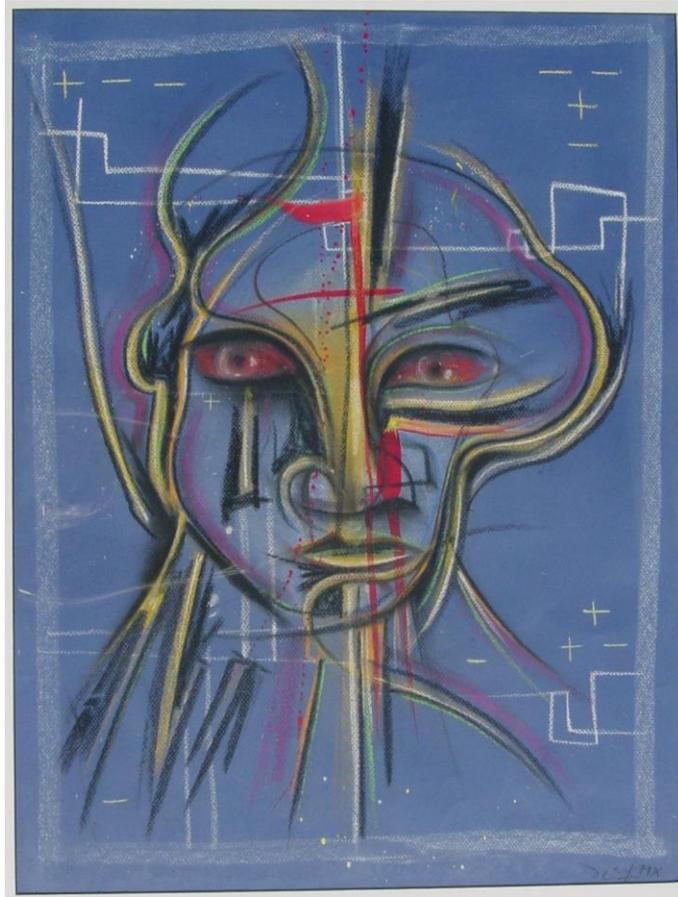


# Caring Congregations: The Care of Difficult People



*Untitled Portrait Ozzy, c. 2000*

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# **The Care of Difficult People**

## **AGENDA**

- **The Care of Difficult People**
- **Some Kinds of Difficult People and Their Care**
- **Discussion / Role-Play Case Studies**
- **Congregational Needs**
  - **Covenant of Right Relations**
  - **Disruptive Behavior Policy**

# The Care of Difficult People

## Introduction

- Care of
  - Care of – rather than the manipulation or isolation of – the difficult person.
  - Care of caregivers
  - Care of the church
- Shared responsibility:
  - No one is to blame but everybody is responsible to fix
  - Person not to be treated as a scapegoat
  - We don't "play God" in others' lives
- Not covered here
  - Intentionally illegal, malicious, or destructive actions
  - Sexual misconduct
  - Not comprehensive of all kinds of difficult people

## Some Advice from Jesus: Three-Step Model: <sup>1</sup>

1. Talk face-to-face with the offender.
  - This may nip the problem in the bud.
  - Give the person the benefit of the doubt: "I don't know whether this is accurate or not, but is it true that you said or did this?"
2. Ask one or two people to join you and meet with the offender.
  - Check your views with the wisdom of others
  - Get offender to "pay attention," not "get attention."
3. Ask the offender to come before the congregation (or sub-committee)
  - Involve the minister, if not already involved
  - If problem is harmful to the congregation, and the person refuses to change, ask person to take a leave of absence, or otherwise remove him/her self from the congregation. Cordiality outside of church is still appropriate.
  - The goal is restoration; determine what steps need to be taken for this
  - Recommend therapy, if appropriate
  - Restore person to community in a spirit of gentleness
  - Learn when to let go if restoration is not possible

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<sup>1</sup> This model is described in Matthew 18: 15-17 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

<sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

<sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

## **Some Kinds of Difficult People and Their Care**

Adapted from Wayne E. Oates. *The Care of Troublesome People*, © New York: Alban Institute, 1994

### **Back-Biting Person**

- Doesn't deal face-to-face with someone with whom they have a grievance; rather spreads stories behind that person's back, starting rumors and gossip.
- How to handle: Deal face-to-face with the originator of the story.
  - Encounter done in a spirit of gentleness and humility, not with anger
  - If the back-biter is telling the truth, understand the situation and take action to address it. If serious, alert the minister.
  - Try to understand person's motivation, fears, etc that led to action; it may be linked to a larger set of difficulties that need to be addressed, maybe using mental health care

### **Authoritarian, Power-Ridden Person**

- Relies on intimidation to get his or her way.
  - Probably needs an audience to make power moves.
  - May have a "palace guard" who depend upon him / her for leadership.
  - May use money as power.
  - May hold all signs of weakness with contempt
- One-on-one encounter is the best way to start: no audience, no embarrassment
- Objective: have him/her hear you out. If there has been a legitimate mistake, admit it. Look for opportunities for reconciliation while "saving face" for authoritarian

### **Competitive Divider of the Congregation**

- Divides congregation into competitive camps
  - Examples: social class, cliques, contending families, staff conflicts
  - Inappropriate use of model of competitive conflict from business world
- Need to set limits beyond which a competitor may not go in terms of divisive behaviors. ex: job descriptions, covenant of right relationships
- When staff members start demeaning each other, nip it in the bud, by pointing it out and restore harmony in a spirit of gentleness and self-examination.
- Be sensitive to people who are disappointed about some action, affirming their gifts

### **Dependent Clinging Vine**

- Dependent on constant attention. Cannot do many things independently. Not sensitive to the effects of his or her behavior.
- May be conscience stricken and need someone to hear him / her out – for a limited number of encounters
- Encourage independent actions
- May need referral to professional counseling - Get minister involved

### **The Star Performer**

- Wants to grab or share the spotlight as much as they can
- Often fickle, sort-tempered, superficial, oblivious to needs of others, undependable, lack integrity, and act against the common good of the church as a whole.
- May criticize the minister who is "in the spotlight" every Sunday morning
- Star performer may need:
  - Friendship that is steadfast and durable
  - A richer spiritual life
  - To find a purpose or calling to their life, maybe studying drama
  - Professional mental health care

## **Some Kinds of Difficult People and Their Care, continued**

Adapted from Robert M. Bramson, *Coping with Difficult People*, © New York: Ballantine, 1984

### **The “Sherman Tank”**

- “Attacks” in an abusive, abrupt, intimidating and contemptuous manner, overpowering anyone with whom they must interact. Needs to prove he/she is always right.
- Stand up to them without being drawn into an argument.
  - Get them to sit down and discuss the problem with you. Maintain eye contact.
  - State your own opinions without apology.
  - Be friendly and receptive to negotiation.

### **The “Exploder”**

- Temper tantrum-like outbursts when they feel thwarted and threatened
- Get them to wind down and switch to a problem-solving mode of interaction.
  - If they don’t wind down, shout “Stop” or “Quiet Please.”
  - Use active listening skills. Move to a private setting.

### **The “Complainer”**

- Finds fault with everything. Someone should be doing something about their problems. Feels powerless to change situations they complain about. Could be a perfectionist
- Interrupt persistent blaming and move to problem-solving mode.
  - Listen, paraphrase. Don’t agree with them or apologize
  - Try to engage in problem-solving mode assigning tasks, or ask for written complaints

### **The “Clam”**

- Will not react to attempts to engage them with other than a grunt or silence. Avoids painful interpersonal situations or taking a position on an issue. May mask fear or anger
- Get them to open up and discuss what is bothering them
  - Ask open-ended questions and wait for a response. Don’t make idle chatter.
  - Comment on what is happening between you.

### **The “Wet Blanket”**

- Responds to every question or proposal with a quick and negative response. Unable to move into problem-solving mode. Feels that everything is out of their control
- Engage them in problem-solving without becoming negative
  - Make optimistic, realistic statements about past successes with similar problems
  - Don’t try and argue them out of their pessimism
  - Allow problem to be discussed before offering solutions

### **The “Know-it-All”**

- An expert on all matters, threatened by others’ knowledge. Must be self-sufficient.
- Try to get them to consider alternatives without directly challenging their expertise.
  - Listen carefully and paraphrase main points of contention with them

### **The “Staller”**

- Habitually indecisive, not wanting to cause disappointment or anger in others
- You can’t change them, but can try to engage in problem-solving
  - Examine facts of the situation.
  - Carefully delineate who is responsible for what

## **Discussion / Role-Play Case Studies**

### **Use these or suggest your own**

1. A man frequently disrupts a committee meeting and keeps work from getting done.
2. A top donor threatens to reduce his contribution if the church plans aren't changed to his liking.
3. A person in a committee takes an action not sanctioned by the committee and represents it as the committee's decision. The person believes they took the right action.
4. The chair of a committee, a person of long-standing power in the congregation, has a very authoritarian style. He has cultivated a "palace guard" on the committee. Open conflict results when there is any disagreement, and ideas are co-opted when the chair likes them.
5. A woman spreads a story about the treasurer's handling of church money.
6. A woman is unhappy about not being selected to a key committee, and seeks to undermine the committee's work.
7. A person expects/demands daily interactions with lay pastoral care staff without an understandable reason
8. A man disrupts worship on a regular basis with loud entrances and exits.
9. A poorly-dressed man is laughed at when entering church and later tries to disrupt a sermon talk-back session.
10. A person has been warned before about disruptive behavior and has continued to do it because the church didn't take any action on past warnings.

## **Congregational Needs**

- Covenant of right relations – how we treat each other in our congregation
- Disruptive Behavior Policy
- Training of church staff and lay leaders
- Referral list of therapists, support groups, and community programs
- Possibly a standing Grievance Committee
  - Small team gifted in discernment, wisdom and compassion
  - Helps minister / lay leaders in working with difficult people

## **Covenant of Right Relations Definition**

Definition of covenant

- (Bible) an agreement between God and his people in which God makes certain promises and requires certain behavior from them in return:
- Formal, solemn and binding agreement
- a signed written agreement between two or more parties (nations) to perform some action

### **Developing a formal covenant of right relations Congregational Exercise Using a District Facilitator**

An opportunity to determine how the members of a congregation wish to be in right relationship with one another.

- working together in large and small groups
- we will develop guidelines for ourselves around how we interact as members of this congregation, with ourselves, with one another, with our minister, our staff, our board and the larger community.
- the workshop will be facilitated by PCD facilitator
- the result will be a good and as powerful as the people who are part of it. It is vital that as many members as possible attend

This lesson was adapted from a workshop initially created by the Pacific Northwest District CONTACT Team and the Unitarian Church of Victoria, British Columbia. Its structure was inspired by Code of Professional Practice in the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Guidelines.

## Resources

### General

- Wayne E. Oates. *The Care of Troublesome People*, New York: Alban Institute, 1994.
- Robert M. Bramson, *Coping with Difficult People*, New York: Ballantine, 1984.
- Rev. Anne Odin Heller, *Church Works, a Well-Body Book for Congregations*, Boston: Skinner House Books, 1999.

### Handling malicious actions in a church setting:

- Kenneth C. Haugk. *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1988.

### Sexual misconduct in the church:

- Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* San Francisco: Harper & Row 1989
- Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton. *Sex in the Parish*, Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991.

## **Example Covenants of Right Relations**

- Unitarian Universalist Church of South County, Mission Viejo, CA
- Universalist Unitarian Church of Riverside, CA
- Atkinson Memorial Church, Oregon City, Oregon
- Unitarian Universalist Church Of Davis
- Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists, Williamsburg, VA
- Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Port Angeles, Washington
- Mount Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church, Walnut Creek, CA

*Unitarian Universalist Church of South County, Mission Viejo, CA*  
**Covenant of Right Relations**



*As members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of South County, we covenant to continually co-create our beloved community. Holding central our Association's **seven principles**, we will strive to support one another's religious quests; honor one another's dignity, and listen deeply to one another's ideas. We are here to foster our own and others' growth, wholeness, joy and service through our shared ministry. We join one another in pledging our gifts of time, talent, and treasure to serve these goals. In this way we will serve our own spiritual development, one another, our religious home, our local community, our larger faith, and our world.*

# Covenant of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Riverside, CA

We, the members of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Riverside, covenant to ourselves, the Minister, the staff and the governing Board to live in harmony with our seven principles:

1. I will honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person by treating every person with respect. When I speak, I will speak directly, honestly, sensitively, clearly, and I will speak for myself only. I will listen with patience, openness and compassion whenever anyone speaks to me. I will not denigrate others nor will I support the denigration of others by my silence.
2. I will model justice, equity and compassion in human relations by forgiving myself and others when we make mistakes. I will support those who serve the Church regardless of whether they were hired, elected or volunteered to meet a need. I will praise their efforts for the work they do, the positions they fill, their responsibilities and duties. I acknowledge the demands of personal, family, work, social and spiritual commitments on my time; therefore I will strive for balance and allow others to seek balance in their lives.
3. I will promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation by taking responsibility for my own spiritual growth and supporting others in their spiritual pursuits. I will learn how the Church works and about Unitarian Universalist principles, traditions and rituals.
4. I will support a free and responsible search for truth and meaning by supporting and encouraging responsible freedom of the pulpit. I will share my vision and my spiritual values while respecting other faiths and practices, and I will not feel compelled to defend my beliefs.
5. I will support the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large by embracing differences of opinion. Without ridicule or intimidation, I will encourage the expression of opposing points of view.
6. I will strive for the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all by promoting and supporting interfaith efforts compatible with Unitarian Universalist values and principles. I will uphold the rights of diverse religious groups within the larger community. I will pay attention to issues of fair treatment.
7. I will show respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part by acting responsibly in local and global issues to reflect Unitarian Universalist principles.

I enter this covenant as a free individual and as a member of this congregation promising mutual trust and support.

Love is the Doctrine of this Church  
The quest of Truth is its Sacrament  
And Service is its Prayer  
To dwell together in Peace;  
To seek knowledge in Freedom;  
And to live in Harmony with all the Living Creatures and Plants of the Earth  
This do we Affirm.

## ***Atkinson Memorial Church, Oregon City, Oregon***

### ***Covenant of Right Relations***

A covenant is a mutual promise of agreement between parties. The Covenant expresses the membership's relationship with the church. Seven basic areas represent the church: board, self, community, member to member, minister, Religious Education, and staff.

On May 13, 2001, about 40 members attended a meeting at the church to discuss the Covenant of a church member with the church. Tim Haley was present at the beginning of the May 13th meeting but did not attend the working session, as this was supposed to be from church members without ministerial input. The first draft of the Covenant of Right Relations was created at that meeting. This document is the final copy of the Covenant of Right Relations. It reflects the input of the people who attended the May 13th meeting and the work of the Covenant committee at the May 19th editing meeting. It also includes input from our membership by using a drop box in the Dome Room to provide feedback on draft copies. The membership was made aware of the drop box through Sunday morning announcements and by the publication of the Covenant in the News and Views. Members provided feedback by marking up copies of the News and Views and placing them in the drop box.

The Covenant was then presented and adopted at the annual congregational meeting on May 20th, 2001. It is not a rule book to be used to reprimand each other with, but rather is between only ourselves and the church. It is to be an ideal that each individual member aspires to; it is how we want to be together in community.

#### **Board**

- I will appreciate that the work of the board involves a significant investment of time and energy.
- I will take the effort to become aware of board responsibilities and activities.
- I will speak directly with board members about my concerns involving board business.
- I will present problems with ideas for solutions and a willingness to help.
- I will look for opportunities to give my time to the Board.
- I will respect board requests for my time, knowing the board will respect my right to say no.
- I will serve on the board at some point in my life, if I can.

#### **Self**

- I will commit to addressing and resolving conflicts in a positive way, without withdrawing, by using available church resources, including mediation.
- I will not take for granted others talents.
- I will welcome others talents.

- I will pledge time and money to the best of my ability, in consideration of the needs of the church.
- I will be friendly and welcoming to all members and visitors.
- I will honor the voices and opinions and decisions of members of all ages.
- I will make a genuine effort to get to know and understand people outside of my age group.
- I will participate in church activities.
- I will encourage youth to participate in church activities.
- I will take responsibilities for my own opinions.
- I will follow through when I commit to do something.

## **Community**

- I will help others outside the church.
- I will encourage and mentor youth to learn social responsibility.
- I will not represent the church without authorization.
- I will be respectful of the church in my communications with others.
- I will continuously educate myself on social issues outside my church, for example, education, ecology, and the local community.
- I will be aware that the facilities are available for use by the local community.
- I will work to overcome my prejudices, for example, race, religion, and sexual preferences.
- I will speak out against injustice.
- I will honor and embrace the mission statement.

## **Member to Member**

- I will be respectful.
- I will be caring for members.
- I will be accepting of differences.
- I will honor the members who have come before me.
- I will respect the past accomplishments.
- I am aware that this church is affiliated with Congregational Christianity and Unitarian Universalists.
- I will honor the many beliefs within our church.
- I will listen to others.
- I will make an effort to include others.
- I will encourage others to share their concerns.
- I will let the trivial stuff go.
- I will avoid saying things that undermine relationships at church.
- I will be straightforward in a caring manner.
- I will make an effort to include new members.
- I will commit myself to taking care of the church as I take care of other things I value.
- I will not expect others to do all the work.

- I will use the mediation committee to resolve differences with other members.
- I will abide by the RE guidelines.
- I will honor the boundaries and expressed wishes of others.

## **Minister**

- I will not expect the minister to "do it all".
- I will be realistic about the amount of time the minister can spend with me.
- I will respect the minister's private and family time.
- If I have concerns with the minister, I will talk directly with him or her.
- If I have unresolved issues with the minister, I will take them to the committee on ministry, or the mediation committee.
- I will respect the freedom of the pulpit.
- I will express my appreciation to the minister.
- I will encourage appropriate remuneration for the minister.
- I will keep my personal relationship with the minister ethically and morally appropriate.
- I will not use the minister's partner as a conduit to the minister and will treat the partner as we would any other member of the congregation.
- I will respect the need for adequate time for the minister to research, prepare, and renew.

## **Staff**

- I will respect the time and effort a staff member contributes to our community and address issues to a staff member in an encouraging and positive manner.
- I will respect the personal time of each staff member.
- I will respect the boundaries of the staff member's job responsibilities.
- I will communicate my need to a staff member directly, and understand that my personal needs may or may not be met.
- I will discuss concerns about the church that is the responsibilities of a staff member, with that staff member.
- I will not make any commitments on behalf of a staff member without their consent.
- I will give the staff member adequate time to respond to my requests.
- I will seek out opportunities to provide positive feedback to each staff member.
- I will use "I" statements when speaking to staff members.
- I understand that as a member of this church, responsibilities will come my way from time to time, and therefore will consider requests that come from staff members.
- Because the staff supports the church community, I will support the staff.
- I will consider mediation as a means to address conflicts with a staff member.

## **Director of Religious Education (DRE)**

- I will not expect the DRE to "do it all".
- I will respect the DRE's private and family time.
- If I have concerns with the DRE, I will talk directly with him or her.
- I will consider mediation as a means to address conflicts with the DRE.
- I will respect the DRE as a professional.
- I will express my appreciation for the DRE.
- I will encourage appropriate remuneration for the DRE.
- I will respect the boundaries of the DRE's job responsibilities.

# Unitarian Universalist Church Of Davis

## Covenant of Right Relations

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis, adopt this covenant for the purpose of being in right relationship with one another. Through this covenant we make a formal commitment to act with mutual trust and respect in our church community. This covenant serves as a public statement of what it means to be a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis. We believe that members bring their best intentions into their relationships with the church and its members, clergy, and staff. Yet, this covenant will serve to remind us of our explicit responsibilities in maintaining a healthy congregation. It will provide a framework for upholding our mission and living our shared Principles and values.

### **Member to Self**

- I promise to nurture my spiritual needs.
- I promise to accept myself as I am, realizing my limits, and forgiving myself when I fall short.
- I promise to take responsibility for my personal well-being and to balance my commitments to the church with those of the other areas of my life.
- I promise to live responsibly, to act with integrity, and to speak honestly.

### **Member to Staff**

- We promise to show our respect by making clear requests in a timely manner, being civil in our interactions, honoring work hours, being open and direct in our communications, and showing sincere appreciation for work done.
- We promise to honor the staff's authority over their spheres of responsibility.
- We promise to provide staff with adequate resources, a healthy work environment, and opportunities for professional development.
- We promise to support fair compensation and benefits for staff.

### **Member to Member**

We promise to be welcoming, respectful, and supportive of church community members by:

- Communicating openly and truthfully.
- Deeply listening with an open mind, loving heart.
- Remaining cognizant of everyone's right to speak.
- Giving of our time, talent, and money.
- Maintaining the commitments we make.
- Keeping informed and informing others of happenings within the church community.
- Supporting each other in our search for meaning, recognizing each of us as a teacher as well as a student in the learning process.
- Caring for each other in our joys and sorrows.

### **Member to Board of Trustees**

- We promise to communicate openly, directly and honestly with the Board.
- We promise to honor and respect the work of the Board.
- We promise to educate ourselves on the Board's decision-making process, to raise issues directly consistent with that process, and to trust and accept the results.

### **Member to Youth and Children**

- We promise to serve as proper role models for our youth and children.

- We promise to be thoughtful and careful in our communications with our youth and children, speaking with clarity and honesty, listening deeply and attentively.
- We promise to be patient with our youth and children, allowing them time to gain experience and to learn for themselves.
- We promise to make our actions with our youth and children intentional, well thought out, consistent and trustworthy.
- We promise to maintain appropriate boundaries with our children and youth.
- We promise to include our youth and children as full participants in church life appropriate to their age and experience.

### **Member to Clergy**

- We promise to have a respectful relationship with the professional clergy, a relationship that models justice, truth, love, equity and compassion in all encounters.
- We promise to communicate directly and honestly and to provide feedback in a spirit of loving-kindness.
- We promise, as a teaching congregation, to support the professional growth of clergy and interns.
- We promise to honor those needs and concerns of the clergy that are outside of their roles as leaders of the congregation, including acknowledging that time away from church is protected personal time.
- We promise to recognize and value the unique role of the clergy in providing leadership for our church while at the same time acknowledging our own responsibility for carrying out the church's shared ministry.
- We promise to support fair compensation and benefits for clergy.

### **Member to Larger Community**

- We promise to conduct ourselves in an ethical manner and thereby promote such behavior in our children and the community.
- We promise to act in a manner to foster acceptance of other faiths and cultures and to work to build an anti-oppressive world.
- We promise to be aware of concerns, needs and conflicts in environmental, economic and social justice issues and to use our resources toward their resolution.

*This is a living document intended to reflect the needs of our congregation as it changes and grows. Accordingly, the Committee on Ministry and Board of Trustees will review it every three years. Additionally, it will be included in our orientation process, made available for all to see, and incorporated into our congregational lives. Concerns about the health of the church in regard to right relations will be directed to the Committee on Ministry.*

# **Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists, Williamsburg, VA**

## **Covenant Of Right Relations**

### **Preamble**

We affirm the Principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Covenant of the Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists. Our Covenant of Right Relations is a statement of how we, as a congregation, strive to support and work with each other to create a living, growing spiritual community. The goal of this document is to provide clear statements about how our principles are demonstrated through our actions. Ultimately, it is the way we treat each other that reveals who and what we are as a congregation. Each of us is responsible to make, and support each other in making, good-faith efforts to abide by this covenant in both letter and spirit.

### **Our Principles**

#### **1. We practice manners and civility in our membership. We act as stewards of our sacred spaces.**

In behavioral and observable terms we promise to

- a. Allow all a chance to speak and listen so that all are heard and understood.
- b. Help each other as we are able with time, money, talent, and spirit
- c. Support church leaders and programs unless we have strong reasons to challenge or oppose them; abide by existing structures, leadership directives, and bylaws while working for change.
- d. Refrain from gossip and from ridiculing, attacking or invalidating others through word or deed.
- e. Remind others kindly of the spirit of this document when needed.
- f. Show manners appropriate to a church or sanctified space e.g. silence, quiet contemplation or prayer, reverence and heart-felt spiritual self-expression, during the worship service.

#### **2. We accept conflict in our community as inevitable and healthy. We are guided by the principle that properly managed conflict between people in right relations to each other can be a positive force for creativity, growth, and enrichment. Our task is to find appropriate ways to express and resolve our conflicts.**

In behavioral and observable terms we promise to

- a. Allow the necessary time to identify and discuss differences before making decisions.
- b. Listen to competing ideas with respect, tolerance, and honest consideration.
- c. Speak openly on matters of controversy, using "I" statements.
- d. Solicit, encourage and integrate minority contributions into a democratic resolution.
- e. Make decisions that serve the common good.

#### **3. We value openness in our communications and decision making.**

In behavioral and observable terms we promise to

- a. Share strongly felt convictions openly rather than withholding input from the group.
- b. Make committee and governance meetings open, with rare exceptions such as personnel matters.
- c. Give visitors to board and committee meetings the opportunity to speak within established guidelines.
- d. Make all minutes, accounts, and transcripts available to the congregation.
- e. Participate actively in WUU governance and decision making.

#### **4. We direct controversial WUU-related communications through appropriate channels.**

In behavioral and observable terms we promise to

- a. When feasible, attempt to resolve interpersonal disputes or grievances directly and privately.
- b. Attempt to resolve non-personal controversies e.g. on policies, programs or finances through the relevant committee or channel.
- c. Follow established procedures for mediation and conflict resolution if our efforts to resolve issues are unsuccessful.
- d. Abide by outcome of the conflict resolution process.

#### **5. We strive to focus on the issues and behaviors, not on people and personalities.**

In behavioral and observable terms we promise to

- a. Address the issues and points under review in our discussions and deliberations; avoid “naming and blaming.”
- b. Use “I” statements to set a tone of presenting and sharing rather than attacking and criticizing.
- c. Consider the message on its merits; avoid personalizing communications about issues and remembering that the message is about the matter at hand, not about the sender or receiver.
- d. Follow established conflict resolution process when a personality trait, perceived character flaw, or unsatisfactory fit between temperament and a position in the congregation is the issue, and direct approaches have been unsuccessful.

#### **In Closing**

We promise to maintain a solution-oriented position on identifying, acknowledging and assessing issues as they arise and working actively to resolve them. Our goal is the resolution of problems through solutions which serve the common good. We offer the gift of forgiveness and are aware that reconciling conflict allows us to remain in fellowship

# **Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

## **Congregational Covenant of Right Relations**

We, the members of Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, agree to treat ourselves and each other with fairness and respect. We commit ourselves to improving the quality of our lives, as individuals and as a community. We will support one another's self-improvement, continuing spiritual growth, and the use of our skills and talents, in beneficial ways.

We agree to fulfill our covenant of right relations by accepting and practicing the following attitudes and actions:

### **Member in Regard to Self**

- I aspire to be a balanced, integrated and valued member of my family and community.
- I take responsibility for my physical, mental, and spiritual health.
- I gladly give and serve, and will value myself by balancing my needs with those of others.
- I will amplify my self-esteem in closeness of family, friends and community achieved through accurate self-knowledge, respect for diversity, honest expression and sensitive interaction.
- I will continue a wide range of life-long learning and honing of communication skills.
- I will nurture my spirituality.

### **In Regard to Other Members**

- I must be responsible, truthful, respectful, accepting and considerate in making sure that my communications are clear as to intent.
- I have an obligation to the Fellowship to contribute my time, my finances and my talents to the best of my abilities, for the Fellowship's good.
- I will extend support in its many forms to others on an appropriate level, taking care to respect privacy issues.
- I will accept responsibility of welcoming and supporting newcomers to our Fellowship utilizing a variety of one-on-one socially oriented activities including, but not limited to "lunch bunch" participation after services.
- I accept the task of notifying our Caring Committee Chairman, our Lay Chaplains, Executive Assistant and our Minister regarding a member or friend of the Fellowship whom may be experiencing a time of need requiring extra support.
- If I agree to serve in any official capacity, I accept the responsibility to perform that duty's functions or step aside, having attempted to find someone to replace me.
- I will be courteous to all other members at all times.
- I will celebrate diversity and the acceptance of others.
- I will proactively prevent problems rather than to be merely reactive.

- I will recognize and accommodate the functional needs of members of all ages.
- I will support the use of a conflict resolution process as the means to resolve issues between members

### **In Regard to Staff**

- I will treat staff members of the church with dignity and respect
- I will support clear expectations of the staff member's duties.
- I will encourage growth and creativity.
- I will foster and practice honest, two-way communications.
- I will respect the boundaries of staff personnel in relation to time commitment, privacy, family needs, including their right to say "No."
- I will work with staff to determine the best way to accomplish their duties.
- I will demonstrate appreciation.
- I will support development of a clear reporting structure.
- I will support provision for frequent performance feed-back.
- I will facilitate staff members networking with others in similar positions.
- I will support fair compensation.
- I will support and encourage the provision of appropriate training.
- I will have high expectations of staff members: fostering a commitment to the success of their roles in strengthening the OUUF as a whole.
- I will encourage staff members to work with an awareness of the Seven Principles.
- I will support staff in all aspects of their jobs.

### **Board in Regard to Members**

- I will remember that the Board is elected to represent the interest of the Fellowship and agree to communicate to the Fellowship all Board decisions and issues.
- I will support keeping the Fellowship informed regarding the best way to communicate with the Board.
- I will support the use of the OUUF newsletter to keep the Fellowship informed about recent and pending decisions and by-law provisions related to Fellowship rights.
- I will actively consider the spiritual and human elements of all our deliberations and decisions.
- I will work to maintain liaisons between old and new Boards.
- I will help institute a mechanism to record and catalog decisions with the intent of facilitating institutional memory.
- I will help spread out responsibilities among leadership

### **Member in Regard to Board**

- I acknowledge that I am invited to attend Board meetings and that my input is welcome.
- I will respect the Board's decisions.
- If I disagree with a Board decision, I will communicate it to a Board member or the Board as a whole rather than to other Fellowship members.

- I agree to support the Board by volunteering to perform needed functions, and agreeing to help when asked, to the best of my ability.
- I will offer adequate appreciation to leadership.
- When I am involved with an OUUF committee, I agree to facilitate good communications between my committee and the Board.

### **In Regard to Our Minister**

- I will treat the Minister and Minister's family with respect dignity and show consideration for their personal time.
- I will take responsibility to address differences of view between myself and the Minister by first taking them to the Minister, and then, if still unresolved, seek advice from the Committee on Ministry.
- I take responsibility to address unresolved issues between myself and the Minister by seeking advice from the Committee on Ministry and/or by following the appropriate procedures as set forth in the Conflict Resolution Policy.
- I have a responsibility to ensure that the Minister is paid appropriately, reflecting UUA staffing guidelines.
- I am responsible for nurturing my own spiritual growth and will not have unrealistic expectations of the Minister's responsibilities in this area.
- I will work in partnership with the Minister to create a spiritual community.
- I will respect the UU Ministers Association Code of Professional Practice and will refrain from conduct that could potentially harm or endanger the integrity and well-being of the minister.

### **In Regard to the Wider World**

- I will live the Seven Principles of the UUA for myself and also encourage others to be aware of our values, while searching for additional ways to communicate our ideas to the wider world.
- I will fully explore means of helping others locally and worldwide, and take positive steps to alleviate hardship and suffering when possible.
- I will find ways to educate the wider community about the growing necessity to protect all living things and to conserve physical resources by consuming less and recycling more.
- I will share our values in a constructive manner.
- I will show respect concerning the values of other individuals and groups unless they unethically compromise the safety and well-being of others.
- I will practice generosity and acceptance to people of differing gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious creed, and socioeconomic background.
- I will regard the Fellowship as a special place where politicking is not appropriate.
- I will make myself aware of the complexity of human emotions and strive to channel my energies in a positive way.

Accepted by the OUUF membership at the annual meeting in May, 2005.

# **Mount Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church**

## **Covenant of Right Relationship**

In my relationship with the MDUUC community, and in keeping with our UU values, I will:

- \* Speak and write openly, honestly and respectfully, with clarity, tact and compassion.
- \* Listen carefully, with an open mind and an open heart, to what others say.
- \* Take responsibility for my speech and actions as they affect both individuals and the congregation as a whole.
- \* Be sensitive to possible conflicts, and be willing to work toward solutions using available resources, accepting that some differences may not be resolvable.
- \* Respect my own boundaries and the boundaries of others (sexual or other), and protect and support vulnerable individuals.
- \* Respect and support the diversity within our congregation, and work to create a more welcoming environment.
- \* Support our congregation as a safe environment for healthy relationships.

Adopted by the Congregation, June 2, 2002

## **Example Policies on Disruptive Behavior**

- Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Port Townsend, Washington
- West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Cleveland, Ohio
- First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego
- Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Fremont, CA

# PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Adopted into the Operations Manual on March 18, 2002

While openness to diversity 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. Concern for the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual.

The following policy shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing situations in which individuals' behavior threatens the emotional and/or physical security of our members and friends. The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained at all times, except in cases in which he/she poses a threat to others. The fellowship will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child sexual abuse.

Since it is serious business to file a formal complaint against a fellow member, doing so should never be taken lightly. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern, before resorting to the use of this policy.

- When a person's disruptive behavior requires an immediate response, it will be undertaken by the minister 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 it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called.
  - Anytime such actions are required and the Minister is not present, then the Minister and President of the Board of Trustees must be notified as soon as is practicable.
  - A follow-up letter or document detailing what steps must be taken by the offending party or parties before he/she/they may return to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister to the offending party or parties.
- For ongoing situations and those not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or people who witnessed it, to the Minister. The Minister will determine whether he/she wishes to handle the situation privately, or request the formation of an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees, (that committee shall include the Minister and at least two other members of the fellowship), to further investigate the matter. When appropriate and whenever possible, the Minister will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.
- The Minister and/or the committee will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgment, without defining acceptable behavior in advance.
  - People and situations will be dealt with individually.
  - Stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.
  - The Minister or the committee will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.
  - When the ad hoc committee considers such information essential to performing its task, the Board shall authorize funds to pay costs for a professional background check, to provide such facts as the correct identity of the person in question and records of past criminal activity involving threats, harassment, or actual harm to other persons or property.

Note: Unitarian Universalists have a long history of public engagement with issues of individual freedom and social justice. Therefore, acts of conscience or civil disobedience which may have resulted in criminal charges or convictions will receive distinct consideration and careful attention under this policy.

- The following questions must be considered by the Minister or the committee:
  - **Dangerous:** Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property, including himself or herself?
  - **Disruptive:** How much interference with church functions is occurring?
  - **Offensive:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
  
- The following questions may be considered by the Minister or the committee:
  - **Causes:** Why is this disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the fellowship? 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?
  
- The Minister or the committee will respond on a case-by-case basis. Mediation by a neutral party is also a possibility. The following levels of response are options the Minister or the committee can implement:
  - **No Action:** It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the minister will explain and discuss this with the person who filed the complaint.
  - **Warning:** The minister or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and expectations for future behavior.
  - **Suspension:** The offending individual is excluded from the fellowship and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing.
  - **Expulsion:** The committee recommends that the offending individual should be expelled from membership in QUUF. If expulsion is approved by a 2/3 majority vote of the Board of Trustees (per QUUF Bylaws III.6), the minister will write a letter to the individual explaining the reasons, the individual's rights and possible recourse.
  
- Appeals: The offending individual may appeal the decision to a Special Fellowship meeting (Bylaws III.6. See also Operations Manual procedure).
  
- Procedure for Special Fellowship Meeting for Appealing an Expulsion: This circumstance is so extreme that it seems to necessitate a very specific procedure in order to keep it focused. Expulsion is the worst case scenario we can imagine; this process will always be painful.
  - Adult members equal to thirty percent (30%) of the QUUF membership must be present in order to have a quorum for the SFM. Proxy votes are not permitted for an SFM.
  - The President of the Board of Trustees, or someone he or she designates, shall serve as Facilitator for the SFM.
  - The Facilitator for the SFM shall be the final authority on all procedural matters or disputes during the SFM.
  - The Facilitator will open the SFM by stating to those present that 1) this appeal is a serious matter 2) they should vote based solely upon what they learn during the SFM and 3) that all dialog and discussion must be conducted respectfully.
  - The offending individual then shall have up to ten (10) minutes to make a presentation regarding why he or she should not be expelled from the QUUF. No one is permitted to interrupt or disrupt this presentation.
  - The Minister or the Committee then shall have up to ten (10) minutes to make a presentation regarding why the offending individual should not be readmitted to the QUUF. No one is permitted to interrupt or disrupt this presentation.

- The offending individual then shall have up to five (5) minutes to respond to what was said by the Minister or the committee and to summarize again why they should not be expelled from the QUUF.
- The members present then have up to fifteen (15) minutes to ask factual questions of either the offending individual or the Minister/committee. Speeches, arguments and debating shall not occur during this 15-minute period and the Facilitator has the right to ask a person who is debating or arguing to either stop doing so or ask a specific factual question.
- The members present then have up to twenty (20) minutes to debate, discuss and argue the sole issue before the SFM, should this congregation reverse the expulsion of Jane Doe or John Smith from the membership of the QUUF.
- Those present can decide by a voice vote to extend any time frame listed in these rules.
- At the end of the debate there shall be a secret ballot vote on one discrete issue: "Should the expulsion of Jane Doe or John Smith from the membership of the QUUF be reversed?"
- The expulsion of the offending individual shall remain unless 2/3 plus one of those members present and voting vote "yes" on the question listed in the previous rule.
- It shall not be permissible to change the substance or content of the one discrete issue that is to be voted upon at an SFM.

# Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

Adopted by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees  
West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Cleveland, Ohio

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 West Shore Unitarian Universalist 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.

West Shore Unitarian Universalist 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.

# Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior

We, the members and friends of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, are a caring community where mutual respect prevails. We believe in the democratic process in human relations. Each committee/organization is encouraged to adopt and agree to ground rules for their meetings/events. When some participants in these meetings/events do not follow the rules, some policy is needed. Therefore a five step process has been proposed to deal with these problems of unacceptable behavior.

1. Disruptive behavior does not need to be tolerated by a committee/organization. When it occurs, a member of the committee leadership should draw the disruptive person aside and state that the behavior is not acceptable.
2. If a second complaint about the behavior occurs, a formal letter will be written by the appropriate leader to the person, stating that the behavior needs to be corrected, with copies to Ombuds (committee) and to the President of the Church. The letter should state that if the individual chooses to do so he/she can request that the Ombuds Committee mediate the dispute. The individual needs to state the problem to Ombuds in writing.
3. Ombuds will discuss the problem and assign a member of the Ombuds Committee to meet with the person and the committee/organization leadership to resolve the problem. Ombuds will report back to the Board.
4. If, after making all reasonable attempts and consulting with Ombuds, the problems seem unresolvable, the leadership of the complaining committee/organization should request the Board's permission to deny the person access to the committee/organization's meetings/events.
5. If, in time, the person reconsiders and wishes to reenter the group, he/she may meet with the leadership of the committee/organization to request reentry, subject to Board approval.

Note: In some situations immediate action is warranted and should be taken. It is appropriate to call the police to remove a person exhibiting violent behavior. Note, too, that the five steps may be accelerated if the behavior is threatening.  
Regarding rights of individuals who feel threatened by behavior of other individuals: No heretofore stated policy of the church applies to an individual, on the premises, who feels threatened and calls the police on his/her own behalf.

# Actions Regarding Disruptive Behavior

A resource for leaders of  
Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation offers services and programs that encourage openness and the search for truth and meaning. This requires a safe and orderly environment, and the use of democratic processes. If disruptive behavior threatens the environment of any service, program or congregational committee, it should be addressed firmly and promptly. Each situation will be considered on its own merits, and handled as those in charge deem in the best interests of the congregation, its mission and its members.

The following are actions that have been helpful in similar situations and therefore may be helpful to MPUUC leadership in deciding how to deal with a particular situation:

## Determining Unacceptable Behavior

Events which constitute unacceptable behavior will be determined by the leader of the event. If, in the opinion of the leader, perhaps in consultation with others, the disruption interferes with the work of the group, or of the quiet enjoyment of participants, then the leader should take action.

Behaviors resulting from illegal activities such as assault, burglary, sexual harassment, child abuse, theft, and so forth will be dealt with using appropriate law enforcement resources, in a manner consistent with MPUUC's safety policy, which is currently under development.

## Initial Action Taken

Actions taken initially might include:

- speaking privately to the person after the meeting,
- asking the disruptive person to desist,
- taking a break and speaking privately with the disruptive person,
- asking the disruptor to leave the meeting, or
- ending the meeting.

The action to take is left to the discretion of the group leader.

Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister should be notified. The leadership or Minister might consider sending a follow-up letter to the offending party detailing what steps must be taken before he or she may return to the activity.

## Possible Further Actions

If the initial action does not resolve the situation, one way to handle the matter is to refer it to an ad hoc committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. The committee members would respond in terms of their own judgment and decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. The following are three possible levels of response (in order of increasing escalation):

Level 1. The minister and/or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual, discuss the disruptive behavior, ask him or her to desist, and point out further consequences if he or she does not.

Level 2. If the disruptive behavior persists, and with the approval of the Board, the minister and/or a member of the committee will meet with the offending individual and provide him or her with a letter specifying the offensive behavior and the consequences if it persists. These

consequences may include exclusion from Mission Peak premises and events, and/or removal from membership.

Level 3. If the disruptive behavior persists, and with the approval of the Board, the individual shall be excluded from Mission Peak events and/or membership for a time certain or indefinitely. This should be spelled out in a letter given to the individual.

If at any step the offender refuses to cooperate, the *ad hoc* committee may move to level