



FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY IN NEWTON

FUSN Issuance 2013-24

Policy **Information**

From: Gordon Moriarty
Chair, Board of Trustees

Date: May 21, 2013

Subject: Policy Regarding Threats and Disruptive Behavior

Purpose: To implement a policy to provide a structure to address threatening or disruptive behavior.

Background: At a meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 21, 2013, the Board voted unanimously to accept this policy, as recommended by the Conflicts Committee.

Policy: The policy is attached.

Effective Date: May 21, 2013

First Unitarian Society in Newton

Policy Regarding Threats and Disruptive Behavior

Introduction

The First Unitarian Society in Newton (“FUSN”) is an intentionally diverse community. People of all ages, races, ethnic identities, gender identities, sexual orientations, physical and mental abilities, and religious backgrounds are welcome here. While FUSN places high value on the right of everyone in the Congregation to be heard and respected, FUSN also recognizes that it can thrive only in a secure and safe atmosphere where openness and freedom from threat and serious disruption exist. Accordingly, threatening or disruptive behavior must be addressed promptly.

FUSN recognizes that such threatening or disruptive behavior may be caused by a number of factors, and that the response to such behavior must be made with compassion. FUSN affirms that nothing in this policy is intended to inhibit the free expression of ideas and that the respectful expression of dissenting opinions does not constitute threatening or disruptive behavior.

This document contains policies for addressing and resolving threatening or disruptive behavior issues within the Congregation. It exists to help move toward positive and clear resolution by encouraging action and communication.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a structure to address threatening or disruptive behavior when such behavior results in:

1. Threats to the safety of any adult or child;
2. Serious disruption of Congregational functions and activities;
3. Serious diminishment of the appeal of the Congregation to its existing and potential membership.

Anyone who believes that one of these situations has or is about to occur should report it to one of the following people: the Minister, the Director of Lifespan Religious Education Ministries, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, or the Chair of the Operations Council.

Procedures

The following is the process that will be followed by FUSN in dealing with threats and disruptive behavior:

1. INITIAL RESPONSES
 - a) ***If no immediate response is needed***, refer the incident to the Chair of the Operations Council or the Minister. Either person will then go to Step 2. Ordinarily, an immediate response is required only when the threatening or disruptive behavior makes it impossible to continue the FUSN activity or where it is evident that a serious threat to the safety of one or more participants in the activity or to FUSN property exists.
 - b) ***If an immediate response is required***, the leader (lay or professional) most immediately

available will respond. This can be the Minister, the Director of Lifespan Religious Education Ministries, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, the Chair of the Operations Council, or a Committee Chair. Ordinarily an immediate response is required only when the threatening or disruptive behavior makes it impossible to continue the FUSN activity or where it is evident that a threat to the safety of one or more participants in the activity or to FUSN property exists.

The response may include asking the threatening or disruptive person(s) to leave, suspending the meeting or activity until such time as it can be safely resumed, or any other action that is deemed appropriate under the circumstances and necessary to eliminate the impact of the threatening or disruptive behavior.

In addition, the Newton Police Department should be called in cases where a person who has been asked to leave for the above reasons refuses to do so or continues to engage in actions that threaten anyone's safety or FUSN property.

If no recognized lay or professional leader is present or near by, anyone present may call the Newton Police Department if someone is engaging in activities that threaten anyone's safety or FUSN property.

When any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister and the Chairs of the Board of Trustees and Operations Council (if not present) must be notified as soon as possible with an explanation of the event, incident, parties involved and response taken.

c) ***Subsequently***, the FUSN Operations Council will act as described in Steps 2 & 3 below.

2. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES & EVALUATION:

a) ***Responsibilities***:

The Operations Council, in consultation with the Steering Committee, will follow-up on the incident or will refer it to a special committee ("Special Committee") appointed by the Operations Council. (If a special committee is appointed, it shall be responsible for this particular incident.)

Any Special Committee will consist of three to five members of the Society. The committee will not include people involved in the incident.

The Operations Council or the Special Committee will respond in terms of their own judgment, observing the following:

- They will respond to incidents referred to them based upon the facts and circumstances of each situation. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- Behavior identified as threatening or disruptive will be handled individually.
- They will collect all necessary information reasonably available, including meeting with the individual(s) to ensure they understand their side of the story.

b) **Evaluation:**

To aid in evaluating the incident, the following points will be considered:

DANGEROUSNESS – Is the individual(s) the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?

DISRUPTIVENESS – How much interference with congregational functions is occurring?

3. FOLLOW-UP DECISIONS & ACTIONS:

a) **To determine the necessary response**, the following factors will be considered:

CAUSES – Why is the threatening or disrupting behavior occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual(s) and others in the Congregation? Is the conflict due to a difference of ideas or opinions? Are there other extenuating circumstances involved?

HISTORY – What, if any, is the frequency and degree of disruption caused by the individual(s) in the past?

PROBABILITY OF CHANGE – How likely is it that the problem behavior causing the incident will diminish in the future?

The Operations Council or Special Committee will decide the necessary response on a case-by-case basis, taking into account whatever information that is pertinent to the incident and which can reasonably be ascertained, including requesting the assistance of outside professionals.

b) **The following three levels of response may be undertaken.**

One or more members of the Society will:

LEVEL ONE – meet with the reported individual(s) to communicate the concern and seek an agreement by the individual(s) to an immediate change in behavior that resolves the concern.

LEVEL TWO – meet with the reported individual(s) to communicate that he or she is barred from the Congregational property and buildings and/or specific Congregational activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and conditions of return made clear. This communication will be confirmed in writing with copies sent to the Minister, Director of Lifespan Religious Education Ministries, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the involved parties.

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

LEVEL THREE – permanently exclude the reported individual(s) from membership, the congregational premises and from all congregational activities. Before this sanction is imposed, the Operations Council will review its recommendation with the Board of Trustees, and the Minister and the Director of

Lifespan Religious Education Ministries. If it is decided to bar the individual(s), a letter will be sent by the Chair of the Board of Trustees explaining the decision, and confirming that the decision has been made in accordance with the By-Laws of FUSN. When it believes that the safety of any adult or child in the FUSN community may be threatened, the Board of Trustees, in consultation with the Operations Council, Minister and the Director of Lifespan Religious Education Ministries, also may issue a No Trespass Order, in accordance with Massachusetts Law, to the individual(s) involved via certified mail or U.S. Postal Service Express Mail, return receipt requested. A copy of the No Trespass Order and the executed return receipt also shall be provided to the Newton Police.

- c) ***Depending on the seriousness of the situation,*** the decision may be communicated only on a need to know basis. If the Board of Trustees issues a No Trespass Order, that action together with a photo and other key information about the individual(s) who are the subject of the No Trespass Order, shall be communicated confidentially to: the Minister, Director of Lifespan Religious Education, the Operations Council, a representative of each permanent tenant of FUSN and any other parties that the Board of Trustees, in its discretion, shall deem it necessary to inform.

Conclusion

FUSN strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. Concern for the safety and well-being of the Congregation as a whole may in special situations need to supercede the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree that threatening or disruptive behavior of an individual compromises the physical, psychological or functional health of the Congregation, the actions of this Congregation as a people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security. Nothing in this policy is intended to be used by anyone as a basis for limiting the expression of respectful differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences.

Amendment

This policy may be amended by vote of a majority of the members of the Board of Trustees at any officially convened meeting.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Society in Newton, MA. May 21, 2013.