

The First Universalist Church of Rochester Covenant of Responsible Behavior

First Universalist Church is dedicated to the free and responsible search for truth and meaning; the inherent worth and dignity of the individual; and justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. We hereby covenant to create an open and supportive community where we can meet and grow towards wholeness, inspire and challenge one another, share in the observance of special life events, and act according to our principles in the local and world communities—in short, where all can feel safe and welcomed.

To do so, we make these promises:

To respect one another's beliefs,

To nurture an environment of direct and positive communication,

To build a caring community through understanding and learning,

To respect the safety and welfare of others,

To respect our sanctuary and church facilities.

We assert these promises as fundamental rights and responsibilities of all persons attending the First Universalist Church. We accept this Covenant of Responsible Behavior as a guide. Its accompanying policy shall guide the response where responsible behavior is in question.

The First Universalist Church of Rochester Policy on Responsible Behavior

This policy does not attempt to further define specific forms of acceptable or unacceptable behavior, but rather to guide the responses of Church individuals and Church leadership where responsible behavior is in question. In the spirit of an open and supportive community it is hoped that individuals experiencing conflict can discuss their issues with civility and reach independent resolution, consistent with the spirit of the Covenant of Responsible Behavior. Of course there will nevertheless be situations of unresolvable conflict between individuals, individuals with personally disruptive behavior, and even times when conflict arises over congregational issues at large. In any of these or other cases, if conflict cannot be resolved and eventually grows to the point where it threatens the health and well-being of the Congregation in part or its entirety, then other actions must be taken by the Church leadership.

If the conflict involves a larger congregational issue that is generally not related to personal behavior or the like, creating broader concerns in the Church community, then it is expected that the Committee on Ministry will be involved. The Committee on Ministry is generally charged with impartially mediating issues that affect the entirety of the Congregation. The Committee on Ministry may initiate its own response to any issue as it becomes aware of the issue, or the Board of Trustees may request that the Committee of Ministry address any particular issue as it becomes aware of the issue. Consistent with its purpose, the Committee on Ministry will only make recommendations and lend advice to the Board of Trustees on proper actions to take, but the Board is ultimately responsible for taking those actions as it deems appropriate.

The first response to any other unresolved conflict—particularly individualized conflict—should be from either the Minister or Board President, or a combination. The response may be initiated by either The Minister or the Board President directly, or in response to an issue brought to the attention of either. The Minister and/or Board President is encouraged to work with all individuals involved to seek some sort of amicable conclusion, as best they see fit.

If the conflict is, in the opinion of the Minister and the Board President, too severe or prolonged to be corrected by a simple conversation, or if the Minister and/or Board President feel too uncomfortable due to personal involvement in the conflict, a difficult relationship with the individual(s) involved, or other factors, they may choose to bring the issue to the Board or the Executive Committee of the Board for consideration. The Board or Executive Committee may then appoint an ad hoc Relationship Committee to address the conflict.

The specific composition of the Relationship Committee will be determined on a case-by- case basis. The Board is encouraged to consider, when determining membership of the committee, both potential members' leadership positions (e.g. for an issue involving a particular committee, the committee chair might be considered), as well as personal qualities (e.g. impartiality, discretion, tact, sensitivity, and diplomacy) that would enable them to serve effectively. The Relationship Committee will impartially consider all of the facts and conditions in the case, in part by communication with the people involved and any others impacted by the conflict. The Relationship Committee will then make timely recommendations to the Board of Trustees on proper actions to take, but the Board is ultimately responsible for taking those actions as it deems appropriate. The Board will render a final decision in all matters.

In all cases, to determine an appropriate resolution, the following points will be considered and documented:

- Causes—why is the conflict occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?

- History—what is 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?
- Dangerousness—is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- Destructiveness—is the behavior likely to cause permanent damage to the church facilities?
- Disruptiveness—is the behavior interfering with church activities?

In all cases involving a Relationship Committee as detailed above, the Board will render a final decision. The decision should be guided by the recommendations and advice of the Relationship Committee, and will generally be determined on a case-by-case basis, but the severity of response may go so far as the following as warranted:

- The offending individual(s) may be excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear.
- If the Board feels that the behavior is severely disruptive, frequent, dangerous, and/or unlikely to change, the offending individual(s) may be permanently excluded from some or all church activities and/or from the church premises. If this action is taken, the background and reasons for it must be carefully documented, and the Board will send a letter to the individual(s) explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse.

Situations that present imminent danger or require an immediate response should be handled by the Minister and/or appropriate church leader by asking the offending person to leave or by calling the police.

Approved by Board of Trustees, May 11, 2015