

# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP OF THE PENINSULA

## POLICY REGARDING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

*APPROVED BY THE UUFP POLICY BOARD 1/17/2007*

While honoring the worth and dignity of every individual is one of the central tenets held by our Fellowship and is expressed in the Unitarian Universalist Association's Purposes and Principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must also maintain a secure atmosphere in which such openness can exist.

Our Fellowship strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. We strive to maintain a balance between the needs of the whole and those of the individual; however, the safety and well being of the congregation must be given priority.

To the degree that any disruption compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as a people of faith must reflect this emphasis on personal safety and security. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately may require the suspension of the membership, or expulsion, of the offending person or persons, after due process.

For purposes of this policy, disruptive behavior may include but is not limited to:

- \* Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child, such as physical or verbal abuse, threats of bodily harm, seductive or otherwise inappropriate behavior;
- \* The disruption of Fellowship activities, including Sunday services, social activities, or other meetings;
- \* Harm to the effective ministry of the Fellowship to its existing and/or potential membership and/or to the larger community, such as unwanted advances, harassment, and/or abusive or inappropriate language.

The following shall be the policy of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Peninsula in dealing with these issues:

1. When an immediate response is required, the Minister, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved, or a Policy Board member will undertake the response. 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 local police department may be called. Any time any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister must be notified as soon as possible as to what occurred and what actions were undertaken. The Policy Board will send a follow-up letter to all concerned party or parties, and to the Chair of the Membership Committee, detailing what steps must be taken before offending persons may return to the activities involved. The process that the Policy Board shall follow is detailed in #4 below.

2. Situations not requiring an immediate response may be referred to the Committee on Ministry (COM) by any concerned person. The COM will respond in terms of its own judgment. For more serious offenses the COM may supplement its membership with other Fellowship Members to effect a broader and fairer hearing of opinions and concerns, observing the following: (a) persons accused of being disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; (b) stereotypes will be avoided; (c) no one shall be presumed guilty prior to the consideration of the evidence.

The COM will attempt to collect all necessary and pertinent information and will make every reasonable attempt to meet in person with the accused, to give that person or persons every opportunity to clarify their own position(s), and to resolve the situation at the earliest stage and as quickly as possible.

The COM may find that an unacceptable behavior may or may not have occurred. If one has occurred, the current UUFP COM Guidelines for Handling Criticisms/Complaints shall be utilized, and the Membership Committee Chair shall be notified of the situation.

The COM will document all such efforts, and attempt to balance the confidentiality of the persons involved with the Fellowship's need to know.

3. 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: What is the degree of interference with Fellowship functions?
- OFFENSE: How likely is it that a prospective or an existing member will be driven away?

To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:

- CAUSES: Why is the disruption occurring?
- HISTORY: What was the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
- PROBABILITY OF CHANGE: How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

4. After reviewing relevant information, the COM shall make a recommendation to the Policy Board on a case-by-case basis. The Policy Board will support or modify it. The following actions are possible.

**A. No Further Action Need be Taken:** The COM finds that no actionable offense has occurred and recommends no Board action need be taken, or the COM has resolved the situation and there is no need for action by the Policy Board.

**B. Communicate:** That the Minister, or a member of the COM, or a designee of the Policy Board, and one disinterested witness will communicate the concern and discuss ways to modify the disruptive behavior.

**C. Suspend:** That the offending individual be suspended from participating in some or all Fellowship activities for a specified period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return communicated in writing to the offending person(s). The COM may, if it wishes, recommend a deadline for compliance with the conditions of return, with the stipulation that failure to meet the deadline may result in permanent exclusion from the Fellowship. The Membership shall be notified of the decision.

D. **Expel:** That the offending individual be excluded from the Fellowship premises and all Fellowship activities. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, the President and Minister will send a letter to the offending person, explaining the expulsion and the individual's right to appeal the expulsion. The Membership shall be notified of the decision.

The Policy Board shall meet to consider the recommendation of the COM. At such a meeting a quorum of 75% of Policy Board members is required if either Suspension or Expulsion is recommended. Any vote to suspend or expel a person must pass by a 2/3 majority of those present.

#### **DOCUMENTATION AND NOTIFICATION PROCESS**

All communication and discussion will be documented. All parties will sign off on the documentation. All mail shall be sent by return receipt requested. Any refusal to sign off on the documentation shall be noted and witnessed. Signing off on the documentation indicates the receipt of the documentation, not necessarily agreement with it.

#### **RIGHT OF APPEAL**

The By-Laws contains a method (Article VI, B; Special Membership Meetings) for concerned members to bring the matter in front of the entire membership. In the case of suspending or expelling a member, the notice must be received by the President of the Policy Board within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the suspension or expulsion notice. The timeliness of this process is important so that healing of our community may begin.

The Policy Board's decision remains in effect until and unless the membership overrides it. If necessary, legal action will be taken to ensure that the individual complies with the suspension or expulsion.

Members of the Fellowship whose personal security has been threatened by the disruptive behavior will be kept informed in a timely manner of the steps being taken to deal with the source of the problem, as will the person accused. In addition, the Minister will offer individual or group counseling to any Fellowship members who have been adversely affected by the disruptive behavior.

#### **RESTORATION OF MEMBERSHIP AFTER EXPULSION**

If in time the person expelled makes the necessary changes to his/her behavior, and wishes to reenter the Fellowship, s/he may apply in writing to the President to meet with the President and the Minister. Any re-entry is subject to Policy Board approval. The



person(s) whose security and safety were as compromised by the offending person will be informed of any such request. Such an application for readmission may not occur before 36 months have elapsed; restoration of membership will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Nothing in this policy should suggest any obligation on the part of the President, Minister or leadership to agree to such a meeting.

Approved by the Unitarian Universalist Policy Board January 17,2007