

The Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley

Board Policy #1002

Policy on Disruptive Behavior

Approved April 2, 2008

Applicable until revoked or amended

Background

Conflict occurs in the normal course of events in any committed community such as the congregation. The UUA does have established procedures to use in the event of conflict arising between individuals and/or groups within the congregation. This policy is designed to serve as an adjunct to those procedures to be used in the event of behavior, which is dangerous, disruptive or offensive to UUCLV members, friends and potential members. It lays out fair and appropriate responses to such behavior. The UUA has recommended that the Boards of all congregations adopt policies such as this and do so at a time when disruptive behavior is not evident, so that it will not be viewed as reactive or punitive.

Definition

Disruptive behavior is defined as the behavior of an individual within the congregation's buildings or in connection with congregation-sponsored events which raises concerns for the physical and emotional safety of children and/or adults, the disruption of congregation activities and/or the diminishment of the congregation's ability to serve both present and potential future members. There will be no attempt to define "unacceptable" behavior in advance.

Policy

Goals

In accordance with our denomination's principles, we covenant to promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning and also to affirm the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process, both within our congregation and outside of it. We wish to promote an open exchange of opinions among a wide variety of individuals, lifestyles and opinions. At the same time, we believe our congregation must maintain a safe atmosphere in order for such openness to exist. Threats, real or perceived, to the physical, emotional and/or spiritual well being of individuals or threats to the freedom to express safely one's beliefs must be addressed firmly and promptly. Concern for the safety and well being of the members and of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of any individual.

Handling of complaints not requiring an immediate response

If occasions of disruption or complaints of potential danger arise and immediate response is not required, the situation will be referred to an ad-hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. The committee will use its best judgment, and honor the following guidelines:

- a. Each situation will be evaluated on its own merits. Stereotypes will be avoided.

b. The committee will gather relevant information before acting. At least two members of the committee should make personal contact with the person whose behavior is in question to ascertain his or her point-of-view about the situation.

c. Evaluation of the situation will include consideration of:

1. Possible danger – Is the individual’s behavior the source of real or perceived threat to persons or property?

2. Disruptiveness – To what degree does the behavior in question interfere with congregation functions, activities, or mission?

3. Offensiveness – How likely is it that the behavior in question is offensive to prospective or current members? Is there likelihood that members or prospective members will be driven away?

d. In determining an appropriate response to the behavior in question, the committee may consider factors giving rise to the situation, such as the person’s history within the congregation, the local community and other institutions. It should also consider how likely it is that the person in question can alter the problematic behavior to avoid further actions which might imperil the sense of safety in the UUCLV community.

e. Remedies will be applied after consideration of the particular factors in each situation. The committee shall inform the minister of its recommendation for addressing the situation before acting. Any of the following four levels of response are recommended for most situations:

1. Level One – The committee may decide that no action is warranted. In that event, the minister and the Board, as well as the parties involved should be informed.

2. Level Two – the minister and a committee member shall meet with the individual in question to communicate the concerns and recommendations of the committee. If the committee has deemed it necessary, a contract for clearly defined parameters of behavior should be signed at this time. If such a contract cannot be agreed upon, Level Four may be enacted immediately with no further process.

3. Level Three – The offending individual shall be excluded from the congregation and/or specific congregation activities for a designated period of time. The reasons for exclusion and the conditions of return will be made clear in a letter to the individual given to the individual by the minister and one member of the committee.

4. Level Four – The individual in question shall be excluded from the congregation’s premises and all congregation activities permanently. Before this sanction is executed, the committee will consult with both the minister and the Board. If expulsion is recommended and the Board votes to enact that recommendation, the Chair of the Board will send a letter, return receipt requested, to the individual explaining the expulsion. The name and contact information will be provided for a person with whom the individual may speak concerning possible recourse under Unitarian Universalist Association policy. For any behavior judged to require a Level 4 responses, the District Executive shall be contacted.

Handling of complaints requiring an immediate response

If an immediate response to disruptive behavior is required, the minister and/or elected or appointed congregation leader or a congregation employee (if available) will respond according to their best judgment in the situation. If none of these are present, any congregation member may exercise her or his best judgment in addressing the situation. Such response may include asking the offending person or persons to leave the premises and/or suspending the meeting or activity in progress until such time as it can be safely resumed. If further assistance is required the Police may be called. If such action is undertaken without the minister being present s/he must be notified as soon as possible. In this case, the Minister and a committee appointed by the Board will determine what further action should be taken; usually using Levels One through Four described above.

Appeals

Action taken by the committee in Levels Two, Three and Four may be appealed by the person in question to the Minister and/or the Board of Trustees. There is no appeal of Level Four within this policy for nonmembers.