

# Unitarian Church of Quincy, Illinois

## Disruptive Behavior Policy

*Adopted by the Board of Trustees April 2019*

### **Statement of Purpose**

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; however, we also affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist.

Within a covenantal community, a balance often needs to be maintained between individual expressions/needs and that of the community as a whole. Nothing can be absolute - this is all held in the tension of being in community, and being a place where we do have limits on what can be said and done. We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, but not every behavior! When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express their beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly. Congregational leaders and members have the responsibility to provide a safe and welcoming environment for children and adults - both regular attendees and visitors.

Developing a Disruptive Behavior Policy (DBP) indicates a commitment to creating a safe and welcoming environment by confirming expectations for everyone's behavior. A DBP establishes behavioral guidelines that consider the community's well-being first and foremost. Disruptive behaviors may impact perceived safety of any adult or child, the disruption of church activities, and the diminishment of the potential and existing membership. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her opinions is threatened, action must be taken. The guidelines provided by a DBP mean that all are held to the same set of standards. The DBP provides a process that leaves less room for singling out a person based on stereotyping or personality conflicts.

Disruptive behavior can be summarized as one or more of the following

- **Dangerous:** is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **Disruptive:** what is the level of interference with church activities?
- **Offensive:** is the behavior likely to drive existing members and visitors away?

Please see the appendix of this document for more detailed descriptions of disruptive behavior.

### **Reporting Disruptive Behavior**

Any person who believes they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior or who has had a disruptive behavior incident reported to them should report it to any of the following:

- The minister
- Any member of the Board
- Any member of the Peace Building Team

If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the minister, a board member, or a member of the Peace Building Team will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

Whenever there is a dispute between people, it is preferred that the people resolve the dispute between themselves and we recognize that this will be sufficient to address most issues. However, if this is not possible, anyone (not just members) may request a meeting with the Peace Building Team to discuss a disruptive behavior issue. The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. All church leaders and staff are required to immediately report any knowledge of disruptive behavior, harassment, abuse or misconduct to the minister(s) or the Board. While the church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, the church will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individuals involved only on a need-to-know basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

The Peace Building Team (PBT) will be appointed by the Board and consist of 3-5 trained members, the minimum of which will be the president of the board and one other board member. The role of the PBT is to create a confidential and safe environment for individuals or groups to work through conflicts that cannot be resolved informally, while preserving the relationships. The goal is for all parties involved in a conflict to understand all points of view and work together to develop a solution that is clear, mutual and workable. The mediation process will be confidential. Records of the process, with the agreements made, will be kept secure and available to the Board of Trustees, Minister and Peace Building Team on an as needed basis.

Conflict resolution training will be made available. All members of the congregation are encouraged to take the training.

### **Disruptive Behavior Initial Action Responses**

Disruptive behaviors are categorized by two different levels of initial action responses, depending on severity.

#### **Initial Action Level One — Immediate Response Required**

If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the leader of the group involved. (If the minister or a board member is present, they may act as an advisor regarding an appropriate response.) Potential responses 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. Any time any of these actions are undertaken without the minister or a board member being present, the minister and the board must be notified. If the issue cannot be resolved within the group or individuals involved, it will be referred to the Peace Building Team. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken

before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Peace Building Team or board president to the offending party or parties (see the Resolutions section for more details).

The Peace Building Team will meet with the person or persons and other related parties. The Team will determine the nature of the disruptive behavior and its impact on the community or individuals involved. It will communicate their concern about the disruptive behavior. If the behavior cannot be resolved, the remedial process will proceed to Action Level Two and the full Board will intervene.

Additionally the behavior in question will be referred directly to the Board:

1. If the individual has been in significant resolutions before; therefore the PBT will infer that previous resolutions have not worked.
2. If the issue affects the larger congregation.

#### Initial Action Level Two — Immediate Response Not Required

Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the PBT, which will assess the validity of the complaint and will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

1. The PBT will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance, except as outlined in the church covenant.
  2. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals. Stereotypes will be avoided.
  3. The PBT will collect all necessary information.
  4. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
    - a. Dangerousness - Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
    - b. Disruptiveness - How much interference with church functions is occurring?
    - c. Offensiveness - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
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1. 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?

## **Disruptive Behavior Resolutions**

The PBT will decide on the necessary resolution(s) on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of resolution are recommended:

### **Resolution Level One - Meeting and Communication**

The PBT shall inform the Minister of the problem and either the Minister(s) or member(s) of the PBT shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern, to listen to the offending individual to understand their perspective, and to provide a path to restoring right relationship, with clear indications of what changes in behavior need to be in evidence for that to happen. The offending individual will receive a written copy of the concerns and the required changes in behavior. This documentation will be provided to the Board of Trustees, the Minister and other parties if safety warrants.

### **Resolution Level Two - Limited Restrictions**

If the requested changes in behavior are not made, the PBT will determine if further limitations from participation in congregational life and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time are required. The PBT will communicate such further limitations with the reasons for the limitations and the conditions of return made clear. The PBT must provide documentation of their decision and meeting to the Board of Trustees by the next monthly board meeting.

- Any action taken by the PBT may be appealed by the individual to the Board of Trustees.
- If, after attempts by the PBT to implement conflict resolution(s) do not resolve the situation and the disruptive behavior continues, the full Board of Trustees will become involved. It may be determined that the offending individual again needs to be limited from congregational life and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons for such action and the conditions of return made clear in a written notification.

### **Resolution Level Three - Permanent Restrictions**

The Board of Trustees, after careful consideration, may determine that the offending individual(s) has failed to change the offending behavior and may be permanently restricted from the church premises and all church activities. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing, and will explain the individual's rights and possible recourse.

At all stages of intervention, if the behavior is determined to be symptomatic of a professionally diagnosed mental illness, all reasonable efforts will be made to support that individual in accessing the care they need.

## **Reinstatement of Removed Individual**

Any request for reinstatement must be made by the individual who was limited.

The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement:

1. A statement of understanding of the reasons for which they were limited from congregational life.
2. An explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified.

The request shall go to the Board of Trustees. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the limited individual. The decision of the board shall be final and not subject to further appeal. A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the limitation. In the event that a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent reinstatement requests may be made no sooner than one year following the member being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

## **Conclusion**

The Unitarian Church of Quincy, Illinois 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.

## **Appendix**

It is important to draw a distinction between behavior that is rude, behavior that is mean, and behavior that is characteristic of bullying.

**Rude** - Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else. Incidents of rudeness are usually spontaneous, unplanned inconsideration, based on thoughtlessness, poor manners, or narcissism, but not meant to actually hurt someone.

**Mean** - Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once (or maybe twice). The main distinction between “rude” and “mean” behavior has to do with intention; while rudeness is often unintentional, mean behavior very much aims to hurt someone. Sometimes mean comes in the form of “humor.”

**Bullying** - Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power. Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Bullying may be physical, verbal,

relational, or carried out via technology. An imbalance of power can be as simple as being a member of the majority in the congregation, being with a group of supportive friends, against someone who is not in the majority or is alone. Religious professionals and staff are not immune from bullying or being bullied. (Source: Whitson, Signe. "[Rude Vs. Mean Vs. Bullying: Defining the Differences](#)." Bullying Behavior)

Most of us have experienced bullying. It can happen in committee meetings, on our boards, within our staff teams, and even between laity and staff (in either direction). Thom Rainer talks about common traits of people who bully others in congregations:

- *They do not recognize themselves as potential bullies.* On the contrary, they see themselves as necessary heroes sent to save the congregation from its own self.
- *They have personal and self-serving agendas.* They have determined what "their" congregation should look like. Any person or ministry or program that is contrary to their perceived ideal congregation must be eliminated.
- *They are famous for saying "people are saying."* They love to gather tidbits of information and shape it to their own agendas.
- *They find their greatest opportunities in low-expectation congregations.* Many of the members have an entitlement view of congregational membership, and the congregation requires little of them for inclusion. (Low expectation congregations are those that have few limits on behavior and that have low bars for involvement and inclusion.)
- *They seek to get their own needs and preferences fulfilled.* They, therefore, won't trouble themselves to confront and deal with other bullies. That leads to the next issue, which is a consequence of this point.
- *They are allowed to bully because members will not address their behavior.* Religious professionals and lay leaders who have been attacked by bullies report that, while the bully brings them great pain, they have even greater hurt because most of the church members stood silent and let it happen.
- *They create chaos and wreak havoc.* A bully always has their next mission. While they may take a brief break from one bullying mission to the next, they are not content unless they are exerting the full force of their manipulative behavior.
- *They often move to other congregations after they have done their damage.* Whether they are forced out or simply get bored, they will move to other churches with the same bullying mission. Some bullies have wreaked havoc in three or more congregations. (Rainer, Thom S. "[Nine Traits of Church Bullies](#)")