

**C**ONFLICT IS A NORMAL PART of congregational life. The Baltimore-Washington Conference conflict transformation policy recognizes that every congregation experiences conflict at times and provides a process for engaging the conflict in healthy ways for the individuals involved and for the congregation.

## Biblical & Theological Foundation

FROM GENESIS THROUGH REVELATION, our salvation history is storied with conflicts between individuals and within and between groups, cultures, congregations, and, yes, even between God and humanity.

IN OUR CONGREGATIONS, conflict can be a catalyst for renewal, health and change and serve as a mechanism for creating momentum toward necessary growth. At other times, however, conflict can become destructive and cause serious dissension among people. A clear and healthy process for working through conflict will empower a congregation to move forward in the midst of the challenges and increase faithfulness and effectiveness within the Church. Jesus outlines the process of conflict resolution saying:

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”*

– MATTHEW 18: 15-19, NRSV

**J**ESUS AFFIRMS HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS which include honest communication with one another, a willingness to be reconciled, and an acknowledgement of the need for forgiveness in our lives. He also claims to be in our midst when we are with those who disagree with us. We are at our best, and honor God, when we work to resolve differences, offer forgiveness and reconcile differences within the congregation.

JESUS TEACHES THAT *“If people refuse to listen even to the church, let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”* Jesus would give the Gentiles and tax collectors a second chance over and over again and responds to Peter’s question about how many times he needed to forgive with, *“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”*

WE HAVE THE SCRIPTURAL MANDATE, the polity resources, and the process to grow our churches beyond occasional conflict. It requires intentionality, hearts intent on forgiveness, and well-trained Staff-Parish Relations committees. Our hope is that our local congregations will become healthier, and therefore more successful, in growing disciples for Jesus Christ.



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# CONFLICT RESOLUTION *within* Congregations



## POLICY AND PROCEDURES



Baltimore-Washington Conference  
of The United Methodist Church

## 1 Communicate

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.”*

– MATTHEW 18:15

BEGIN WITH PRAYER for yourself and the individual with whom you have a conflict. Invite God to share wisdom, enable understanding and an openness to communication that resolves differences.

When you have a concern about an action of a pastor, staff member, or parishioner, attempt to work it out directly with the person. Speak with the individual face-to-face. Explain how it has affected you and provide an opportunity for reconciliation between you and the other person. You are encouraged to start the conversation by saying – “I experienced (describe what you felt or experienced) when you (describe the action of the individual) and I would like to resolve our differences.”

## 2 Companions

*“But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”*

– MATTHEW 18:16

IF YOUR CONCERN is not reasonably resolved, speak to a member of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and ask for help to resolve your concern. This may include having a member of the committee mediate a conversation between the individuals who are in conflict with one another. This step may also include having those with concerns meet with the full SPRC and pastor so that they may hear the concerns identified. When the concern is with or involves the pastor, the SPRC chair will contact the district superintendent if there does not appear to be resolution or a path forward to address the concerns presented. SPRCs are encouraged to participate in conference training on conflict resolution and to seek consultation with the Guide about mediating conversations.

## 3 Council

*“If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”*

– MATTHEW 18:17

AN INDIVIDUAL who does not believe that the SPRC has adequately addressed their concern or believes that the SPRC has not acted objectively, may ask the SPRC chairperson to contact the district superintendent. The superintendent will further review the concerns and determine if additional steps are warranted.

When the conflict arises because of an allegation of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or sexual abuse, the SPRC chairperson or the pastor will contact the district superintendent immediately (within eight hours) so that the Sexual Misconduct Policy will be implemented.

