves a board member, this individual will be excluded from voting on the action**).
 - Request one or both parties step down from any or all leadership positions.
 - Request one or both parties end their participation in any or all Fellowship-sponsored small groups or committees.
 - Request one or both parties to end their membership with the Fellowship