

## **Policy regarding Disruptive Behavior**

### **Amended by the Board of Trustees January 19, 2012**

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, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. 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 exclusion of the offending person or persons.

There have been times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building has led members to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

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

The following shall be the policy of the Unitarian Church of Norfolk in dealing with these issues:

- A. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the minister, 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. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the minister being present, the minister must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the minister to the offending party or parties.
- B. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. The committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:
  1. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
  2. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
  3. The committee will collect all necessary information.
  4. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
    - **Dangerousness** - Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
    - **Disruptiveness** - How much interference with church functions is going on?
    - **Offensiveness** - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

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5. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
- **Context** - When, where and with whom has the disruption been happening? What are commonalities or patterns, if any, of the disruptive behavior? How widespread is it? How have those who have experienced the disruption been affected?
  - **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?
6. The 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 committee shall inform the minister of the problem, and either the minister or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.
  - **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 made clear.
  - **Level Three** - The offending individual is excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Before this is carried out, the committee will consult with the Board of Trustees and the minister. If it is decided that exclusion will take place, a letter will be sent by the minister explaining the exclusion and the individual's rights and possible recourse. In *all* cases where a person has been excluded from church premises and all church activities, the person excluded may petition the Board to reverse the exclusion by writing a letter requesting it. The Board will appoint a committee to review the request and meet with the person about her/his request. The focus of such a meeting will be on how the person will change his/her behavior in order to participate in church activities in a non-disruptive way. After meeting with the person, the committee will advise the Board whether reversal of the exclusion is recommended.

A confidential church record will be kept of all actions taken under this policy.

The Unitarian Church of Norfolk strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of 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.