

Report on Healthy Community Relations by Lee Nelson

After last year's Annual Membership meeting, the Board of Trustees, which included four new members, decided to embark on a journey of learning and growth through a training in Non-violent Communication led by Karen Starz. We had a couple instances of conflict, some confusion on how to handle issue of conflict, and a desire for a bonding experience for our board as a whole.

With Nonviolent Communication (NVC) we learn to hear our own deeper needs and those of others. Through its emphasis on deep listening—to ourselves as well as others—NVC helps us discover the depth of our own compassion. This language reveals the awareness that all human beings are only trying to honor universal values and needs, every minute, every day.

NVC can be seen as both a spiritual practice that helps us see our common humanity, using our power in a way that honors everyone's needs, and a concrete set of skills which help us create life-serving families and communities.

The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative and was developed by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg.

We hired NVC Trainer Karen Starz to lead us on this journey of discovery in compassionate communication. Each board member had a personal session with Karen, and we met together in group sessions where we got to know each other and ourselves by honoring our emotions and identifying our needs.

We came together as a community for a book study of Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall Rosenberg, to really learn how to listen and offer empathy and have more compassionate connections with others.

We then offered a series of workshops for the congregation. All of these sessions were online as we all did our best to move through this Covid experience together.

From this training and learning we have a proposal to add to our policy manual.

Proposed Policy and Recommendation to make it part of USCL's membership agreement.

In alignment with USCL's core values, it is the intention of the community to foster a safe space for everyone. As a member of USCL, our community agreement is that we will treat each other with respect.

Knowing that our humanness may at times lead us into unskilled and unloving behavior as well as perceived unskilled, unloving behavior, USCL is/has created a "Restorative Listening Team" to hold a safe space to heal the unmet needs.

This team will consist of the minister and members trained in non-violent communication. Members of this team will create and hold a safe space for stories to be told without judgment and provide empathy for healing.

Should an incident in which words or actions are perceived to be unsafe, we agree to take the following actions:

- a. When someone brings up an issue of an agreement not being met, we ask that person to come into a Restorative Circle, which may be the with one or more Restorative Team members to voice their concerns.*
- b. The Restorative team asks for observations, feelings, and needs. Members of the Restorative team listen and give empathy. The Restorative Team members use non-violent communication skills to verbalize back to the individual, observations and the needs that were unmet.*
- c. The other party that was named for breaking an agreement is then brought into a separate Restorative circle and goes through the same process.*
- d. The agreements of respect are reaffirmed and signed by both parties*
- e. Either or both parties are encouraged to participate in further healing as in one-on-one empathy, coaching, therapy, prayer, etc.*
- f. If both parties are willing and able to, they may attend a third Restorative Circle together to hear each other's side and give empathy to each other.*