

# RESOLVING CONFLICT

## Back River United Methodist Church

### Our Vision:

A church with a holy impact on the world

### Our Values:

Back River United Methodist Church highly values these six principles –

- 1) *communication*
- 2) *community*
- 3) *celebration*
- 4) *coaching (discipling)*
- 5) *collaboration*
- 6) *change/risk-taking*

### Our Goal – “Faith-filled Relationships”

Our goal is to establish people in the community of faith by fostering committed, authentic, and accountable relationships. One of the ways we do this is by empowering healthy conflict resolution in our congregation. We invite you to be in prayer when disagreements arise in our community of faith. Open your heart to God’s voice as you seek wisdom, patience, understanding and healing.

# Conflict

is a natural part of life. It should be expected when new ideas come into contact with established routines, when innovation knocks into tradition, whenever two ideas seek to share the same space and attention, and when there is misunderstanding. In churches, conflict can be a positive catalyst for change and serve as a mechanism for creating the momentum necessary for transformation to occur. At other times, however, conflict can be destructive when it is not processed through healthy means and creates dissension within the Body of Christ. At those times, a clear process for healthy conflict resolution will empower a church to move through the difficulties so that it might increase its ability to effectively grow disciples of Jesus Christ and make a holy impact on the world.

### A Scriptural Guideline:

Matthew offers us the wisdom of Jesus on the subject of managing conflict.

*“If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him – work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you’ve made a friend. If he won’t listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If they still won’t listen, tell the church.”*

- Matthew 18:15-17, *The Message*

# A Process for Resolving Conflict

*The following process is designed to help our congregation navigate through the difficult seasons of conflict.*

## Step 1: **C**ommunicate (*Confrontation*)

Begin with prayer for yourself and the individual with whom you have a conflict. Ask God to give wisdom, enable understanding, and provide openness to communication so that the differences can be resolved. When you first have a concern about an action of the pastor, a staff member, church leader, or church member, go directly and speak to the individual. Share your concern and how you have been affected. Explain clearly the change you hope will occur. Listen to the other person and work to identify a “win-win” solution. Hopefully, there will be forgiveness, new patterns of living, and reconciliation. If this does not occur, move to Step Two.

## Step 2: **C**ompanions (*Facilitation*)

Communicate with one of the members of the Pastor-Parish Relations Team (PPR) that you have a concern. Again, pray that God will help you to bring healing. With the help of this PPR member, complete a “Facilitation Form.” The facilitation form will then be given to the Pastor Parish Relations Coordinator. The PPR Coordinator will convene a meeting with the Lay Leader and one other member of the PPR Team to review the facilitation form and will make arrangements to meet with the persons involved. This PPR-Facilitation team will help all parties to identify steps to be taken to resolve the issue. There must be a prayerful commitment for reconciliation to occur. If the Pastor is a part of the conflict, he/she should contact her/his Conference Guide to make him/her aware of the situation.

## Step 3: **C**ouncil (*Remediation*)

If there is still no resolution, all persons involved will meet with the entire PPR Team to work again through the process recommended in Step Two. This group of church leaders will be the final decision making body on the matter.

When the Pastor is involved in the conflict, the Conference Guide is to be notified by the Pastor or PPR Coordinator at least five (5) days prior to the meeting. The Guide will determine if she/he needs to be present. If the pastoral issue is still not resolved, the Guide (in conversation with the District Superintendent) will establish any additional steps that should be taken.

Behaviors that are not helpful to healing include: letter writing campaigns, circulating petitions, secret meetings, calling conference officials (the Bishop and District Superintendent), and gossiping.

## Fighting Fair – Questions to Consider

*Conflict resolution utilizes a number of universal principles in any situation. Among the questions that should be considered in resolving any conflict are:*

- Do I really want to resolve the conflict? Am I willing to do what it takes to fix the problem?
- Can I see the whole picture and not just my own point of view? You may need to broaden your outlook.
- What are the needs and anxieties of everyone involved? Write them down.
- How can I make this fair? Don't be afraid to negotiate.
- What are the possibilities? Think up as many options and solutions as you can. Select the one that gives everyone more of what they want.
- Can we work it out together? Treat each other as equals, with respect.
- What am I feeling? Am I getting too emotional?
- What do I want to change? Be very clear. Attack the problem, not the person.
- What opportunity can this bring? Examine the positives, not the negatives.
- Do we need a neutral third person? Could this be helpful to help create understanding?
- How can both parties win?

*From the Conflict Resolution Network (<http://www.crnhq.org/>)*

## Basics for Resolution

### 1. **Attack the problem not the person:**

Define the problem.

Explore each person's perception of the problem.

Try to understand and respect each point of view without judging.

Use good communication skills including listening, summarizing and clarifying.

### 2. **Concentrate on interests, not positions:**

The position is the outcome you are interested in getting.

The interest is why you want that outcome.

Interests that are involved in conflicts are usually related to our basic needs.

When we focus on interests instead of positions we can start to find solutions.

3. **Come up with options in which both sides can win (Win-Win options).**
4. **Cooperate together to solve the problem fairly.**  
A fair solution respects the interests and needs of both sides.

From *The Conflict Resolution Center* (<http://members.aol.com/pforpeace>)

## A Nun's prayer

*The idea of conflict within faith communities is nothing new. The following is a prayer from a nun who lived in the 17th century.*

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody, helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free of the recital of endless details: give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet: I do not want to be a saint — some of them are so hard to live with — but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so. **Amen.**