

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville
Policy and Procedures

Section: General & Administrative

Adopted: August, 2007

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, our church has also adopted a covenant that we gather in safe and compassionate community. It is in such a community that such openness can thrive. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

There have been times when the disruptive behavior of an individual in the church community has led members to voice their concerns about:

1. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
2. The disruption of church activities; or
3. Diminishment of the appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership.

The following shall be the policy of First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville in dealing with these issues:

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister(s), if available, 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 such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called. Any time any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) being present, the Minister(s) and the Safe Congregation Panel (SCP) must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the SCP to the offending person or persons.
2. Situations not requiring an immediate response will be referred to the Safe Congregation Panel (SCP). The SCP will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:
 - a. The SCP will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define acceptable behavior in advance.
 - b. Persons exhibiting disruptive behavior will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
 - c. The SCP will collect all necessary information.
 - d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
 - i. DANGEROUSNESS - Is the behavior a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?

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- ii. DISRUPTIVENESS - How much interference with the church functions is going on?
- iii. OFFENSIVENESS - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
 - i. CAUSES - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
 - ii. HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused by this person in the past?
 - iii. PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- f. The SCP will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
 - i. LEVEL ONE - The SCP shall inform the Minister of the problem. Either two or more people from the SCP or the minister and one or more people from the SCP shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern. If appropriate, that person shall be offered the opportunity to sign a covenant setting forth the terms for continued participation in the community.
 - ii. LEVEL TWO - The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return stated in writing. Any Level Two action taken may be appealed to the Board of Directors within 10 days of the date of the document. A letter shall be sent to the congregation explaining any Level Two action.
 - iii. LEVEL THREE - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Such an exclusion and the reasons for it shall be stated in writing to the individual. Before this is carried out, the SCP and Minister will consult with the Board of Directors. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the SCP explaining the expulsion. A letter shall be sent to the congregation explaining any Level Three action.

Although the letters sent to the Congregation explaining level two or three actions may have to speak of subjects that make people uncomfortable and to some extent the privacy of some individuals may be violated by such a letter, the need for transparency of the process and the need of the community to know of any such events necessitates the letter be distributed to all members and friends.

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, when behavior of an individual causes concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole, the congregation must be given priority over the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.