FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF INDIANA PA
LEVEL ONE: INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT PROCEDURE

Rationale:

This procedure's intent is to provide a series of informal steps for resolving conflicts at the Covenant Restoration Policy's Level 1: Interpersonal Conflict. It is our hope that this procedure will help to resolve conflicts within our church community at this level, when they are relatively minor.

This document is based on a number of sources, primarily a document from Cedar Valley UU Church as well as suggestions from a Drive Time Essay on the UUA Website. COM adopted the Cedar Valley document as a template and adapted its language and provisions to fit our congregation, received comments from standing committees, and submitted it to the Board of Trustees. It was accepted for one year at the Board's November 16 meeting.

Procedure:

Within a Unitarian Universalist church, different views and beliefs are discussed in a free and supportive environment. In fact, it is often through constructive discord that we continue to grow and thrive as a liberal religious community. Interpersonal conflict, on the other hand, interferes with that freedom, and because conflict is a part of almost every interpersonal relationship, managing it is the responsibility of all members and active friends within the church community.

A. Qualities of Conflict:
Conflict arises when one person perceives that another individual is restricting or suppressing their personal freedom or dignity in a manner which results in a defensive climate, characterized by these qualities:

1. Evaluation: judging and criticizing other group members.
2. Control: imposing the will of one group member on the others.
3. Strategy: using hidden agendas.
4. Indifference: demonstrating apathy.
5. Superiority: expressing dominance.
6. Inflexibility: being rigid in one's willingness to listen to others.

Individuals involved in conflict may blame the other party or parties. Further, individuals may go beyond the specific behavior in question and blame the character of the other person. A final problem that is often encountered in conflicts is a win - lose mentality. Instead, the steps below focus on each individual's goals/outcomes in order to promote a win - win outcome.

B. Steps for Resolving Interpersonal Conflict:

1. Examine your own role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Do some soul searching.

2. At this step, and at all succeeding steps that become necessary, own your issue. Anonymous complaints are not acceptable.

3. Get a reality check from a trusted third party. Compare your perceptions. Did they see it or hear it in the same way?

4. Based on your telling of events and your feelings about it, would they feel the same way?

5. Talk directly with the person with whom you have the disagreement.

6. Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private and as soon as possible after the incident.

7. Use "I" statements in your discussion ("I feel..." not "You did..."); use active listening.

8. If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts into writing. Be available to hear the response.

9. If you feel that safety is an issue, use an appropriate third party or the Committee on Ministries to provide a safe environment for the discussion.

10. If the conflict is more with how a person is performing a job (staff, religious educator, etc.), address the concern to the proper supervisor so that the individual does not feel "supervised" from all sides.

C. Additional Process for Conflict Resolution:
If the steps above are unsuccessful in resolving the conflict, the following process should be undertaken:

1. Talk with the Minister for counseling regarding the issue.

2. If all parties involved in the conflict agree that the Minister is neutral and appropriate, the Minister may act as mediator.

3. If the Minister believes she or he is not the appropriate mediator, the Minister will direct you to the Committee on Ministries for mediation.

4. If the Minister is the other party in the conflict, go directly to the Committee on Ministries for support and mediation.

D. **Possible Outcomes:** The Committee on Ministries and the Minister are empowered to achieve compromise,
make recommendations, and negotiate behavioral contracts. Committee members can recommend counseling or other behavior changing strategies when behaviors are harmful to the church, or not expressive of our collective values. When one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, the behavior is unchanged and/or the behavior is a threat to the church, the matter will be considered to be one of disruptive behavior.

Version 2.4 (COM review 9-27-16). Accepted by Board of Trustees 11-16-16 for one year.

Sources Consulted:

Brammer, Karen. Rev. "Return to Covenant." *Drive Time Essays. <u>Volume 3: Small Congregations</u>*, <u>Track 4 (MP3, 5:52 minutes)</u>. Feb. 2009. http://www.uua.org/governance/covenant/182770.shtml

Cedar Valley Unitarian Universalist Church. "Conflict Resolution Policy." April 20, 2010. <u>http://96bda424cfcc34d9dd1a-0a7f10f87519dba22d2dbc6233a731e5.r41.cf2.rackcdn.com/CedarValleyUnitarianUniversalists/ConflictResolutionPolicy2010.pdf</u>

Unitarian Universalist Association. "Conflict Management in UU Congregations." <u>www.uua.org/safe/conflict</u>