

COMMUNICATION COVENANT OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, WEST LAFAYETTE

First United Methodist Church is a community of faith united to experience and share God's wholeness. As a community comprised of individuals, it is normal that, at times, we will disagree with one another. It is also possible that at times we, as individuals, may have concerns about our church, or the words, actions, or performance of a pastor, staff member, or another member of the congregation. So that our words and actions might always reflect our love of God and love of each other, we make this communication covenant with one another.

We agree that...

When we have a concern about our church or the words, actions, or performance of the pastor, a staff member, a committee chairperson, or a fellow member of the congregation, we will first take time to prayerfully consider the reasons for our concern and whether it is sufficiently worthy of being shared. We acknowledge the importance of seeking guidance by reading and reflecting upon scripture. James 1:19-20, Colossians 3:12-14, Ephesians 4:29 and Matthew 18:21-22 are among the scripture verses that guide our church during times of disagreement.

In general, it is not helpful to discuss a concern with other people while in the process of discerning whether the concern is worthy of being shared. If guidance or discussion is needed during the discernment process, the chair of SPRC is an appropriate person to ask for assistance.

If an individual determines that a concern is worthy of addressing, it should be handled as follows. A concern about the church should be shared with the senior pastor. A concern about the words, actions, or performance of the pastor, a staff member, a committee chairperson, or a fellow member of the congregation should be shared directly with the individual involved.

The sharing of concerns should be done through an in-person conversation if at all possible. If this is not possible, a discussion by phone is the next best option. Email, texting, and social media are typically not appropriate methods for sharing the substance of a concern. Email may be appropriate for scheduling a time to meet in person to discuss the concern. Being too busy is not a valid reason for addressing concerns within the church through email.

When discussing a concern with someone, we will act out of love and humility, speaking with a calm tone of voice and using respectful language. In addition, we will speak in the first person (I feel... I think...), we will refrain from making accusations (You always... You never...), and we will practice active listening (What I am hearing you say is... Do I understand you correctly?).

After taking the time to meet and discuss a concern, both individuals may decide that the concern has been sufficiently addressed. It is very possible for a concern to be sufficiently addressed even if agreement is not reached. Often the best outcome is to actively listen to each other, "agree to disagree", and choose to move forward.

When the concern cannot be sufficiently addressed by the two people directly involved the next step may be to bring an appropriate third person into the discussion. When the concern is with a staff member, their direct supervisor, which is usually the senior pastor, is the next person to include. When the concern is with the senior pastor, the chair of SPRC is the next person to include. When the concern is with a committee chairperson, the chair of SPRC or the senior pastor is the appropriate third person.

We recognize that it is possible for an individual with a concern to feel that the concern has not been sufficiently addressed after following the steps above and consulting with the senior pastor and the chair of SPRC. Sometimes the individual may be able to set aside the concern with time. We will show our love for one another and the church by being supportive of individuals and their decisions about how to bring concerns to rest.

We understand that it is not possible, nor is it our intention, for this communication covenant to address all of the possibilities that may arise during the course of resolving a concern. Rather we intend to use this covenant to help us shape our interactions with one another in a manner consistent with the spirit of scripture and the life and teachings of Jesus. By doing so we can facilitate the open and constructive sharing of concerns and differences of opinion when needed while continuing to promote unity within the church.

Adopted by the Church Council on May 19, 2014