

## **PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR** **First Unitarian Universalist Church of Indiana (First UU)**

While openness to diversity is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's Purposes and Principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. Concern for the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual.

The following policy shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing situations in which individuals' behavior threatens the emotional and/or physical security of our members and friends. The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained at all times, except in cases in which he/she poses a threat to others. The minister, staff, and congregation leaders will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child sexual abuse.

Since it is serious business to file a formal complaint against a fellow member, doing so should never be taken lightly. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern, before resorting to the use of this policy.

- When a person's disruptive behavior requires an immediate response, it will be undertaken by the minister and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the police may be called.
  - Anytime such actions are required and the Minister is not present, then the Minister and President of the Board of Trustees must be notified as soon as is practicable.
  - A follow-up letter or document detailing what steps must be taken by the offending party or parties before he/she/they may return to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister to the offending party or parties.
- For ongoing situations and those not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or people who witnessed it, to the Minister. The Minister will determine whether he/she wishes to handle the situation privately or request the formation of an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees, (that ad hoc committee shall include the Minister and at least two other members of the congregation), to further investigate the matter. When appropriate and whenever possible, the Minister or the ad hoc committee will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.
- The Minister and/or the ad hoc committee will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgment, without defining acceptable behavior in advance.
  - People and situations will be dealt with individually.
  - Stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.
  - The Minister or the ad hoc committee will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.
  - When the Minister and/or the ad hoc committee considers such information essential to performing its task, the Board shall authorize funds to pay costs for a professional background check, to provide such facts as the correct identity of the person in question and records of past criminal activity involving threats, harassment, or actual harm to other persons or property.

Note: Unitarian Universalists have a long history of public engagement with issues of individual freedom and social justice. Therefore, acts of conscience or civil disobedience which may have resulted in criminal charges or convictions will receive distinct consideration and careful attention under this policy.

- The following questions must be considered by the Minister or the ad hoc committee:

- **Dangerous:** Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property, including himself or herself?
- **Disruptive:** How much interference with church functions is occurring?
- **Offensive:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- The following questions may be considered by the Minister or the ad hoc committee:
  - **Causes:** Why is this disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the congregation? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
  - **History:** What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
  - **Probability of Change:** How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- The Minister or the ad hoc committee will respond on a case-by-case basis. Mediation by a neutral party is also a possibility. The following levels of response are options the Minister or the ad hoc committee can implement:
  - **No Action:** It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the Minister will explain and discuss this with the person or people who filed the complaint.
  - **Warning:** The Minister and a member of the Board of Trustees, or two members of the ad hoc committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and expectations for future behavior. The offending individual may have a support person accompany him/her to this meeting.
  - **Suspension:** The offending individual is excluded from the congregation and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing.
  - **Removal from Membership:** The ad hoc committee recommends that the offending individual should be removed from membership in First UU. If removal from membership is approved by a 2/3 majority vote of the Board of Trustees (in accordance with the Congregational Bylaws Article III, Section 2), the Minister and President of the Board of Trustees will write a letter to the individual explaining the reasons, the individual's rights and possible recourse.
- Appeals: The offending individual may appeal the decision to a Special Congregational Meeting (Congregational Bylaws Article IV, Sections 3 through 6).
- Procedure for Special Congregational Meeting for Appealing a removal from membership: This circumstance is so extreme that it seems to necessitate a very specific procedure in order to keep it focused. Removal from membership is the worst case scenario we can imagine; this process will always be painful.
  - Members equal to thirty percent (30%) of the First UU membership must be present in order to have a quorum for the Special Congregational Meeting. Proxy votes are not permitted for a Special Congregational Meeting.
  - The President of the Board of Trustees, or someone he or she designates, shall serve as Facilitator for the Special Congregational Meeting.
  - The Facilitator for the Special Congregational Meeting shall be the final authority on all procedural matters or disputes during the Special Congregational Meeting.
  - The Facilitator will open the Special Congregational Meeting by stating to those present that 1) this appeal is a serious matter 2) they should vote based solely upon what they learn during the Special Congregational Meeting and 3) that all dialog and discussion must be conducted respectfully.
  - The offending individual then shall have up to ten (10) minutes to make a presentation regarding why he or she should not be removed from membership at First UU. No one is permitted to interrupt or disrupt this presentation.

- The Minister or the ad hoc committee then shall have up to ten (10) minutes to make a presentation regarding why the offending individual should not be readmitted to First UU. No one is permitted to interrupt or disrupt this presentation.
- The offending individual then shall have up to five (5) minutes to respond to what was said by the Minister or the ad hoc committee and to summarize again why they should not be removed from membership in First UU.
- The members present then have up to fifteen (15) minutes to ask factual questions of either the offending individual or the Minister/ad hoc committee. Speeches, arguments and debating shall not occur during this 15-minute period and the Facilitator has the right to ask a person who is debating or arguing to either stop doing so or ask a specific factual question.
- The members present then have up to twenty (20) minutes to debate, discuss and argue the sole issue before the Special Congregational Meeting, should this congregation reverse the expulsion of Jane Doe or John Smith from the membership in the First UU Church.
- Those present can decide by a voice vote to extend any time frame listed in these rules.
- At the end of the debate there shall be a secret ballot vote on one discrete issue: "Should the removal of Jane Doe or John Smith from the membership in the First UU Church be reversed?"
- The removal from membership of the offending individual shall remain unless 2/3 plus one of those members present and voting vote "yes" on the question listed in the previous rule.
- It shall not be permissible to change the substance or content of the one discrete issue that is to be voted upon at a Special Congregational Meeting.