

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND APPREHENSION OF BIAS GUIDELINES FOR USE IN BAY OF QUINTE CONFERENCE

PREAMBLE

We are a people who live in relationship. Each of us has a multitude of relationships and a multitude of interests. It is inevitable that there will be times when our relationships, interests and responsibilities collide.

In The United Church of Canada, we use a conciliar style of decision-making. That means that our decisions are made not by individuals but by groups of people of faith. It is those groups that call us into relationships of accountability, and that help us to discern and name those places where our relationships and interests come into conflict, and to act appropriately.

One of the values we uphold in our conciliar system is that of transparency. We are called to reveal our competing values and interests so that our decision-making can be honest, fair and just, and also be seen to be honest fair and just. Any appearance of bias or conflict of interest may cause our decisions to be suspect and open them to criticism.

A decision, once made, must be owned and upheld by the decision-making body. That can happen with integrity only if its members have been open and honest with each other about their relationships and interests. When we are called to make decisions on behalf of the church, we are placed in a position of both trust and power. To fail to declare our conflicts of interests is to abuse both the power and trust we have been given.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are intended to be general guidelines, rather than exhaustive or proscriptive lists.

Conflict of Interest

A *conflict of interest* exists when our participation in decision-making has the potential to:

Create a financial, personal or professional benefit for:

- Ourselves
- Our family members
- Our close friends
- A particular person, group, pastoral charge or institution with which we have had a significant relationship

OR

Create a situation potentially detrimental to a person, pastoral charge or group with whom we have had a negative relationship.

Apprehension of Bias

Apprehension of bias exists when a reasonable person, who has been reasonably informed of the situation, might believe that we are biased or in a *conflict of interest*, as described above. The appearance of bias does not mean that bias does in fact exist. However, in all our decision-making processes, we are required not only to act justly and openly, but also to be seen to act justly and openly.

PROCESS

1. When a decision is to be made, the members of the decision-making body shall have sufficient prior notice to reflect on their own potential conflicts in the situation.
2. When the decision-making body gathers, adequate time must be given at the outset to create an environment and opportunity for the group as a whole to discern areas where conflict of interest might occur, and for individual members to discern and share their particular relationships and interests of potential conflict. Individuals may then offer some suggestion about how the group can best deal with their own particular conflicts of interest.
3. The decision-making body must then decide how its members' potential conflicts will be handled. Possibilities include (but are not limited to):
 - The person absenting her/himself from all discussion and decision-making.
 - The person presenting an opinion but not participating in discussion or decision-making.
 - The person participating in discussion but not in decision-making.
 - The person participating on both discussion and decision-making.
4. Recognizing that it is often difficult to discern our own conflicts of interest, it is the responsibility of the whole group to support and challenge its members in discerning their conflicts and dealing with them appropriately.
5. Recognizing that such challenges can be uncomfortable for all concerned, they should be offered in a spirit of care and compassion for the individual, and of concern for the health of the whole group.