

First Unitarian Church of South Bend
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Policy for Disruptive or Inappropriate Behavior

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, as outlined in the accompanying Covenant of Right Relationship. When any person's freedom to safely participate in the congregation's activities and/or express their 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 dynamics come into play when disruptive behavior comes from the Minister, complaints involving the Minister are to be referred to the Committee on Ministry or the equivalent. If the Minister's family is involved, the Minister will recuse himself/herself/themselves and the issue will be referred to a neutral mediator.

Created by: Policy Task Force, with edits from Administrative Committee in February 2025 based on input from current and previous members of the Committee on Ministry

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Date Approved: April 16, 2025

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Procedure: There may be times when the disruptive or inappropriate behavior of an individual within the church building leads members to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
- Disruption of church activities;
- Behavior that may constitute verbal abuse or harassment.

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 taken by the Minister (if available) or the President of the Board of Trustees, and/or the leader of the group or activity involved.
 - b. Such actions may include asking the offending person or persons to leave the meeting or the church premises, or suspending a meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely resume. If further assistance is required, the South Bend Police Department may be called.
 - c. If any of these actions are taken without the Minister (or, in the Minister's absence, the Board President) being present, the Minister (or Board President) must be promptly notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken by the

offending individual before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister (or Board President) to the offending party or parties

2. Situations not requiring an immediate response can be responded to, based on escalation. Those voicing concerns about inappropriate or disruptive behavior are encouraged to try to resolve issues directly with the offending party. If that does not result in a change in behavior, or if the offended person does not feel physically or emotionally safe, the issue will be referred to a Board of Trustees subcommittee [hereafter, the subcommittee] consisting of the Minister (if available), the Board President, Vice President, and a third individual from the Board, preferably an individual with training in counseling and/or conflict resolution. Complaints or concerns will be attributed by name unless safety concerns are an issue. The Minister (or, if unavailable, the Board President) 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. The subcommittee will collect all necessary information and will ensure that minutes are kept for all meetings (either subcommittee meetings or associated Board meetings).
 - c. 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?
DISRUPTION: How much interference with church functions is going on?
OFFENSIVENESS: Does the behavior rise to the level of verbal abuse or harassment?
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 by this individual in the past?
 - c. PROBABILITY OF CHANGE - How likely is it that the individual's problematic 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 and discuss how it might be resolved.
LEVEL TWO: The offending individual shall be excluded from the church premises 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 subcommittee action taken under item 4 (above) may be

appealed to the Board and must be done in writing within 30 days of the subcommittee 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 the relevant portion of any Board Meetings, or subcommittee meetings, in which their removal from membership is being discussed. That member also has the right to have a witness present during the relevant portion of any meeting 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.

Covenant of Right Relationship

In the spirit of affirming the dignity and human worth of all persons, and in our search for truth and meaning, as congregants of the First Unitarian Church, we make the following commitments to one another.

We work to build community.

- We treat one another in a friendly, open, and welcoming manner.
- We participate in the life of the community, and give generously of ourselves and our resources.
- We actively listen to each other.
- We care for one another.
- We inspire others to participate in the life of the church and acknowledge their contributions.

We work toward open and respectful communication.

- We assume the best of others and treat them with courtesy, honesty, and good faith.
- We speak for ourselves alone.
- We discuss issues out in the open and avoid gossip.
- We nurture person-to-person and group-to-group relationships.
- We give and seek constructive feedback in our relationships with one another.

We accept responsibility to work constructively to maintain right relationships.

- We treat others with dignity and sensitivity even when in disagreement.

- We stay in the conversation, even when conflicts arise.
- We attempt to understand the perspective of the other even while in disagreement with that viewpoint.
- We seek common ground rather than dwell on differences and challenge ourselves to forgive past wrongs.
- We commit to working within those processes that have been developed to resolve conflict and keep our congregation healthy.