

CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY **ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

This conflict resolution policy is designed to demonstrate the commitment of St. Luke's United Methodist Church to resolving differences in a positive, constructive, and Christ-like manner, using the processes set forth in the book of Matthew, Chapter 18. The goal of the policy is, therefore, to create a framework for members and attendees (i.e. the parish) as well as the staff of St. Luke's to work together to overcome any differences they may have and to find the common ground that is shared by us all in the teachings of Christ, rather than having anyone walk away from the church because of an unresolved conflict.

For purposes of this policy, "conflict" is recognized and defined as being as simple as a difference of opinion, or it may involve a disagreement over church doctrine, or dissatisfaction with one or more of the church's leadership, or dissatisfaction or disagreement with a decision by one its governing committees (i.e. Board of Trustees, Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee, Emmaus Council), or an argument involving two or more individuals concerning the policies and direction of the church. Regardless of the nature of the conflict, it is our prayer that all members, attendees and staff of St. Luke's United Methodist Church will follow the example of Jesus Christ in treating each other with love and respect, even when there is not agreement on an issue.

Recognizing that differences of opinion are inevitable in any human endeavor, however, St. Luke's calls on its members, attendees and staff to follow this policy so that when conflict does occur, Jesus will be honored by our efforts to resolve our differences in love and maintain the unity of the body of Christ that is St. Luke's on 5th. (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Therefore, we ask that:

1. **Self-Reflection & Prayer** (Matthew 18)

Jesus tells us to take time to examine our role in a conflict. If any person in the church has a conflict, he or she should begin in prayer and first ask God for direction. They should ask themselves whether they can let the conflict go. They should put themselves in the other's shoes and ask themselves what others may say they have contributed to the problem. They should also ask themselves what it is that God sees, and whether they are putting their personal ideas, thoughts and desires above what is best for the congregation.

2. **One on One Discussions** (Matthew 18:15)

If the matter is not resolved through self-reflection and prayer and there is still a disagreement or conflict, particularly a disagreement between two parties, the second step and the ideal response is for the two parties to meet together, face to face, to discuss the matter and seek common ground. (Matthew 18:15).

If any person in the church has a concern or a complaint about a leader of the church, whether the pastor or a lay leader, the concerned person is strongly encouraged to discuss the matter directly with the leader involved (Matthew 18:15).

The purpose of this second step is to resolve the conflict, not to get mad or to get even. The situation/conflict should not be viewed as a competition where one has to win and one has to lose. All conflict is not necessarily bad. Conflict that is dealt with, discussed and resolved can be good if it provides an opportunity unity and growth within the congregation. As a result, each person should work hard to understand the other person's point of view, to listen to the other person without interrupting, and to try to work together to create solutions.

Accept and respect that individual opinions may differ. In all interactions with each other, especially one on one discussions under this policy, the people of St. Luke's United Methodist Church will respect different ideas and views and will express disagreement with civility and Christian love. (1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:18).

Gossip is strongly discouraged as dishonoring to our Lord Jesus Christ (James 4:11-12). One on one discussions under this policy should be focused on the issue or problem, not the person(s) involved. Additionally, each person in the meeting should speak for themselves, not an unknown group of people or "many people in the congregation."

Disagreements and conflicts should be addressed as soon as possible. The longer conflict is unresolved, the harder it is to bridge the differences (Matthew 5:23-24).

Resolving conflict is impossible if one is unwilling or unable to forgive. If and when the matter is resolved, the parties agree to put the issue/conflict behind them, and move forward in a positive and constructive manner that allows them to stay healthy, spiritually and emotionally. This means the parties will open their hearts and minds to allow Christ to fortify their spirit, and they will commit to let go of the conflict and to not discuss it further.

3. **Objective Assistance/Mediation** (Matthew 18:16)

If the matter is not resolved through one-on-one discussions or if for any reason it is not possible to meet one-on-one, parties with a conflict or disagreement should seek the assistance of a church leader to help facilitate the resolution process. The mediator should be a person who is accepted by all parties involved and he/she should know something about St. Luke's procedures and decision-making processes. The person should be one who will not take sides, but will be neutral regarding the issues and conflict.

It is recognized by the parties that a member of the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee may be the best person to serve as a mediator for issues involving the pastor/staff, a member of the Board of Trustees may be the best person to serve as a mediator for issues involving St. Luke's property and building, and a member of the Emmaus Council may be the best person to serve as a mediator for issues involving St. Luke's vision, ministry and mission. Church staff and leaders may also recommend another party as mediator, possibly someone from outside the congregation or someone obtained through conference-related mediation resources (Matthew 18:16).

Depending on the situation, a team of mediators may be required to intervene in a conflict (Matthew 18:16).

If and when the matter is resolved, the parties agree to put the matter behind them and move forward in a positive and constructive manner by committing to let go of the conflict and to not discuss it any further.

4. **Church Resolution Of The Conflict** (Matthew 18:17(a))

If the matter is not resolved through the assistance of an objective mediator or if, for any reason, it is not possible for the parties to meet with a mediator, then one or both of the parties may bring the conflict to one of the boards of the church for resolution (the Board of Trustees, Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee and/or the Emmaus Council).

Unresolved conflicts involving the St. Luke's property and building must be raised first with the Board of Trustees. Unresolved conflicts involving St. Luke's pastor or staff members must be raised first with the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee. The Emmaus Council shall be the final arbiter/decision-maker of any

conflicts not resolved by the Board of Trustees or the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee. (Matthew 18:17).

Only after all these avenues have been exhausted should parties contact the district superintendent or Bishop of the West Ohio Conference of the Ohio United Methodist Church.

If and when the matter is resolved, the parties agree to put the matter behind them and move forward in a positive and constructive manner by committing to let go of the conflict and to not discuss it any further.

5. **Additional Conflict Resolution Issues**

Concerns involving sexual misconduct of the pastor, church staff and/or lay leadership should be directed first to the West Ohio Conference of the Ohio Methodist Church, which may be contacted directly at 614-844-6200.

All allegations involving child abuse must be handled as directed in St. Luke's United Methodist Church's and the West Ohio Conference's Safe Sanctuaries policies.

Mediators and committees of St. Luke's asked to assist with any conflict resolution shall strive to propose constructive solutions.

For purposes of this policy, "resolution" is defined as mutual agreement or understanding among all the parties in a conflict. When a resolution is achieved, the parties agree to put the matter behind them and move forward in a positive and constructive manner by committing to let go of the conflict and to not discuss it any further.

In all circumstances, the confidentiality of the parties involved in a conflict shall be respected.

There are some conflicts that cannot be resolved to the mutual satisfaction of all of the parties. If all efforts at conflict resolution fail, parties should remember the mission of St. Luke's United Methodist Church. They should let go of any anger or disappointment that they have over the unresolved issue, and move forward focused on the common ground that is shared by us all in the teachings of Christ, rather than walking away from the church because of an unresolved conflict. If, however, they believe they are not able to stay at St. Luke's in peace, any party

wishing to leave St. Luke's fellowship is asked to do so lovingly, without rancor or bitterness, on the part of the person leaving or on the parts of those staying at this church, so that we may not bring disgrace on the name of Jesus (1 John 2:10).

Anyone who believes they are in a conflict situation and is unsure of how to proceed should first contact the pastor for guidance and counsel or, if the conflict involves the pastor, either the lay leader or the Emmaus Council chair or vice-chair.