



## Tapestry: A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

<b>Title: Dispute and Conflict Resolution Process and Procedures</b>		
Initial Board Approval Date: <b>June 2013</b>	Date First Issued: May 5, 2013	
Date Board Approved Revision:	Revision #:	Effective Date of Revision:
Approval Signature: Keith Tuominen Title: President		

### **BACKGROUND/HISTORY/DISCUSSION:**

An ad hoc committee appointed by the Tapestry Board of Trustees met in March, 2013 to draft a revised Covenant of Right Relations. It was felt that, in connection with this revised covenant, a comprehensive policy and procedure for conflict resolution should be developed for Tapestry.

### **PURPOSE:**

To provide comprehensive and consistent guidelines for resolving conflicts of various types that may arise at Tapestry.

### **POLICY:**

Tapestry leadership is committed to resolving conflicts fairly and promptly so that small issues do not become bigger issues. This is in keeping with our Covenant of Right Relations, the UU Seven Principles, and the process outlined in this document.

### **AREAS/COMMITTEES/SUBCOMMITTEES INVOLVED:**

Various

### **MODIFYING CIRCUMSTANCES/EXCEPTIONS:**

N/A

### **INTRODUCTION:**

For those times when conflict arises, Tapestry has established a 3-phased approach for addressing it. These steps include personal reflection, addressing concerns directly, and seeking assistance when needed. If resolving a conflict within the Tapestry community requires additional support, the **Right Relations Team (RRT)** is available, and will treat all matters confidentially.

Written complaints should be delivered to one of the following:

1. The Right Relations Team
2. Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM)
3. Board of Trustees
4. Minister

## PROCEDURE(S):

### General Conflict Resolution Steps that can apply to most situations:

#### Step 1 - Personal Reflection:

- When conflict occurs within Tapestry, those in conflict are encouraged to work it out together in a face-to-face meeting.
- First, own your issue. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable.
- Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Try writing down what happened and why, to get it clear in your own mind.
- Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Did this person see or hear it in the same way? Based on your telling of events and your feelings, would they feel the same way?
- Seek understanding of the situation by asking humanizing questions. What sort of influences might be at play? Is there a background story that you might not currently be aware of? What might be causing the behavior?

#### Step 2 - Address the Concern Directly:

- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private as soon as possible after the incident.
- Talk directly with the person (member, minister, staff) with whom you have the conflict.
- During the discussion, use “I” statements (“I feel” not “you did”). Actively listen to the other person; if necessary, repeat what the person just said to make sure you heard it correctly.
- If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts in writing, again using “I” statements. (Email is not appropriate for this sort of writing.) Be available to hear the response.
- If you feel that safety is an issue, or that the conversation is too difficult to manage alone, use an appropriate third party; the Right Relations Team has members who are available to help.
- If the conflict is not with the person but with how that person is performing a job (staff, RE teacher, etc.), address your concern to the proper supervisor of that person.

#### Step 3 - Referral to RRT:

- If needed, those in conflict are encouraged to contact the RRT directly or may be referred by the Board or Minister to the RRT.
- In conflicts of a serious nature, consult the Tapestry Bylaws
- One or both members should complete the *Resolution Assistance Request Form*.
  - All participants in the RRT process participate on a strictly voluntary basis.
  - ***Confidentiality parameters and ground rules for interacting during the RRT process are defined and agreed to prior to initiating the process.***

After gathering information about the conflict and determining that it is within their scope of practice, the RRT will provide a safe and structured environment with facilitation for disputants to resolve the conflict. (See **Right Relation Team Role and Scope of Practice** below.\*\*)

**Referral Resource(s):**

- If no resolution is reached, RRT members suggest next steps to disputants, including the possibility of calling upon the "Healthy Congregations Team" of the PSWD of the UUA.

**Debriefing and Documentation:**

- RRT members debrief the conflict resolution process with one another and make a record of the mediation using the *Resolution Assistance Request Form* with additional pages as needed.
- Debriefing and sharing of final documentation (where appropriate) with those in conflict will be the final step in the process.

**Specific Cases that May Require Varied Responses:****I. Conflict or Grievance between Two Members**

The two individuals should first meet, discuss and try to work it out between themselves.

- 1.1 If it can't be resolved, one or both of the parties can fill out a *Resolution Assistance Request Form* and submit it to the RRT who will review the matter and meet with the parties in an effort to resolve it.
- 1.2 The members of the RRT will discuss the matter, and may ask for input or assistance from the Board of Trustees depending on the nature and severity of the matter.

**II. Disputes, Conflicts or Grievances between Two Board Members**

The two individuals should meet and discuss and try to work it out between themselves following steps 1 and 2 from the general procedures.

- 2.1 If it can't be resolved, one or both of the parties can fill out a *Resolution Assistance Request Form* and submit it to the RRT who will review the matter and meet with the parties in an effort to resolve it.
- 2.2 The members of the RRT will discuss the matter, and may ask for input or assistance from the Board of Trustees or the Minister depending on the nature and severity of the matter.
- 2.3 Removal of Trustees and Officers of the Board is regulated by Article VI, Section 7 of the Tapestry Bylaws.

**III. Disputes Involving the Minister**

The complainant/member should first make an appointment with the Minister to discuss the matter face-to-face.

- 3.1 If, after honest conversation and dialogue between the member and the Minister, the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, the member should complete the *Resolution Assistance Request Form* and submit it to the Chair of the Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM). CoSM is the committee at Tapestry that deals with issues related to ministry.
- 3.2 The members of CoSM will discuss the matter, speak with both the Minister and the complainant and may ask for input or assistance from the Worship Committee, the

Board of Trustees or the Right Relations Team, depending on the nature and severity of the issue.

- 3.3 If the matter is brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees, the board may ask for input or assistance from the office of the District Executive at the UUA's district office, the Pacific Southwest District (PSWD). The board may meet with the District Executive or a designee to discuss and resolve the issue, depending on the nature severity of the matter.
- 3.4 In some unusual circumstances, the PSWD may recommend the services of an outside arbitrator or mediator.
- 3.5 A member of CoSM or the Board or the RRT will meet with the complainant and provide written feedback as to the resolution and may follow up with the member at a later time to see how things are going.
- 3.6 Dismissal of a Settled Minister is regulated by Article VIII, Section 2 of the Tapestry Bylaws.

#### **IV. Emergent Issues**

In some situations, immediate action may be warranted and should be taken. Two such situations are described below:

- 4.1 If there is a dispute or conflict that involves another individual exhibiting violent behavior, it is appropriate to call the police to remove the person. Refer to the congregation's policy "Dealing with Difficult Behavior."
- 4.2 Anyone who acquires knowledge or has a reasonable suspicion that a child or youth is being harmed, sexually molested or exploited, injured or been the victim of significant objectionable conduct should immediately report the incident to the person in charge of the activity or event, such as the DRE, the Minister, or volunteer lay leader or teacher. Refer to the congregation's Child Protection Policy.

#### **\*\* Right Relations Team Role and Scope of Practice:**

(Note – all issues involving the RRT Team will be held in strict confidence.)

The RRT is available for the following conflicts, if invited:

- Conflicts with minister (invited by the minister or by the Committee on Shared Ministry).
- Staff to staff conflicts (invited by the Board of Trustees).
- Conflicts involving policy (invited by the Board of Trustees).

The scope of practice of the RRT excludes the following:

- Conflicts that arise outside of our congregation.
- Issues needing professional services (mental health issues, marriage therapy, threats of violence or any illegal activity).

In resolving issues, RRT Mediators will utilize the following key steps:

#### **A. Initiation**

1. Validate participants' willingness and courage in seeking mediation.
2. Explain the process (impartiality of mediators, and goal of voluntary agreement)

3. Go over ground rules for session:
  - Speak respectfully
  - Try to remain open to hearing the other person's point of view
  - Each participant will have equal opportunity to speak
  - Confidentiality
  - Any other rules which are important to participants

**B. Clarification**

1. Ask the first questions and restate the answers to clarify issues.
2. Move conversation between participants to reduce tension and hostility.
3. Clarify, validate, and follow leads, and ask about both issues and feelings.
4. Take notes and summarize issues at end of the session.
5. Summarize issues and ask if there is anything more before moving on.
6. Transition occurs when all major issues are clarified and participants seem ready to speak to each other. One mediator explains any next phases and validates efforts of participants.
7. Review and understand the Tapestry Bylaws. Some conflicts require action that is regulated by the bylaws, and some conflicts require a vote of the congregation.

**C. Finding mutual understanding**

1. Mediators choose an easy issue or common ground for participants to begin this phase.
  - Guide parties to speak to one another, beginning with chosen topic.
  - Help them to restate the other's point before responding, especially at first when moving toward understanding is the primary key.
2. Transition occurs when parties understand main concerns and they trust each other enough to work together toward solutions.

**D. Agreement**

1. Mediators help participants develop a mutually-agreed upon resolution.
  - Begin with easy issues and working towards most difficult disagreements.
  - Make sure each agreement is clear, mutual, and workable.
  - Bring back suggested solutions from earlier phases.
  - Guide participants to resolve each important issue.
  - Do not suggest solutions.
  - Create and read aloud, point by point, a written resolution.
2. Transition occurs when both participants agree to sign it.

**E. Closure**

1. Affirm and encourage both parties and their work in the session.
2. Give a copy of the agreement to both participants or let them know when they will receive it.
3. Determine which of the mediators will follow up with participants in 2–4 weeks.

**Resolution Assistance Request Form**

See the following two pages.



**TAPESTRY, A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION  
Resolution Assistance Request Form**

In accordance with our Covenant of Rights Relations, Tapestry will pursue the ideals of a beloved community and promote constructive relations among members. Nevertheless, differences of opinion are part of the life of an active congregation; therefore, we urge each person to follow the steps outlined in Tapestry’s Conflict Resolution Policy and Procedure. If the member has attempted to resolve the issue by personal reflection and meeting directly with the other individual(s), then members are urged to resolve the dispute by seeking assistance and completing this *Resolution Assistance Request Form*. This form may be completed by one or more persons involved in a conflict and should be delivered to any one of the following as appropriate.

**Groups or Individuals Who Provide Resolution Assistance:**

Situation	Resource
Conflicts involving paid staff or other issues.	Minister
All types of unresolved conflicts.	Right Relations Team
Board Policy Issues and other conflicts	Board of Trustees
Matters related to the Minister and Ministry	Committee on Shared Ministry

You will find a list of current members of the Right Relations Team, the Board of Trustees, and the Committee on Shared Ministry on the Tapestry web site. Contact information is provided.

1. **Your Name(s)** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Contact Information**  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Covenant of Right Relations Issue or Board Policy Violated**

Please identify the party or parties involved in the conflict and the Covenant of Right Relations issue or Board Policy that you feel is at the core of this dispute.

---



---

**4 Description of the Incident/Issue**

Please describe your concerns and/or the incident or issue as completely as possible. Use as much space as needed and include names, dates, and other specific information. Be objective and try to avoid personal feelings and derogatory remarks. You may use/attach additional pages if needed.

---



---



---

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

You will be contacted within seven (7) days from the time of the receipt of this form regarding the expedition of your issue and the arrangement for a personal meeting with the appropriate Resolution Assistance member or group.

***\*\* All information in this document will be confidential and will be shared only with the members of the Right Relations Team.***

.....

**For Documentation by Right Relations Team Members or Other Recipient**

**Resolution Assistance Request Form Received by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Individual Expediting this Resolution Assistance Request:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Resolution Assistance Request Documentation**

Resolution Assistance Process	Action Taken	Documented by:	Date
Receipt of Initiator's Resolution Assistance Request Form			
Resolution Request Member/Team discussion			
Meeting with Initiators and Right Relations Team Member(s)			
Meeting with other individuals, COSM, Board, Minister			
Additional meetings or steps needed			