

RIGHT RELATIONS POLICY AND PROCESS

First Unitarian Church of Portland
Approved May 7, 2025

Preamble

To be “in right relations” with others means to hold one another in esteem, with a mutual feeling of ease and goodwill. In this state, we are open and curious about those with whom we interact, are willing to be accountable for our own behaviors and make changes as needed for mutual benefit. When we are out of right relations with one another, conflict can worsen. Our Covenant of Right Relations calls us to repair with one another and to restore right relations, and this policy describes how we do so.

Conflict naturally occurs when people are in contact with one another. As Unitarian Universalists (UU), we honor and celebrate differences yet can struggle with how to manage them. Effectively managed, conflict has many positive results. When people can respectfully disagree with each other and simultaneously advocate for different ideas, our church is healthier.

This policy is grounded in restorative practices which recognize that when one person harms another, there can be injury not only to the individual person, but also to the community of which they are a part. Thus, the process can include discussion and repair at both the individual and community levels. Restorative practices ask us to deeply listen to each others’ experiences and make requests of one another for repair. Agreements made through restorative processes are often more specific, appropriate, and long lasting than directives decided by an authority.

First Unitarian Portland is committed to safety, multicultural transformation, dismantling white supremacy culture, gender justice, LGBTQ+¹ inclusion, and access for people of all abilities and all ages. Understandings of ‘appropriate’ behavior are culturally conditioned, and in a multicultural congregation, not everyone will always agree about the appropriateness of certain behaviors. This policy and process aims to embrace a broad understanding of the how and why of human interaction with an aim toward community well being. While we honor the inherent dignity and worth of each individual, the wellbeing of the community as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual whose behaviors are dangerous or destructive.

It is the assumption of this policy and process that most conflicts can and will be resolved by efforts on the part of individuals and groups. It is expected that all

¹ LGBTQ+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (or sometimes “Questioning”); there are longer acronyms that include both Queer and Questioning, as well as Intersex, Asexual, and Two Spirit.

congregants will use the Covenant of Right Relations and UU Principles to inform their own actions and will treat everyone with compassion, respect and dignity.

Purpose

The purpose of the First Unitarian Portland Right Relations Policy and Process is to guide our church community towards a healthy approach to the management, resolution and transformation of conflict. In the spirit of the First Unitarian Portland Covenant of Right Relations and Unitarian Universalist Principles, this policy and process seeks to:

1. Foster and maintain healthy relations within the Congregation
2. Mitigate conflict through education, facilitation and training for the Congregation and its leaders
3. Establish a congregational process and structure for resolving conflicts and restoring right relations.

Scope

The Right Relations Policy and Process pertains to all church and church-related functions, whether on or offsite. While it does not extend to private or public engagements in which one or more church members may be present, congregants are nevertheless encouraged to consider these practices for conflicts that might arise in such settings.

The Policy and Process addresses conflicts which arise between and among individual congregants and congregant groups.

When conflicts arise between certain entities including staff members, Board members, Executive Team, and ministers, they will first use any policies and procedures which were established to address their specific conflict such as *First Unitarian Church Personnel Policy Manual*; *Governing Policies for First Unitarian Church*; *Collective Bargaining Agreement between First Unitarian Church and Communications Workers of America, Local 7901*. If, at the conclusion of the process all participants to such conflicts agree, they may then use this Right Relations Policy and Process.

This policy and process does not supersede authorities given to the Board of Trustees and the Executive Team under the First Unitarian Policy Governance Framework.

Supporting Guidelines

Participants finding themselves in conflict should:

- First engage in self-reflection

- Take responsibility upon themselves to resolve the conflict
- Use the conflict to mend relationships and provide healing
- Use conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth

Persons asked to assist in resolving conflicts should:

- Respect and offer compassion to all of the participants
- Listen with an open mind
- Approach the matters raised with impartiality
- Explore the facts with care
- Recuse themselves from matters in which they have a conflict of interest
- Use conflict resolution best practices in dealing with the participants and their issues
- Offer the least intrusive intervention necessary to resolve conflicts
- Apply the least restrictive alternative
- Balance strict confidentiality and transparency with the safety of the participants in conflict and the Congregation
- Refer individuals to pastoral care, counseling or other services, as needed

Committee on Right Relations

The Board of Trustees established the Committee on Right Relations (CRR) pursuant to Article III Section 6 of the Church Bylaws by adoption of its charter. The CRR's purpose is to execute the First Unitarian Portland Right Relations Policy and Process. The CRR has several authorities and responsibilities outlined below. One of these responsibilities is to recruit a cadre of volunteers to support its work, and oversee coaches, Right Relations Teams (RRT) and Healthy Congregations Teams (HCT) to assist the CRR in carrying out its mandate.

The Conflict Resolution Process

Conflicts may be addressed by one or more of the following four distinct types of interventions:

- A. A Self Guided Process
- B. Right Relations Team coaching and facilitated dialogue process;
- C. A Healthy Congregations Team Intervention; and
- D. A Destructive Behavior/Imminent Danger Intervention.

Self-Guided Process:

Self-Help/Personal Reflection: If a congregant experiences a conflict, they may first engage in self-reflective work to see how they might come back to right relations on their own. This self-reflection may include: reflecting on what occurred, considering

one's own role in the interaction, carefully examining alternative hypotheses to any conclusions we may have formed, considering our covenantal promises to one another, and considering what we might need for resolution. If these processes alone restore us to right relations, the matter is resolved. If this is not sufficient or possible, then the congregant may reach out to the CRR for support and coaching.

Direct Conversation. The expectation is that the vast majority of conflicts will be resolved at this level directly by the people involved, without external intervention. The CRR's materials and training may support congregants in such conversations. Participants resolve differences themselves by having each person involved doing their own self work (as above), then agree to meet with one another to have a conversation on their own, each sharing their experience and requests for repair and/or behavior change with one another. If this process restores the participants to right relations, the matter is resolved. If a direct (unfacilitated) conversation is not sufficient or possible, then the congregant may reach out to the CRR for support and coaching.

The Right Relations Team Coaching and Facilitated Dialogue Process

When a conflict arises between groups or individual congregants, the process is generally to start with the Self-Guided Process (above) to try to resolve the matter, and only if that is not able to resolve it, to then ask for help from the Committee on Right Relations.

Anyone can request support from the CRR. A person or group directly experiencing conflict may reach out themselves for help; a congregant aware of but not part of a conflict may suggest to another that they contact the CRR, or may contact the CRR and ask them to reach out to the person or group in conflict; or the CRR may on its own initiative reach out to check in about a possible conflict.

Some situations may advance immediately to higher levels, such as those which merit a Healthy Congregations Team intervention or involve imminent danger or destructive behavior and merit an Immediate Danger Intervention.

Others may start at a higher level of intervention, such as Coaching and Support, which may lead the participants to engage in a Direct (unfacilitated) Conversation.

Throughout the process, all persons will be treated with respect and compassion consistent with the First Unitarian Portland Covenant of Right Relations and UU principles.

Coaching and Support. A congregant can request coaching and support from the CRR. A team member selected by the CRR will provide reflective listening and offer guidance that can point the way toward reconciliation. The focus is on self-reflection on

that person's role in the conflict, empathy for the other person(s) and their perspective(s), and gaining additional skills or techniques to resolve the situation themselves. This may occur before or after they have attempted a conversation on their own. The CRR team member will listen deeply to the congregant's concerns, ask clarifying questions, and explore ideas that may help the person to resolve the situation themselves. If the coaching alone restores the participant(s) to right relations, the matter is resolved. If the coaching helps the participant(s) to have a direct (unfacilitated) conversation with the other participants and that conversation restores the participants to right relations, the matter is resolved. If support and coaching is not enough to resolve the situation, the person may move to a facilitated conversation.

Facilitated Conversation. Congregants may request that the CRR help facilitate a conversation between individuals or groups.

1. The CRR will review the request, determine if it is within the scope of this policy, and assign a RRT of at least two members to assist.
2. The members of an RRT may be members of the CRR and/or may include any other trusted member of the congregation who is trained in the right relations process and selected by the CRR to assist.
3. All members of the RRT will meet with the requesting congregant and gather information including the recitation of events that led to the conflict, the impact on the participants, and the requested remedies.
4. Next, all members of the RRT will reach out to other people involved in the conflict, request to meet with them, and gather the same information from them.
5. The RRT will then organize a meeting with all participants in order to conduct a facilitated discussion. This meeting may be in person or virtual. It may be conducted where the participants engage simultaneously with one another, or by "shuttle" where the participants are in separate rooms (in person or virtually), or asynchronously.
6. The goal of a facilitated discussion is for the participants to more fully understand each other, clarify misunderstandings, and improve communications such that they can reach a mutually satisfactory plan for remedy and restoration of right relations.
7. The RRT does not impose agreements on the participants; instead, they assist the participants in crafting a set of agreements that work for them.
8. At the conclusion of a facilitated discussion, the participants will be able to mutually decide what, if anything, about their process or agreements will be shared with others. If this conversation restores the participants to right relations, the matter is resolved. If this is insufficient to solve the issue, and/or the matter concerns a significant risk to individual or community safety, a HCT may be formed to address the matter.

Healthy Congregations Team intervention. In situations which involve a significant risk to individual or community safety, but do not rise to the level of Immediate Danger as described below, the CRR may in their sole discretion convene a

HCT. This process may also be used when there is reason to believe that an individual may pose a danger to the congregation because of past criminal, violent, or threatening behavior. The CRR will weigh the information available to them in order to determine if formation of an HCT is the appropriate approach. If so:

1. The CRR will select an ad hoc team of at least three members to serve as the HCT for a given matter. The HCT will provide written notice to the involved participants that it will begin conducting information gathering.
2. The members of an HCT may be members of the CRR and/or may include any other trusted member of the congregation who is trained in the right relations process and selected by the CRR to assist.
3. Information gathering will include the team together speaking to each involved person, hearing what they each need by way of resolution, and coming to consensus as a team as to any further action. It may also include interviews, meetings, discussions and review of relevant documents, and the like.
4. When the HCT has spoken with the person(s) alleging harm and is considering imposing a remedy, prior to doing so they must first share the allegations of specific behaviors and resulting harm with the person(s) named to have engaged in those behaviors, and give them the opportunity to share their experience and perspective. The HCT will not impose any remedies until the person(s) have been given an opportunity to speak with them. In the event that a person does not make themselves available to the HCT in a reasonable time frame, the HCT will exercise their best judgment in determining a remedy.
5. At the conclusion of the information gathering stage, the HCT will engage in deliberations as to the appropriate remedy and seek consensus.
6. Once the HCT reaches consensus on the proposed remedy, they will prepare a written plan and submit it to all participants for consideration. The HCT will provide an opportunity for the participants to discuss the written plan with them. Any revisions of the plan following such discussions are wholly within the discretion of the HCT.
7. Finally, the HCT will forward the written plan to the Board for approval. The Board will review and deliberate over the matter in a closed, executive session to protect the privacy rights of the participants involved.

CONSIDERATIONS

To aid in evaluating the situation and determining the appropriate response, following should be considered:

- **Credibility & Certainty:** Did a person admit the alleged behavior? If not, has the Healthy Congregation Team reached a reasonable certainty that the behaviors alleged were more likely than not to have occurred?
- **Dangerousness:** Did the behavior involve a threat of or physical harm to persons or property?

- **History:** What is the history of this behavior from this individual in the past? How frequently did the behavior occur? Has the behavior been formally addressed previously with this person?
- **Disruptiveness:** Did the behavior disrupt church functioning? If the behavior were to recur, to what degree is it likely to disrupt church functioning? Are there valid reasons behind the disruption that mitigate or excuse the behavior, or that a person under consideration of a remedy may have reasonably considered valid?
- **Organizational Integrity:** Was the behavior out of alignment with First Unitarian's core value as a welcoming, inclusive community? Did the behavior dissuade others from participation in church activities? If the behavior recurs, how likely is it that existing or prospective congregants will be dissuaded from participation in church functions because of the behavior?
- **Causes:** Why is the behavior occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the organization? Is it due to personal distress? Is it due to a medical or mental health condition?
- **Mitigation:** What if any steps were taken to reduce the adverse impact of the behavior?
- **Probability of Change:** How likely is it that the behavior will continue, exacerbate, diminish or cease in the future?
- **Age or Capacity:** Does the age or physical or mental capacity of the participant(s) require special consideration?
- **Impact:** Even though intent to harm may not have been present, was the impact of the behavior such that a remedy should be imposed?

REMEDIES

Remedies may include, but are not limited to:

1. **No Action Taken.** In such an instance, the written report will include the information gathered, and the deliberations which led to the finding that taking no action was the appropriate result.
2. **A Written Agreement** regarding specific behavioral expectations for participation in church activities.
3. **A Limited Access Agreement**, which limits the participant(s) from certain activities for a determined period of time.
4. **Exclusion from Participation** in the church or on its premises for a determined period of time, which may be time limited or permanent. This remedy is reserved for situations in which:
 - a. a participant refuses to sign an agreement, or
 - b. a participant refuses to abide by an agreement that was made, or
 - c. a participant is engaging in behavior of sufficient severity which is likely to continue.
5. **Written Findings** and explanations. All written agreements will include the reasons for such action, and conditions for lifting of the limited access or

exclusion provisions, if any, will be clearly communicated and documented.

6. **Referrals** to other resources, internal and external. For example, the HCT may refer participants to have a facilitated conversation with the RRT, or for coaching with the CRR, or may refer a participant to an external skill-building training or lay ministry support.
7. **Follow Through.** The HCT's plan will also name the steps needed to enforce the integrity of the decision.

If the HCT's final recommendation for a situation is "No Action Taken," the Board of Trustees will not review the matter unless an interested participant requests it. Any action recommended by the HCT which could impact the rights of any members will be forwarded to the Board Officers Committee for consideration. The Board Officers Committee will refer its proposal for action in response to the HCT recommendation to the full Board for further consideration and a final decision. All Board discussions regarding the matter will be conducted in closed, executive session to protect member privacy. For any remedy involving limited access or exclusion from participation, however, the Board action will be stated publicly in the Board minutes, but explanatory content will remain confidential to the extent necessary to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. The Board's decision in response to the Board Officer Committee's proposal for action will be the final step of any HCT intervention process. The HCT will communicate Board approved actions to the affected individuals and to any other individual necessary to ensure full compliance with the action.

Limited access agreements and removal from church community are remedies to be used only in situations where remedies short of that have failed, or if a person has engaged in behavior that is severe or has caused significant harm, and that person does not agree to make changes in their behavior and follow through with that commitment.

POST REMEDY RELIEF

Any action of limited access or exclusion from participation may have a statement describing what specific circumstances or conditions would be required in order for reinstatement or lifting of limitations to occur. These should be specific and measurable, and may include a statement that no reinstatement will be permitted.

Any request for lifting of limitations or reinstatement must be made in writing by the affected member themselves. The request must contain a detailed explanation of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a lifting of limitations or reinstatement would be justified.

The request shall go to the CRR. The CRR will review the matter and make a recommendation to the Board. The Board will review the request and the CRR's recommendation and respond with their decision within sixty days of the date of the request. Unless the plan specifies otherwise, the Board will only review requests for lifting of limitations or reinstatement no sooner than one year following the approval of the action, and any subsequent requests may be made no sooner than one year following the member being informed of the Board's most recent response.

Destructive Behavior/ Imminent Danger Intervention

The procedures of First Unitarian Portland for dealing with alleged incidents of destructive behavior which require an immediate response are set forth below. Even in situations that require the application of these procedures, all involved individuals should be treated with dignity and respect.

Acts of destructive behavior include acts or imminent threats of physical harm to persons or property (including financial harm).

1. When it appears that an immediate response is needed to an unfolding, dangerous situation, a minister, if available, should initiate the response or, if a minister is not available, the leader of the group involved should act to protect all involved. The response may include:
 1. Asking the offending person or persons to leave the premises;
 2. Suspending the service, meeting, or activity until such time as it can be safely resumed; or
 3. Taking other reasonable actions that are deemed necessary.

If the behavior poses an immediate threat of physical injury or death or damage to property, then the appropriate authorities shall be contacted, such as police, fire, ambulance. [See <https://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/alternatives-calling-police>]

Whenever any of these actions is undertaken without a minister present, notification must be given promptly to the church ministers and CRR.

Complaints alleging dangerous, threatening, disruptive, or disrespectful behavior for situations not requiring an immediate response will be sent to the CRR.

Confidentiality

Communications with the CRR, RRT and HCT are confidential, except where disclosure is reasonably believed to be necessary to avoid physical harm, property damage, or financial harm, or is required by law. Processes which involve Board approval may require sharing of certain otherwise confidential information. Participants to a given process may mutually agree in writing to share about their process with others; all participants in a process must agree before any confidential information may be shared.

Amendments

The First Unitarian Portland Board of Trustees and the CRR are jointly responsible for maintaining and upholding this policy and process. Amendments to this policy and process shall be recommended by the CRR and approved by the Board of Trustees.