

United Methodist Covenant for Conflict Resolution

The Center for Leadership Development designed these guidelines in 2015 as a template for churches to use in demonstrating their commitment to resolving differences in a Christ-like manner.

It is our prayer that all members and attendees of United Methodist churches will follow the example of Jesus Christ, in treating each other with love and respect. Recognizing that differences of opinion and conflict are part of living life together, it is recommended that each church establish a conflict resolution policy so that when conflict does occur, God will be honored by our efforts to resolve differences in love, maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:2-3)

Our goal is that people in Methodist churches will not walk away from the church because of conflict, but will work together to overcome differences and discover the common ground we share in Christ. Such an idea is biblically mandated and serves as an example to our communities and our world that we are indeed disciples of Christ. (John 13:34-35)

Conflict can be defined as a simple difference in perspective, a disagreement over church doctrine, dissatisfaction with church leadership, or an argument involving two or more parties concerning the direction of the church.

These guidelines are suggested when such conflict occurs:

1. In all interactions with each other, the United Methodist people will respect different ideas and views, and will express disagreement with civility and Christian love, which means acting out of a “constant love” for those with which we disagree (1 Peter 4:8) and expressing that love not only in words but in “truth and action.” (1 John 3:18)
2. Gossip is strongly discouraged as dishonoring to our Lord Jesus Christ. (James 4:11-12)

3. Disagreements and conflicts should be addressed as soon as possible; the longer it takes to address the conflict, the harder it becomes to bridge differences. (Matthew 5:23-24)
4. If two parties have a disagreement, the ideal response is for them to meet together, face to face, to discuss the matter and seek to recognize commonalities. (Matthew 18:15)-
5. If any person in the church has a concern or a complaint about a leader of the church, whether it is church staff, pastor or laity, the concerned person is strongly encouraged to discuss the matter directly with the leader involved. (Matthew 18:15)
6. If for any reason it is not possible to meet one-on-one, parties with a conflict or disagreement should seek the counsel of his/her pastor.
7. If the conflict involves a staff member or pastor and is not resolved through direct communication with the pastor or staff member, the congregant may contact the Staff /Pastor Parish Relations Committee Chairperson. The Chair should work to resolve the conflict in concert with the S/PPR Committee.
8. After these avenues have been explored parties may contact their District Superintendent.
9. The Conflict Resolution Team may be called upon at the recommendation of the District Superintendent to assess the level of conflict and offer assistance through church-wide mediation, conflict education and/or individual interpersonal mediation in order to help resolve conflict. Conflict assessment with a certified mediator will be provided through the Center for Leadership Development. Other services are available for fee.
10. The Conflict Resolution Team members asked to intervene in conflict shall strive to propose constructive resolutions to conflict. Resolution shall be defined as mutual agreement or understanding among all parties in a conflict. In all circumstances, confidentiality shall be respected.

11. Concerns involving sexual misconduct of a pastor or staff person should be directed to that pastor's District Superintendent, the Bishop or the Director of the Center for Leadership Development. These concerns will be handled according to the Sexual Misconduct policy contained in the North Texas Conference Journal and the Book of Discipline.
12. All allegations involving child abuse must be handled as directed in the North Texas Conference's MinistrySafe policy as outlined in the North Texas Conference Journal and the congregation's MinistrySafe policy.
13. If all efforts at resolution fail, any party wishing to leave the church's fellowship is asked to do so lovingly, without rancor or bitterness. (1 John 2:10)

Healthy Communication Techniques

- Think the conversation through. What is your intent? What is the purpose of the conversation?
- Take the time to reflect personally on your contributions to the conflict.
- Invite a conversation.
- Choose a neutral location.
- Create safety through the use of guidelines and structure. Guidelines could be no interrupting, no loud voices, and the use of breaks if someone feels uncomfortable. Ask the other person what they need in order to feel safe to talk about their concerns or listen to yours.
- When you meet, pray together.
- Begin the conversation with positive intent, using words that are gracious, clear, and constructive.
- Throughout the conversation be soft on people and hard on problems.
- Invite the other person to go first if they are aware of the problem. If not, gently share with them your concerns.
- Good conversation starters include: How the conflict has affected you. How much the relationship means to you. What you could have done differently.
- During the conversation it will be helpful to use these supportive skills:
 1. Paraphrase: "So let me make sure I have this right, you're saying....."
 2. Openness: "Tell me more about how you feel."
 3. Agreement Stating: "I would have been upset too if someone had done that to me."
 4. Intentional Listening: This is 75% of conflict transformation; it is a sign of respect and slows down conflict escalation.

These guidelines can be used in combination with each other, or incorporate 1 or 2 into your next difficult conversation or conflict. The use of just 1 of these ideas can change the course of a conflict or transform a dispute into a conversation.