

CHURCH COUNCIL ADOPTS CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY

It probably does not come as a surprise that church folks do not always agree and sometimes actually have conflict with other members of the church. The key is how we deal with it. At the encouragement of District Superintendent, Rev. Larry Whitehead our Church Council has adopted the following policy to encourage us to resolve our conflicts in a Christian manner with the ultimate goal of reconciliation.

This policy was adopted by the Church Council on March 20, 2017, demonstrating our commitment to resolving differences in a Christ-like manner.

Portage First UM Church Conflict Resolution Policy

It is our prayer that all members and attenders of Portage First United Methodist Church will follow the example of our head, Jesus Christ, in treating each other with love and respect. Recognizing that differences of opinion and conflicts are inevitable in any human endeavor, however, our church desires to establish a conflict resolution policy that we call on members and attenders to follow, 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 (*Ephesians 4:2-3*).

Our goal is that the people of Portage First United Methodist Church will not walk away from the church because of conflict but will work together to overcome differences and find the common ground we share in Christ. Such an approach is biblically mandated and serves as an example to the non-Christian world that we are indeed disciples of Christ (*John 13:34-35*).

Conflict may be 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 an argument involving two or more parties concerning the policies and direction of the church.

Therefore, we expect that:

In all interactions with each other, the people of Portage First United Methodist Church will respect different ideas and views and will express disagreement with civility and Christian love, which means acting in the best interest of those we disagree with (*1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:18*).

1. Gossip is strongly discouraged as dishonoring to our Lord Jesus Christ (*James 4:11-12*).
2. 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*).
3. If two parties have a disagreement, the ideal response is for them to meet together, face to face, to discuss the matter and seek common ground (*Matthew 18:15*).
4. If any person in the church has a concern or a complaint about a leader of the church, whether the pastor or lay official, the concerned person is strongly encouraged to discuss the matter directly with the leader involved (*Matthew 18:15*).
5. If for any reason it is not possible to meet one-on-one, parties with a conflict or disagreement should seek the mediation of a church leader. Preferred mediators are the lay leader or assistant lay leader, chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Church Council chairperson, the pastor or associate pastor. Church leaders may recommend another party as mediator, possibly someone from outside the congregation or conference-related mediation resources (*Matthew 18:16*).
6. Depending on the situation, a team of mediators may be required to intervene in a conflict (*Matthew 18:16*).
7. If mediation is unsuccessful in resolving a conflict, one or both of the parties may bring the matter to the Church Council. Conflicts involving the pastor or staff members should be addressed first to the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. Other conflicts should be addressed to the Church Council. The Church Council shall be the final arbiter of conflicts unresolved through SPRC (*Matthew 18:17*).
8. Only after all these avenues have been exhausted should parties contact the North District Superintendent or Bishop of the Indiana Conference.

9. Concerns involving sexual misconduct of church leadership should be directed first to a member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, which is tasked with handling such matters.
10. All allegations involving child abuse must be handled as directed in the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy.
11. Mediators and committees asked to intervene in conflict shall strive to propose resolutions to conflict.
12. Resolution shall be defined as mutual agreement or understanding among all the parties in a conflict.
13. In all circumstances, confidentiality shall be respected.
14. If all efforts at resolution fail, and parties believe they are not able to stay in community in peace, any party wishing to leave Portage First UMC's fellowship is asked to do so lovingly, without rancor or bitterness on the part of the one 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*).
15. Anyone who believes they are in a conflict situation and is unsure of how to proceed should first contact the pastor for counsel or, if the conflict involves the pastor, either the lay leader or the Church Council chairperson.

Matthew 18:15-20-New International Version (NIV)

Dealing With Sin in the Church

15 "If your brother or sister[a] sins, [b] go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'[c] 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[e] loosed in heaven.

19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."