

**Disruptive or Inappropriate Behavior Policy**  
**First Unitarian Church**  
**Approved March 13, 2013**

**Purpose**

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.

This policy applies to visitors, friends and members of the congregation. Because unbalanced power issues come into play when disruptive behavior comes from the minister, such issues are to be referred to the Committee on Ministry or the equivalent. If the minister's family is involved, the minister will recuse him or herself and the issue will be referred to a neutral mediator.

**Procedure**

There may be times when the disruptive or inappropriate behavior of an individual within the church building lead 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;
- Diminished appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership.

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

1. If an immediate response is required,
  - a. Actions will be undertaken by the Minister, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved.
  - b. 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.
  - c. Any time 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.
2. Situations not requiring an immediate response can be responded to based on escalation. We encourage every individual to try to resolve issues directly with the offending party. If that does not result in a change in behavior or the offended person does not feel physically or emotionally safe in a one-to-one situation, the issue will be referred to a board subcommittee consisting of the Minister, Board President, Vice President and an individual who has had training in counseling and conflict resolution. No anonymous feedback will be given to the offender unless dire safety issues are an issue. The Minister will chair the subcommittee so that there will be a level of continuity. The following guidelines will be used during the review of the situation:
  - a. The subcommittee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
  - b. If a person is identified as disruptive they will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.

- c. The subcommittee will collect all necessary information and will insure that minutes are kept for all meetings (either subcommittee meetings or associated Board meetings).
- d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
  - DANGER: Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
  - DISRUPTIVE: How much interference with church functions is going on?
  - OFFENSIVE: How likely is it that prospective or existing members or friends of First Unitarian will be driven away?
3. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
  - a. 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?
  - b. HISTORY - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
  - c. PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
4. The subcommittee will decide how to respond on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
  - LEVEL ONE: The subcommittee 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 defined period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear.
  - LEVEL THREE: The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Before this is carried out, the subcommittee will consult with the Board of Trustees
5. If it is decided that expulsion is warranted, a certified letter with return receipt required will be sent by the Minister or President explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse. Any action taken under item 4 (above) may be appealed to the Board and must be done in writing within 30 days of the original action. If the member does not respond to the first mailing after 30 days a second and final certified letter will be sent. If, after the second 30 day period has elapsed, there is still no response, the Board will be authorized to vote on removal from membership at their next scheduled meeting. If the offending individual is not a member, the board will vote to prohibit the individual from continued association with First Unitarian (Level 3).
6. If the member does respond to either letter that member must be invited to attend any Board Meetings, or subcommittee meetings, in which his/her removal from membership is discussed. That member also has the right to have a witness present at any (or all) meetings held during this process.
7. The First Unitarian Church of South Bend 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.

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