

GTF Guidance Question to the Board of Trustees – February 9, 2010

“Right Relations” is the current UU terminology for describing:

1. How the members of a church are expected to interact with each other. It is normally expressed through covenant or other list of behaviors that are expected to result in a state of Right Relations.
2. A process that will be applied to return the church to a state of Right Relations if we stray from that preferred state of being.

Historically, “Beloved Community” and “behavioral covenant” have been used to describe the same concept. The UUA has information about Right Relations at:

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/safecongregations/ethics/104222.shtml>. This material includes background information along with samples.

Our existing Board policies (i.e. our “old” but still in existence policies...not our currently affirmed but not yet in force “new” policies) contain a “Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior”. This policy was adopted by the Board on February 12, 2008. If it has ever been formally invoked, the GTF is not aware of it. Our recommendation is that this policy should be carried forward without change. It exists and appears adequate for the trial period.

We do not have a behavioral covenant or statement of expectations and we feel that it would be very useful to have one. We have provided the attached “Statement of Values and Expectations” as an example. It is a set of behavioral expectations created by another church and distributed as an example to students at the most recent Midwest Leadership School. Shawna shared it with us at the last Program Council meeting. It has been changed to show it as being owned by First Unitarian Church.

Our question is what should we do in addition to carrying forward the existing Disruptive Behavior policy? Here are some possible approaches:

1. Disruptive Behavior policy. Indicate a timeframe and an entity to review and update the policy.
2. Behavioral Expectations. Ignore for the time being.
3. Behavioral Expectations. Adopt something now. We probably could not draft something from scratch but we could adapt something that exists.
4. Behavioral Expectations. Do nothing now, but indicate a timeframe and an entity to create a set of expectations or covenant (note that a “covenant” is an agreement and thus using the term covenant probably implies a participatory process to draft it.) Optionally, an example could be included to help inform the future work.
5. Behavioral Expectations. Adopt something now, and also indicate a timeframe and an entity to review and update the expectations.

Here is a “half-formed” policy statement example just to give you a feel for how the options might be handled.

- 8. Right Relations.** The well-being, strength, and reputation of our church depend on a sense of fellowship among the members, friends, and staff, which thrives in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and cooperation. To clarify our expectations and processes, the {Ministry Team Leader or other designated entity} shall, {during the Trial Run or by some other date} :
- a. Develop a covenant of right relations that supports the growth of individuals and our community, helps to maintain a culture of mutual respect and personal safety, and sets forth the Church’s expectations for our membership. {Until such a covenant is developed, the Board adopts the } {An example of a }covenant of right relations is set forth (where).
 - b. Review our existing Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior and recommend changes to the Board as needed. The existing policy is set forth (where) and shall remain in force until updated or replaced.

Attachments that follow:

1. Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior
2. Statement of Values and Expectations

Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

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. 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.

There have been times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building 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.

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

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister(s), 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. If further assistance is required the Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister(s) being present, the Minister(s) must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister(s) to the offending party or parties.
2. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. The committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:
 - a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. 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. The committee will collect all necessary information.
 - d. 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?
 - OFFENSIVENESS - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
 - e. 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?
 - 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?
 - f. The committee will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:

LEVEL ONE - The committee shall inform the Minister(s) of the problem and either the Minister(s) or a member 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.

g. Any action taken under item f. (above) may be appealed to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees and/or the Minister(s).

LEVEL THREE - The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Before this is carried out, the committee will consult with the Board of Trustees and the Minister(s). If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister(s) explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse.

First 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.

Statement of Values and Expectations for First Unitarian Church of Omaha Membership

It is the intention of the First Unitarian Church to create a culture of mutual respect and personal safety that supports the growth of individuals and our community. In the service of this goal and our mission, the Church holds certain expectations of its members, its volunteer leaders, its professional leaders, and those who relate to its children.

The Church expects members:

- not to endanger the health or physical safety of others;
- not to harass, bully, intimidate or physically or verbally abuse others;
- to communicate respectfully, honestly, and directly;
- to respond with acceptance to differences in ability and status;
- to treat seriously in civil dialogue diversities of theology and culture;
- not to engage in sexually exploitive or offensive behavior;
- to abide by the bylaws, policies, and organizational structures and procedures established by the Church;
- not to endanger the organizational status of the Church, including its tax exemption, or break the law, except by a thoughtful and deliberate act of civil disobedience.

In addition to the above, the Church expects its volunteer leaders:

- to exercise their leadership fairly, respectfully, and competently;
- to abide by democratic principles;
- to uphold the best interests of the Church in general;
- to support the safety and growth of those they lead;
- not to exploit the authority of their role;
- to consent to background checks as required by law, insurance, or prudence;
- not to use Church facilities or resources to which they may have access for purposes other than for their assigned role.

In addition to all of the above, the Church expects its professional leaders:

- to protect the confidentiality and trust reposed in them by members;
- not to use their position at the Church for personal financial advantage;
- not to speak on behalf of the Church unless formally authorized to do so;

- to abide by the code of ethics of their professional organizations;
- to respect healthy boundaries of sexual behavior.

In addition to the membership and leadership expectations above, the Church expects all who work with its children:

- to care for the children's physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth;
- to treat them with respect and dignity;
- to be positive and affirming toward them, even in the process of correcting behavior;
- to refrain from behavior with them that is in any way erotic, seductive, or sexual in nature;
- to abide by the UUA statement of ethics regarding work with children and youth;
- to consent to background checks as required by law, insurance, or prudence;
- to abide by all policies determined by the Religious Education or Youth/ Adult committees.

Questions regarding these expectations, or concerns as to whether they are being met, should be referred to the Minister or the Board of Trustees.