

Unitarian Church of Montpelier Disruptive Behavior Policy

A. Policy:

The Unitarian Church of Montpelier strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, in some cases, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual. To the degree that disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions, as people of faith, must reflect our commitment to maintaining both security and beloved community. There may be times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building or on the church grounds could lead members/friends to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

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

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. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, as they happen. This may include encouraging a complainant to speak directly with the disruptive individual, perhaps in the company of a church leader. Actions to address disruptive behavior should be undertaken with compassion and the hope of reconciliation. Use of covenants to foster right-relationships while undertaking the work of the congregation is encouraged.

B. Procedure:

The following shall be the process of The Unitarian Church of Montpelier in dealing with these issues:

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister, the leader of the meeting or activity involved, church staff, and/or a member of the Executive Team. This may include asking the disruptive individual(s) 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. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing the offense and the action taken, should be written and distributed to the Minister and the Executive Team.
2. If the situation does not require an immediate response, it will be referred to the Minister or a member of the Executive Team. The Executive Team will appoint an ad hoc committee of 4-5 members, which will include the Minister, a designated member of the Executive Team, the complainant or a member of the committee or group involved in bringing the complaint, a member of the Committee on Ministries, a member of the Pastoral Care Network, and such others as the Executive Team deems appropriate. The ad hoc committee will respond, using their own judgment, observing the following:
 - a. The ad hoc committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
 - b. Persons whose behavior has been identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; prejudicial associations with other individuals or groups will be avoided.
 - c. The ad hoc committee will collect all necessary information.
 - d. To aid in evaluating the complaint, the following points will be considered:

DANGEROUSNESS - Was the disruptive individual a threat or perceived threat to persons or property? Does that threat continue to exist?

DISRUPTIVENESS - How much interference was there to church functions or ministry? Does that interference continue?

OFFENSIVENESS - How likely is it that prospective or existing members/friends will be driven away by the disruptive individual's actions?

- e. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:

CAUSES - Why did the disruption occur? Was it a situational conflict between the disruptive individual and others in the church, or was it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?

HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused by the same individual in the past?

PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

- f. The ad hoc committee will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:

LEVEL ONE – The Minister(s) and a member of the ad hoc committee shall meet with the individual charged with the disruptive behavior to communicate the concern, including a description of the disruptive behavior and the changes desired. The individual charged will be given an opportunity to address the pertinent behavior and situation. The meeting and its substance shall be documented in writing. If appropriate, the ad hoc committee may recommend settling the matter through compassionate and mutual discussion with the parties involved.

If the complaint appears to justify further action, the ad hoc committee will proceed to Level Two or Three.

LEVEL TWO -The individual charged is excluded from the Unitarian Church of Montpelier church and/or specific church activities by the authority of the ad hoc

committee for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear and in writing.

LEVEL THREE - The individual charged is indefinitely excluded from the Unitarian Church of Montpelier church premises and all church activities. Before this step is carried out, the ad hoc committee will consult with the full Executive Team. If the Executive Team accepts the recommendation they will convey these recommendations to the Board. If the Board agrees, the exclusion will take place. The decision and terms of exclusion will be communicated in writing to the individual by the Minister and Chair of the Board in person or by certified mail.

3. Confidentiality and Documentation

Confidentiality can encourage reconciliation and protect other parties involved from unnecessary exposure. Conversely, the injury caused by the disruptive person may be widespread or significant enough to require some portion or the whole of the congregation to be informed or included in the reconciliation process. In consultation with the Executive Team, the ad hoc committee will determine the degree of confidentiality to be used during the invoking of the Disruptive Behavior Policy.

To preserve institutional memory and consistent application of this policy over time, a record of each use of this Policy will be maintained in a registry secured in the Church offices. Access to this registry is restricted to the Ministers and the Chair of the Board, who may share this information on a “need to know” basis. A registry record includes the identity of the offending individual, all communications between the individual and the church relating to the use of the policy and supporting documentation. The record will also include, for the benefit of future Ministers and Boards, a statement written by the ad hoc committee on the recommended course of action should offenses by the individual continue or recur.

C. Appeal Process for Possible Reinstatement of Removed Individual

1. Any action taken under item f, Level One and Two, may be appealed to the Executive Team, which shall consult with the Minister and make a final decision.
2. A reinstatement request following action taken under item f, Level Three, may be made no sooner than one year following the exclusion from church premises and activities. Any request for reinstatement must be made in writing by the member/friend who was excluded from the church premises and activities. The request must contain the following information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement:
 - a. A statement of understanding of the reasons for which s/he was excluded,
 - b. An explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed such that a reinstatement would be justified.

The request shall go to the Executive Team and then the Board, if indicated. The Board or Executive Team will review the request and the Board will respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the excluded member/friend. The decision of the Board shall be final and not subject to further appeal or requests.

Source Documents:

UUA Sample Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

Policies and Procedures: Disruptive Behavior, First Unitarian Church of Columbus, OH 2005

Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior, Unitarian Universalist Church, Rockford, IL 2008,
www.uua.org/documents/congregations/rockforduuc/disruptive_policy.pdf

Procedures for Addressing Disruptive Behavior, Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 2002. www.quuf.org/opsmanual/policies/disruptive.html