

Emerson Unitarian Chapel

Our Covenant

We build our church on a foundation of love and covenant with one another,
To freely explore our values and honor our diversity as a source of communal strength,
To accept responsibility for our individual acts and promote justice and peace,
To celebrate the joys of discovery, embracing the fullest measure of our humanity,
To communicate with kindness and support,
To serve with compassion and commitment,
To openly share our laughter and tears and,
To show reverence for the divine in all that is.

Covenant of Right Relations

The well-being, strength, and reputation of our church depend on a sense of fellowship among the members, friends, and staff, which thrives in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and cooperation. Within such an atmosphere, differences of opinion and their resolution through compromise or consensus can enhance a sense of community and serve as an opportunity to grow in healthy authentic relationships with one another. However, differences or misunderstandings that go unresolved and descend into prolonged conflict can threaten the social fabric of our church. We recognize that conflict may occur between members, members and staff, members and minister, or staff and minister.

We preface these suggestions with the commonsense wisdom that all should adhere to the UU Principles and Purposes and our own church covenant, exhibiting behaviors that enhance the dignity and inherent worth of all participants: expressing sincere appreciation; allowing for human fallibility; dealing directly with each other; speaking softly; being creative in problem solving; maintaining a sense of humor; actively listening and clarifying what we hear; letting others have their say; respecting boundaries that may differ from our own; respecting confidentiality; refraining from harmful gossip about others; and speaking honestly. We will actively and graciously pursue genuine peace and authentic reconciliation, carefully using mediators when appropriate. We will seek just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.

Each person, regardless of his or her role in the church - including clergy, board members, non-member staff, etc. - is expected to live to this covenant within the context of their relationship with the church community.

We all, as responsible members of this community, have an obligation to bring to light concerns about things which threaten the health of our church. This should be done by using existing procedures, proper committees, etc. As members of this community, we have an obligation to find out what those procedures are, in a conflict or in any other dealing with the church, just as we have responsibilities to support the church, honor our pledges, show up, fulfill our commitments for committees, and strive to be on time. In short, we owe each other respectful participation in the life of our church.

PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Emerson Unitarian Universalist Chapel

While openness to diversity is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's Purposes and Principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. Concern for the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual.

The following policy shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing situations in which individuals' behavior threatens the emotional and/or physical security of our members and friends. The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained at all times, except in cases in which he/she poses a threat to others. The fellowship will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child sexual abuse.

Since it is serious business to file a formal complaint against a fellow member, doing so should never be taken lightly. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern, before resorting to the use of this policy.

- When a person's disruptive behavior requires an immediate response, it will be undertaken by the minister and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called.
 - Anytime such actions are required and the Minister is not present, then the Minister and President of the Board of Trustees must be notified as soon as is practicable.
 - A follow-up letter or document detailing what steps must be taken by the offending party or parties before he/she/they may return to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister to the offending party or parties.
- For ongoing situations and those not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or people who witnessed it, to the Minister. The Minister will determine whether he/she wishes to handle the situation privately, or request the formation of an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees, (that committee shall include the Minister and at least two other members of the fellowship), to further investigate the matter. When appropriate and whenever possible, the Minister will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.
- The Minister and/or the committee will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgement, without defining acceptable behavior in advance.
 - People and situations will be dealt with individually.
 - Stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.
 - The Minister or the committee will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.
 - When the ad hoc committee considers such information essential to performing its task, the Board shall authorize funds to pay costs for a professional background check, to provide such facts as the correct identity of the person in question and records of past criminal activity involving threats, harassment, or actual harm to other persons or property.

Note: Unitarian Universalists have a long history of public engagement with issues of individual freedom and social justice. Therefore, acts of conscience or civil disobedience which may have resulted in criminal charges or convictions will receive distinct consideration and careful attention under this policy.

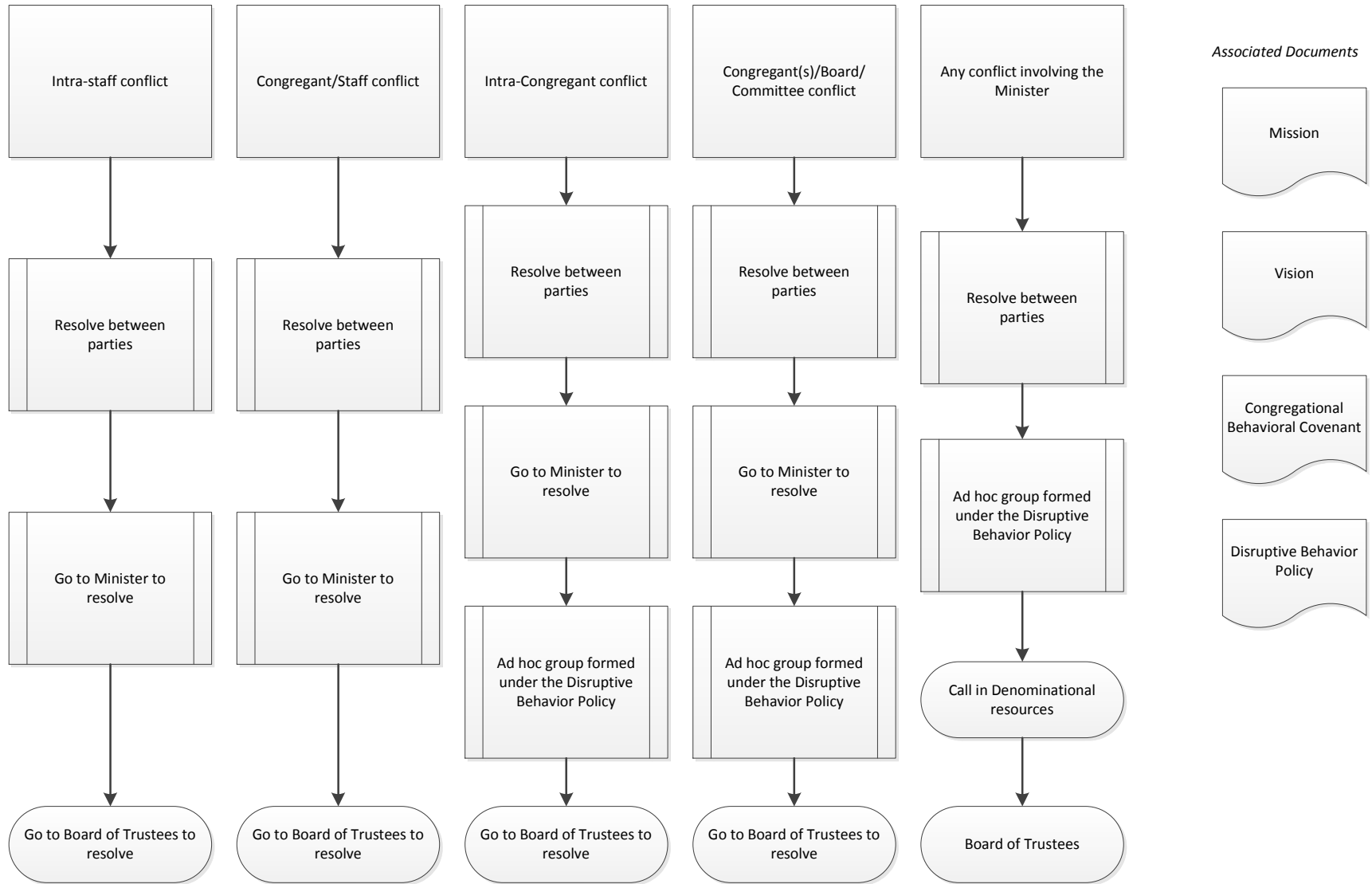
- The following questions must be considered by the Minister or the committee:
 - **Dangerous:** Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property, including himself or herself?
 - **Disruptive:** How much interference with church functions is occurring?
 - **Offensive:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

- The following questions may be considered by the Minister or the committee:
 - **Causes:** Why is this disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the fellowship? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
 - **History:** What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
 - **Probability of Change:** How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

- The Minister or the committee will respond on a case-by-case basis. Mediation by a neutral party is also a possibility. The following levels of response are options the Minister or the committee can implement:
 - **No Action:** It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the minister will explain and discuss this with the person who filed the complaint.
 - **Warning:** The minister or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and expectations for future behavior.
 - **Suspension:** The offending individual is excluded from the fellowship and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing.
 - **Expulsion:** The committee recommends that the offending individual should be expelled from membership in EUUC. If expulsion is approved by a 2/3 majority vote of the Board of Trustees, the minister will write a letter to the individual explaining the reasons, the individual's rights and possible recourse.

Emerson UU Chapel Conflict Resolution Process

Conflict Resolution Flowcharts



It is important to note that no conflict resolution process can alter root causes, but rather, can mediate and resolve behaviors.