

## **Second Unitarian Church of Omaha**

**Policy:** Disruptive Participant

**Date of Policy Approval:** February 11, 2010

**Date Policy Updated:**

**Policy Owner:** Board of Trustees

### **1. Disruptive Participant Policy Need**

Second Unitarian Church 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. We affirm that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist.

There have been times when the disruptive behavior of an individual on church premises or offsite church-sponsored functions has led members to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

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

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 expulsion of the offending person or persons.

### **2. Disruptive Participant Process**

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

#### **2.1. Immediate Response 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.
- The Police Department may be called if further assistance is required.
- The Minister must be notified if any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present.
- A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent to the offending party or parties. This letter is sent by the Minister or as directed by the Board of Trustees Executive Committee from one of the following committees: the Committee on Ministry, Board of Trustees, or Transitions Team.
- And if applicable, this letter should also be co-authored by the leader of the group involved. The Board of Trustees Executive Committee must also be copied on this written correspondence.

#### **2.2. Immediate Response Not Required**

- The leader of the group present during the disruptive situation should report this behavior to the Minister and to a member of the Board of Trustees Executive Committee.
- The Board of Trustees Executive Committee will make a determination if the issue should be referred to the Committee on Ministry or Board-appointed ad hoc committee.

In either **2.1** or **2.2** above, the appointed committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

- a. Each situation will be responded to individually as it arises using this policy. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
- c. 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 and how likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- d. To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:
  - 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? However, under no circumstances should a diagnosis be considered other than from the individual's own mental health professional (and this will probably not be available due to Privacy laws.)
  - History/Change - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past? How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
- e. The necessary response will be determined on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
  - Level One** - The assigned committee (as noted in 2.1 and 2.2) shall inform the Minister(s) of the problem and then the Minister(s) and a minimum of two members 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 in written documentation (with a copy going to the offender and one going into congregational files.)

Note: Any action taken under Level One or Level Two may be appealed to the Board of Trustees and the Minister.

  - Level Three** - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities, including offsite church-sponsored activities. Before this is carried out, the appointed committee as described in 2.1 or 2.2 will consult with the Board of Trustees and the Minister. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse.
- f. All meetings must be documented and any other pertinent documentation must be kept in the locked confidential church files. Documentation must include:
  1. Offending individual's name
  2. Description of situation causing the disruption
  3. Dates and minutes from all meetings with the offending (party(s), to include all meeting attendees
  4. Time period of exclusion
  5. Description of steps required for the party(s) to be allowed back into the church.
  6. Signature of understanding by offending party(s)