

## **Conflict and Grievance Policy**

The First Congregational United Church of Christ (FCUCC) in Grand Marais desires to create and sustain a positive and fair environment, one that ensures appropriate lines of respectful communication, trust and goodwill between all employees, the pastor, lay leaders and congregation.

We recognize that healthy churches experience conflict, and that disagreements, hurts, perceived criticism, unfairness or other issues or offenses will surface from time to time among people who work together. When that happens, we strongly urge the parties involved to make their best efforts to resolve the issue or conflict among themselves, as soon as possible. Failing these efforts, we outline steps to be taken to deal with the conflict or, if necessary, file a grievance. The desired outcome of this process is open discussion of issues, improved communication, and a reconciliation that helps restore the wholeness and well-being of all parties.

### **Addressing Conflicts:**

Appropriate levels of confidentiality shall be maintained by the parties. At any part or time in this process, the aggrieved party may be accompanied by a trusted friend or ally.

### **Peer to Peer Conflict**

Individuals are strongly urged to make a concerted effort to resolve differences directly with the person with whom they have the conflict. If unsuccessful, the aggrieved person should take the problem to the pastor for help in resolving the conflict. If that is not successful or the individual is uncomfortable discussing the conflict with the pastor, the person can submit the issue to the Moderator. If that is not successful, the person can submit the issue to the Grievance Committee for their review.

### **Conflict with the Pastor**

If the Pastor is part of the conflict, then prior to an individual submitting a grievance, the individual is strongly urged to make a concerted effort to resolve his/her differences directly with the Pastor. The Pastor must be provided an opportunity to be made aware of the issue and have an opportunity to resolve it. If the conflict cannot be resolved between the two parties, then the conflict is brought to the Moderator. If the conflict is not resolved, then the person can submit the issue to the Grievance Committee for their review.

### **Conflict with the Board of Directors**

If the conflict involves the Board of Directors, the conflict should be reported to the Grievance committee and Pastor. The Grievance Committee will review the grievance and provide a recommendation for action to the Board of Directors.

**A grievance is defined** as an unresolved conflict filed, concerning alleged illegal discrimination, harassment or other forms of offensive behavior in the church environment. Parties should be mindful of appropriate reporting of serious accusations to appropriate civil authorities.

**The Grievance Procedure** is a process to be used by any employee, volunteer or congregant who feels they have been subjected to illegal discrimination, harassment or other form of offensive behavior by an employee of the Church or by any other person they encounter at the workplace or at any place associated with the church. It is not only appropriate but required by this policy that they report their grievance as soon as possible.

**The Grievance Committee** is a standing committee consisting of three persons appointed by the Board of Directors (BOD). Committee appointees should not be participants of the grievance, nor should they be allies or opponents to any party therein. Any member of the Grievance Committee or the BOD who is directly involved in the grievance should recuse themselves, and the BOD will appoint a replacement. If not a part of the grievance, the pastor may be consulted for advice and assistance.

**Guiding Principles and Guidelines:** The Grievance Process is a confidential process between the parties, the Grievance Committee and the Board of Directors. The committee shall be objective in their research, deliberation and decision-making. They shall consider all aspects of the problem and resolution. They will facilitate at least one face-to-face meeting between the affected parties. They will not withhold any information from either of the parties concerning the grievance. All supporting documentation should be known by both parties.

**Investigating Grievances:** The grievance committee investigates the matter promptly and discreetly to the extent reasonably possible. The grievance committee will protect the confidentiality of a grievance if and to the extent reasonably possible, but does not guarantee that such a grievance or the identity of the individual will be kept confidential, since certain information may need to be disclosed for the grievance to be properly investigated or may be discernible through the investigation.

No retaliation or intimidation directed toward anyone who makes a grievance in good faith under this policy or who in good faith provides information on a grievance investigation under this policy will be tolerated. If the offensive conduct continues or recurs, or any retaliatory or intimidating conduct occurs, it should be reported immediately.

An employee against whom a grievance has been filed may be suspended prior to and during an investigation at FCUCC Board of Director's discretion. Suspensions may be with or without pay at the discretion of the FCUCC Board of Directors.

**The Grievance Decision:** The Grievance Committee will brief the Board of Directors on the issue and submit its resolution or any recommendations for approval by the Board of Directors.

**Resolution:** If the investigation concludes that the matter does not rise to the level of a grievance as defined above, but involves a personality clash, a working style preference, or other working relationship issue, the supervisor involved and/or the Board of Directors will assess the issue and make a recommendation to the involved parties on a course of action to improve working relationships.

If the investigation concludes that a violation has occurred, resolution of the grievances can include, but is not necessarily limited to, an apology, direction to stop the offensive behavior, counseling or training, verbal or written warning, suspension with or without pay, or termination.

The Minnesota Conference should be advised, should a grievance procedure be undertaken. Authorized ministers may be subject to a Fitness Review conducted by the Committee on Ministry, Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ. The MN Conference may call for a Situational Support Consultation at any point. (The Minnesota Conference "Manual on Ministry" can be located at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)).