

Conflict Resolution Process

Purpose

It is natural from time to time for conflicts to arise as individuals, teams and committees strive to accomplish the mission of the church.

It is the purpose of this process to provide guidance and support to the personnel and volunteers of Crossroads United Church in understanding conflict and in working through conflict to achieve positive results for personnel, members, volunteers and the community.

Open, non-judgmental communication and respectful behaviours create a productive, harmonious environment.

Principles of Dispute Resolution

(from the United Church of Canada Handbook)

Different models of alternative dispute resolution may be more or less suitable to resolve a particular dispute, depending on the particular combination of the parties involved and the nature of the dispute. A “one size fits all” approach is unrealistic, and flexibility is an important characteristic of the policy.

At the same time, there are a number of fundamental principles that represent a basic common thread in the resolution of all types of disputes within the church. The development and ongoing administration of the policy has been guided by these principles:

- i) **Holistic**
There must be emphasis on responding to all of the needs of the whole person for each of the parties in the conflict.
- ii) **Inclusive**
The interests of the community affected by the conflict must be accommodated in the resolution of the conflict.
- iii) **Focus on Healing**
There must be emphasis on re-establishing right relationship and balance in the community affected by the conflict. The focus is not on punishment.
- iv) **Fairness**
The empowerment, dignity, respect, and care of all parties in the dispute must be ensured. There should be no “losers.”
- v) **Problem-solving**
The focus should be resolution of the conflict, not blaming and “scapegoating” of participants in the conflict.
- vi) **Accountability**
There must be accountability for harm that has been done.
- vii) **Justice**
There must be determination to address the needs of all those affected by the conflict.
- viii) **Love**
“Overwhelming evil with good.”

Values

Conflict is natural, and productive conflict can lead to positive outcomes.

At Crossroads United Church, Ministry Personnel, employees, contractors and congregation members will treat fellow employees, members, volunteers and the public with respect, courtesy and compassion at all times.

It is the intent of this process that conflicts be solved as close to the source as possible. Ministry Personnel, employees, contractors, congregation members and volunteers are encouraged to recognize, communicate and resolve issues as they arise.

Crossroads will not discriminate against, penalize, or retaliate against an individual who seeks to productively resolve conflict.

If a member of staff, a congregation member or a contractor has an issue to resolve with another member of the congregation, they are encouraged to speak directly to that member. If no resolution is achieved, the member of staff, congregation member or contractor should bring the issue to the Ministry and Personnel (M&P) committee.

If a member of the congregation has an issue to resolve with a member of the staff, they are encouraged to speak directly to that staff member. If no resolution is achieved, the member of the congregation should bring the issue to the M&P committee.

Who This Process Applies To

Including but not limited to: members, adherents, lay employees, contractors and ministry personnel, and elected members or volunteers.

What This Process Does Not Cover

Employee performance issues, incompetence, dishonesty, theft, fraud, abuse and other issues of misconduct are not covered by this process and will be dealt with by the appropriate authority (Lead Minister, M&P committee, or Policy Board.)

Why Conflicts Happen

It is important to remember that conflicts generally arise for the following reasons:

- Assumptions regarding the reasons for or purpose of the other person's actions or behaviour.
- Failure to listen to the other person's point of view.
- Failure to allow time for reflection about the problem.
- Differing values.
- Differences of opinion or disagreement about the facts of the matter.
- Lack of clarity about each person's role and responsibilities.
- Failure to explore the complexity of an issue or get all the information.
- Different working styles.
- Poor communication.
- Avoidance – unwillingness to approach the other person with the problem.
- Incompatible personality types.
- Failure to focus on the real issues
- Taking comments too personally, getting too personally involved in a situation.
- Failure to deal with minor issues as they arise.

Each individual is responsible for behaving in a manner that focuses on solving the problem in a way that respects the needs and wishes of the other party.

Steps in Resolving Conflict

Staff Responsibilities

Remember to behave in a way that focuses on solving the problem rather than getting involved in avoidance or argument. Conflict should not be played out as a contest to determine winners and losers. Remember, you are part of a community that shares the same mission and values. Avoid gossip and drawing others into the problem. This only makes the problem worse.

- **Clarify the Problem**

You may want to write down the nature of the problem, what happened, and the desired outcome and possible options to resolve the conflict. Sometimes just stating the problem in writing will clarify where there are opportunities to work out a solution.

- **Define the Problem**

Whose problem is it? Could it be a miscommunication or misunderstanding?

- Arrange to **talk to the person involved**. Agree on a time and place to discuss the issue. **Select a location** that is private, quiet and free of interruptions.
- **Listen**. Attempt to understand the other person's point of view. **Agree upon the facts**.
- **Give your point of view**. **Talk about the impact** of the issue or situation on you, on others. **Avoid blame**. Ask for feedback.
- Make a serious attempt to **find a possible solution together**. The most successful resolution to a conflict is collaborative.
- If the conflict is too difficult to resolve at this level, then one or both parties will approach the Lead Minister with the issue. The Lead Minister will attempt to support the resolution of the conflict. The Lead Minister may refer the issue to the M&P Committee or an employee trained in Conflict Resolution and Mediation.
- If the conflict remains unresolved, the M&P Committee will notify the Policy Board and refer the issue to a Mediator.
- **The conflict referral process will be as follows:**
Individual → Other Person → Lead Minister → M&P Committee → Policy Board
→ External Mediator.

Occasionally the preceding process may not result in the productive resolution of conflict. In these instances the issue may be referred for formal resolution under the terms of the "Dispute Resolution Policy" of the United Church of Canada.

Summary

Unresolved conflict contributes to damaged relationships, increased stress, poor morale and operational ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

Remembering the principle of flexibility articulated at the beginning of this document, we commit to courageous resolution of conflict at Crossroads United Church. Best practice leads an individual seeking resolution to follow the conflict resolution procedures, without skipping important steps, or fearing discrimination, retaliation or penalties in any way. After the resolution process, all parties are encouraged to focus on work and tasks at hand and to leave the issue and personal feelings behind them, for the sake of the flourishing of our community of faith.

Appendix

"Dispute Resolution Policy Handbook," The United Church of Canada, 2008