

**Unitarian Universalist Community of Charlotte**  
**Covenant of Right Relations Policy**  
Approved by Board of Trustees: October 24, 2023

**Introduction**

Conflict is inevitable in any community of people engaged in creating meaning in their lives. Managed well, conflict contributes to the growth of the individual and the community. Left unresolved, conflict may threaten the fabric of a community and disrupt the functioning of a congregation.

The UUCC Covenant of Right Relations (see Appendix A) was approved by the membership in June 2021. A fundamental part of participating in our covenanted community is that we follow a set of guidelines by which we resolve conflicts that may arise. Differences and misunderstandings may involve visitors, members, or professional staff including Ministers. Conflict between paid staff members is handled as outlined in contracts and covenants between staff members.

This policy sets forth the procedures that may be initiated by any person in the UUCC (members, staff, and Ministers) when they want assistance, or have identified that assistance may be needed, to resolve a conflict with another person, persons, or group at the UUCC. The safety and well-being of children and youth and the adults who work with them are also governed by the UUCC Child and Youth Protection Policies.

**Definition of Conflict**

The word “conflict,” as used in this policy, includes any behavior that affects one or more members of the UUCC or the congregation at large in one or more of the following ways:

1. Behaving in a manner that is, or could be perceived as, a threat to the safety, physical, or emotional well-being of any adult or child. This includes threats to the safe expression of beliefs;
2. Undermining or threatening an atmosphere of trust, respect, and cooperation;
3. Interfering with essential operations, programs, or services;
4. Diminishing appeal of the UUCC to its potential or existing members by fostering divisiveness or causing harm to the name and reputation of individuals or the UUCC.

The Right Relations Team (RRT) manages the conflict resolution process at the UUCC.

The RRT oversees the practices of accountability when one or more members need support in a conflict. The RRT, in communication with all involved, will provide options for the parties to address the departure or perceived departure from right relationship, as defined in the UCC Covenant of Right Relations (Appendix A).

The team receives requests for assistance and determines what assistance and resources are needed using the conflict resolution process described in Appendix C.

The RRT is responsible for communication to the congregation regarding the covenant of right relations policy and process. This includes providing education and training in conflict resolution and conflict management for the congregation and its leaders.

The team will hold awareness of relationships of power and privilege as a key piece of its work and congregational education.

Noting the UCC's commitment to dismantling systems of oppression (see Ends Statement #3), the RRT is charged with the aspirational goal of learning about non-punitive conflict management options including but not limited to restorative practices. Further, the RRT will educate the congregation about their discoveries with the goal of future incorporation into this policy.

### **Authority**

The RRT is a committee appointed by the UCC Board of Trustees (BOT) to implement this Covenant of Right Relations Policy and process (as outlined in Appendix B, Operational Guidelines), and to educate the congregation. The RRT is accountable to the BOT.

### **Composition**

The RRT is a standing committee composed of three to five members of the congregation who are not members of the BOT. The BOT will communicate to the congregation the names of those appointed to the RRT. RRT members will elect a chair annually.

The following factors will be considered in selecting RRT members, with the goal to assemble a team that together encompasses a broad cross section of these characteristics, skills or experiences:

- Membership in good standing in the congregation for two or more years.
- Professional experience that would serve as a proxy for good listening skills.
- Interest in and understanding of structural and institutional dynamics and impacts of racism and other oppressions.

- Ability to seek fairness toward everyone involved in a conflict.
- Experience with restorative practices, conflict management, trauma-informed care, and/or counseling.
- Commitment to sharing best practices in relationship management.
- An expressed interest in serving on the committee.

**Term**

RRT members will serve staggered terms of three years with the possibility of renewing for additional terms. Terms start at the beginning of the UUCS fiscal year. Vacancies that occur during a calendar year will be filled by BOT appointment.

## **APPENDIX A: The UCC Covenant of Right Relations**

**(adopted by congregational vote June 2021)**

As members of the Unitarian Universalist Community of Charlotte, we are committed to the seven UU principles, respect our Vision and Mission, and embrace being a Welcoming Congregation. We strive to treat everyone with dignity and respect, to care about and to be connected to one another, and to listen in an open-minded manner. We make the following promises to further our path in being the loving, liberating religious community that our Vision calls on us to be.

Welcome members and visitors alike with warmth and hospitality;

Speak for ourselves and listen to all with attention and kindness;

Understand that we are all works in progress in our life journeys, and recognize that everyone faces both joys and challenges that may be unknown to us, as ours are to them;

Remain open to understanding that we can learn and grow from our connections to people with both similar and differing viewpoints;

Embrace the diversity within and beyond our community, knowing it makes us a stronger, more loving and compassionate community;

Give of ourselves to the UCC as a whole, to individual members and to those in the larger community as we are able;

Respect that our membership makes decisions by seeking unity and consensus among our members, enacting changes by majority vote, which may not always align with our personal desires;

Accept reminders of our covenant when other people may feel that we're failing to adhere to these promises, committing to resolve conflicts by engaging in potentially difficult conversations without straying from our promise to treat each person with love, respect, and dignity.

## **APPENDIX B: Operational Guidelines**

Guided by the UCC Covenant of Right Relations, UU Values, and this Covenant of Right Relations Policy, the RRT will:

- Respond to each request for assistance in a timely manner.

- Maintain confidentiality of team discussions, complaints, actions taken, and parties involved while the situation is active and once it is resolved. If there are aspects of the resolution that will not remain confidential (e.g. limited access agreements), they will be noted in the case documentation (see Record-keeping and Continuity, below).
- Recuse themselves from any issue to which they are a party or a stakeholder. Any RRT member may declare a conflict to exist for themselves or for another member, and recusal will follow.
- Report activities of the team to the BOT and congregation at least annually, according to the monitoring report schedule, respecting confidentiality.
- Provide and maintain information regarding right relations on the UUCC website.
- Submit an annual budget request to fund training, resources, and outside consultants.
- Develop additional procedures as needed.
- Recommend additions or modifications to this policy to the BOT as needed.
- Maintain confidential records of referrals and dispositions as detailed below under “Record-keeping and Continuity.”
- Follow local, state, and federal mandated reporting requirements.

### **Record-keeping and Continuity**

Records pertaining to mediation, dispute outcomes, and limited access or other agreements will be kept by the team in a secure location in the UUCC offices. A duplicate envelope for each conflict will be kept in a locked drawer in the Minister's office, and every new Minister will have access to these files. Pertinent information will be shared with other staff and/or select volunteers in cases where confidential information is necessary for executing job tasks or maintaining compliance with other UUCC policies at the discretion of the RRT in consultation with the Lead Minister.

The team will develop a procedure for record-keeping and continuity of records to be approved by the BOT and appended to this policy.

## APPENDIX C: Conflict Resolution Process

Where possible, parties involved in the conflict are encouraged to first try to resolve the conflict independently using the recommended actions below. Congregants are encouraged to consult the Minister, the staff liaison or team leader, or a member of the RRT for support.

The RRT can also mediate informally, exchanging views between and making suggestions to parties separately, and should explore such avenues first. If a consensus cannot be reached, only then should a meeting of all concerned with the RRT be considered.

If safety is a concern for one or more involved parties, they may choose to immediately consult with the Minister or RRT member (Step 3 below).

Steps	Actions	Implementation	Additional Information
Step 1	Personal reflection	<p>Work on yourself first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine your own role in the conflict.</li> <li>Ask, "What, if anything, am I not noticing about my own role in the conflict?"</li> <li>"Why is this matter so important to me?"</li> <li>Work on telling yourself a story that doesn't vilify the other person.</li> <li>Become curious rather than angry.</li> </ul>	
	Take time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider discussing the matter with an objective party for a reality check. Compare your perceptions. Did they see or hear it the same way?</li> <li>Sleep on it before acting rashly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on behaviors, not people.</li> <li>Avoid mentioning names.</li> <li>Avoid negative triangulation (i.e., do not involve a third party to avoid direct communication or to avoid personal responsibility)</li> </ul>
	Seek to understand the other person	<p>Try to get to the essence of the problem by asking humanizing questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What sort of influences are acting on the person?</li> <li>What is causing the behavior?</li> <li>Do they have the ability to do their job?</li> <li>Are there barriers to overcome?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use "I" statements ("I feel...", not "You did...")</li> <li>Use active listening and reflect back what you've heard.</li> </ul>

<b>Step 2</b>	Address the concern directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk directly with the person with whom you have the disagreement.</li> <li>• Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk one-on-one as soon as possible after the incident.</li> <li>• If direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting thoughts into writing. Be available to hear the response.</li> <li>• Bring a support person with you, if that's more comfortable.</li> </ul>	
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>Seek assistance if conflict remains unresolved.</p> <p>Move to formal process guided by the RRT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with Minister or RRT member for assistance and direction on taking the next appropriate step.</li> <li>• If the conflict is less with the person than with how they are performing a job, address the concern to the respective supervisor or committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymous complaints are not healthy or acceptable.</li> <li>• Be prepared to take responsibility for your concerns.</li> </ul>

**Formal Conflict Resolution Process**

If Steps 1 and 2 of the Conflict Resolution Process outlined above are unsuccessful, either party may take this issue to any member of the RRT. At this point the process becomes formalized, and the RRT's responsibility is to assist the parties in developing a mutually agreeable resolution to the conflict.

Toward that end, the RRT is empowered to make recommendations for resolution consistent with UUCB Bylaws, the Covenant of Right Relations, and this Covenant of Right Relations Policy. The RRT is also empowered to engage the BOT in any conflicts for which a resolution cannot be reached by the RRT.

The RRT may also be called upon to mediate different perspectives and varying viewpoints within the congregation. In doing so, the RRT will work to ensure that all voices are heard and that the best practices of conflict management are applied. The RRT will encourage framing these kinds of conflicts as opportunities for learning, healing, and building community.

The RRT serves as a whole; any members receiving a complaint will bring it to the entire RRT for discussion.

The RRT may seek information from other persons who have first-hand knowledge of the conflict, emphasizing confidentiality in all its deliberations and to all with whom the RRT interacts. The RRT will invite other parties involved in the conflict to present their perspectives.

The RRT is empowered to make recommendations, behavioral contracts, and judgments. They are not limited to achieving compromises. When they believe a situation exists where behaviors are harmful to the UUCC or not expressive of our collective values, they can recommend professional counseling, limits to participation in congregational life, or other behavior-changing strategies.

The RRT will work with any related parties to assist in conflict resolution. However, sometimes the best that can be achieved in resolving a conflict is for the parties to define parameters of behavior that will minimize any impact of the conflict within the UUCC community. For example, parties might agree to cease written or verbal communication, refrain from discussion of the matter with others, or voluntarily suspend participation for a time in activities that have given rise to the conflict in order for tensions to subside. The emphasis of any resolution at this point is for all parties to be involved in setting the boundaries that allow each person room for their struggle to be authentic yet remain within the context of and with an emphasis upon the greater welfare of UUCC.

In some instances, the RRT may determine that the level of mediation needed is beyond their level of expertise and may ask if all parties would agree to seek guidance from the Minister, the BOT, or a professional mediator, including but not limited to UUA Regional Staff.

When an agreement is reached, the parties are expected to abide by the terms of the agreement and to fulfill the terms on their own initiative.

Should disagreements arise over implementation, the parties may again seek the assistance of the RRT.

### **Refusal of Persons in Conflict to Engage**

Should one or more of the parties do any of the following:

- refuse to participate in the resolution process,
- refuse to implement the conflict resolution agreement, or
- refuse to change their behavior or repeated incidents

and the RRT believes that the behavior is disruptive to any UUCC member, its staff, or the UUCC community as a whole, the matter will be addressed by escalating response levels:

1. At least two RRT members meet in-person or virtually with the individual(s) in question to communicate the concerns and recommendations of the RRT.
2. The RRT may inform the individual(s) in question that continued disruptive behavior may lead to exclusion from activities and/or suspension of membership.



If a plan for behavior change is warranted, the RRT shall inform the Minister of its recommendations before acting.

If the undesirable behavior continues despite the preceding steps, the RRT may recommend to the BOT that the individual be excluded from specific UCC activities for a designated period. The reasons for exclusion and the conditions of return will be made clear in a letter to the individual provided by the Minister and one member of the RRT.

If all other efforts have not remedied the disruptive behavior, the RRT may recommend to the BOT that the individual in question be suspended from UCC membership and excluded from the premises and all UCC activities.

The person whose behavior was referred for suspension may make an appeal to the BOT, presenting their concerns or perspective, at the time the recommendation is considered by the BOT.

The suspension of membership, including the process for appeal to the BOT, will be communicated in writing to the individual in question. This communication will include clear descriptions of the conditions and procedures for reconciliation and the time parameters of the suspension. The individual will be provided contact information for a person on the RRT with whom they may speak concerning items such as, but not limited to, reconciliation, conditions of return, or assistance in meeting those conditions, if appropriate.

At the end of the suspension period specified in the written notice to the individual, they may apply for reinstatement by sending notice to the RRT. Consideration of reconciliation and return to UCC will be based upon the conditions described in the letter of suspension and information regarding the individual's behavior during the time of suspension.