

## **KUC Statement on Conflict Resolution**

### **May 2015**

*As Christians, we believe that all people are created in the image of God, are of intrinsic value, and are worthy of respect and love.*

Your M&P Committee has various responsibilities, one of which is to work to resolve conflict at the earliest possible stage.

M&P works to prevent conflict from arising and is guided by the appended theological statement (see below). We are in touch on a regular basis with ministry personnel and staff to foster positive work relationships and an effective ministry team. We also conduct annual reviews with staff and have supported staff in holding retreats to consider issues important to their team ministry such as interpersonal communication styles and team strategies.

From time to time, conflict will arise as a normal and unavoidable part of life. We understand that while conflict may lead to discomfort, it can also lead to positive growth and change within the church and within relationships. The M&P Committee supports healthy responses to issues, concerns and conflict situations arising between ministry personnel, staff members and the congregation. When concerns are raised or conflicts identified, M&P will support processes that involve all sides fairly. M&P tries to be a “non-anxious” presence in the midst of conflict i.e. we try to be objective and impartial. The focus of M&P in addressing conflict is on re-establishing right relationships; on fairness; on problem-solving; and on fostering greater understanding and growth for all participants involved.

M&P will deal with written or spoken concerns or complaints that are raised by an individual(s). M&P cannot deal with anonymous sources or gossip.

The United Church of Canada (*UCC*) has a dispute resolution policy covering formal complaints. Complaints regarding any form of illegal activity or abuse, such as sexual or child abuse, are subject to immediate action in accordance with established UCC policies and procedures. In such cases, the M&P Committee consults with the Chair of KUC Council and with Ottawa Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee and/or the Conference/Presbytery Personnel Minister depending on the seriousness of the concern or complaint and acts in accordance with UCC policy as required.

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Steps that may be taken by M&P in dealing with concerns or complaints include:

1. An M&P member will try to get as much information about the situation as possible, gathering specific facts and feelings. We encourage an emphasis on explaining the situation and on feelings, not on personalities.
2. M&P through the appropriate liaison person and/or Chair may have a confidential discussion with all the parties involved as to the scope of the concerns raised and what steps they feel may be helpful.
3. If a formal written complaint is received, M&P will contact that person, explain the appropriate UCC policy and ask if it is their intention to file a formal complaint or if they would rather withdraw it and deal with it informally. If confirmed as part of a formal process, it will be dealt with by a Conflict Resolution Facilitator under UCC policies.
4. In most cases where there is the communication of an informal concern, M&P will encourage in the first instance a direct discussion between the individuals involved to address the concern.
5. If the concern is still not resolved, M&P may take further action. An M&P representative may help facilitate a meeting with the individuals involved. M&P can identify and invite outside mediation or facilitation services if considered desirable. In such cases, Ministry personnel and staff have the option of bringing a support person.
6. Where M&P is dealing in-house with such informal concerns, the information shared by the parties is confidential as is the outcome, unless otherwise agreed to by all participants. A concern or complaint may be withdrawn at any time in a process

The desired outcomes are that everyone involved in a situation will have the opportunity to share their perspective and respond to concerns that are raised and that there is clear agreement on what each person will do to help resolve an expressed concern.

M&P will also support as appropriate KUC staff in addressing conflict issues with higher levels in the UCC system.

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## Resources

1. The Manual (2013) (Section J)
2. Guidelines for Ministry and Personnel Committees (UCC 2010)
3. Dispute Resolution Policy (UCC August 2013)
4. Dispute Resolution Policy Handbook (UCC, October 2008).
5. Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel (UCC 2008)
6. Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures (UCC 2013)

**Approved by KUC Council May 19, 2015**

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### **Theological Affirmations**

As Christians, we believe that all people are created in the image of God, are of intrinsic value, and are worthy of respect and love.

We believe that we are called to a common vision. The biblical vision of shalom as God's intention for creation is characterized by right relationships with God and with one another that result in harmony, wholeness, peace, well-being, joy, and justice.

Injustice and oppression on either the personal or social level are contrary to the vision of shalom.

We believe that diversity in creation and in humankind is a gift from God to challenge and enrich us. Celebrating our common vision and our diversity, we are called into community. Community is the crucible in which we learn to dialogue, to embrace diversity, and to seek to define the ethic of an active love.

We believe that conflict is a normal part of life and is, in fact, necessary for personal and social development. Conflict is a spiritual issue. When it is addressed constructively, conflict can provide opportunities for growth, new understanding, and transformation.

We believe that conflict becomes destructive when, through attitudes, words, and actions, it leads to exclusion, wounded self-esteem, broken relationships, loss of a sense of well-being, alienation, distrust, undue stress, misunderstanding, abuse, and violation.

We believe that harm and violation are contrary to God's will.

We believe that the biblical concept of justice (sedeqah) and the teachings of Jesus are primarily concerned with the restoration of right relationships between God and people, and between people and each other, enabling the movement toward shalom. Often this means not a return to the status quo, but an improvement that addresses existing injustices and promotes growth, new understanding, and transformation.

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We believe that we are called to look to God's action in Christ as normative. Through covenantal renewal and grace, God moves beyond wrath to the restoration of relationships. God's love for us continues even when our behaviour must be denounced.

We believe we are called to restore broken relationships wherever they occur, and to practise ministries of healing and reconciliation. We believe that conflict can and should, whenever possible, be resolved in ways that are non-adversarial, and that emphasize accountability, inclusivity, understanding, reparation, tolerance, safety, respect for human dignity, and forgiveness. Healing may not mean agreement.

We believe that conflict resolution through "winning" reflects an ethic of domination and control rather than the Christian ideal of love. To love one another is the ultimate challenge for Christians and for humankind, particularly in the midst of conflict. The church is called to be a transforming presence, to promote right relationships within its midst and in the world.

We believe in the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst, reminding us that we can trust that the conflict and pain need not be the end, but part of the spiritual journey that can lead to places of wholeness and health for the people and congregations involved.

We believe that our response to conflict is a theological statement.

Source: *Dispute Resolution Policy Handbook* (The United Church of Canada, October 2008).