

Procedure for Board Involvement in Conflict Resolution

(Step 3a on the “Pathway to Conflict Resolution” document)

Whenever a member of the Northlake community finds themselves in an interpersonal conflict with another member, the Pathway to Conflict Resolution offers guidance toward reconciliation.

- If a member is in conflict with another member or with Northlake staff, they should be encouraged to follow the Pathway.
- If there is conflict between members of the staff, they should consult Human Resources committee.
- If there is conflict between a church member and the minister, they may choose to follow this Pathway, or may consult with the Committee on Ministries (COM). If not certain which path to pursue, they should consult with a member of COM or the Healthy Congregations Team (HCT.)

If a member comes to the board with concerns about an interpersonal conflict, they will be asked whether they have already tried Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the Pathway. If they have not, they would typically be encouraged to start there, because Step 3a is a complex formal process that will result in a board recommendation they will be required to follow.

In handling conflict through the procedures outlined below, it is mandatory that confidentiality be observed at all times. Board members must be fully aware of potential violations of confidentiality.

Raising the Concern: A member of the congregation can bring a concern about an interpersonal conflict to any Board member. That Board member will share with the full board, at a board meeting or via email, that a conflict that has been brought to their attention.

Appointing Interviewers: The Board will appoint two persons, either board members, or non-board congregants, to investigate the situation. These individuals should possess good conflict resolution skills, good listening skills, and be capable of maintaining a high level of objectivity and confidentiality. These individuals would be informed of the identities of the parties involved, and given a brief outline of the situation, then asked if they have a close relationship with either party or an inherent bias, based on the issues involved. If so, they must recuse themselves, and alternate individuals would be appointed.

Interviews: Interviewers will work together to interview each party, in separate meetings. They will:

- Prior to the interview, ask each individual to write down their recollection of the conflict.
- At the interview, ask each individual to share what they have written about the conflict and any events that precipitated it. The focus is on open, non-judgmental listening. Listeners can ask questions or restate the answers to clarify issues.
- Interviewers will take notes and summarize issues at the end of the session, then write up a summary of the discussion. They will then ask the speaker to review the summary to ensure that they have accurately captured the key points.
- Because conflict tends to worsen over time, all parties should endeavor to limit the time from complaint to completion of the interviews to as short a time period as possible.
- If one party will not meet with interviewers in a timely manner, they will be given a specified time limit for doing so, after which the process would move forward without their input. Suggested time to wait would be no more than two weeks.

Presentation to Board: When both written summaries are complete, and not before then, the Board will convene for an executive session, in person and/or via conference call. Board members would be asked whether they have a close relationship with either party or an inherent bias, based on issues involved. If so, they must recuse themselves.

The interviewers will read both written summaries, and answer questions from board members. Then the Board will make a recommendation on how to proceed.

Typically, the Board would recommend mediation. However, they are not limited to achieving compromises. If they believe that a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to the church, or not expressive of our collective values, they can recommend counseling, limits to participation in church life, or other behavior changing strategies. Procedures from the Policy on Disruptive Behavior might be applied.

If mediation is recommended:

- Remember at all times that confidentiality is essential.
- The Board would consider possible mediators from UUA Western Region or professionals in the larger community.
- The Board will select and hire the appropriate mediator.
- A member of the board would then work with the mediator and the involved parties to schedule the mediation. Considering that conflict tends to worsen when left unaddressed for a long period of time, a mediation should be scheduled to occur as soon as possible, ideally within a month.
- Mediators help participants to reach a mutually agreed upon resolution. They create a written resolution with clear, specific promises that each party is making. The mediator assures that each agreement is clear, mutual, and workable. Mediation is complete when both participants agree to sign the agreement. They do not have to agree to be friends, or agree that everything the other person says is true. They do need to agree that they will honor the agreement and that they can both continue to participate in the congregation, and interact with each other in ways that honor our Covenant of Right Relations.
- After a mediation, the mediator should provide a written report to the board. The report should include a concise definition of the differences, details of the resolution or of irreconcilable differences, and recommendations for further action. The report should only reveal as many details as necessary to gain an understanding of the situation.
- If the mediation is not successful (i.e. one member of the conflict refuses to participate, or they are unable to come to a resolution), the Board may consider other actions, including limiting participation in church activities for one or both parties. They will apply the least intrusive intervention necessary to re-establish harmonious relations.
- The only thing which goes into the permanent record is that mediation was held between parties X and Y, and it was resolved, or it was not resolved and the following actions were taken.
- If, after a mediation process, either party fails to honor their agreements, the Board could require sanctions.

Approved by the Board of Trustees
Northlake Unitarian Universalist Church, Kirkland, Washington, January 16, 2017