

**Jefferson Unitarian Church**  
**Disruptive Behavior Policy**  
**Date: 3/23/2018**

**Preamble:** In every human community there exists the possibility of one or more persons engaging in behavior that threaten the well-being or safety of others or the health of the community. Because these situations can arise within churches, we are called to have a process and plan for how to address disruptive behavior within our church. Operational policies are required pursuant to the church governing policies, particularly the section on Treatment of Members, Friends, and Visitors, which state that “the Senior Minister shall not:... Operate without safety procedures.” Disruptive behavior includes a wide range of potential activities, and no policy can cover all possible circumstances. This policy of Jefferson Unitarian Church is intended to provide general guidance to our members, staff, ministers and leaders about how to address disruptive behavior either within the church, or in situations that impact church members. We believe that any policy should respond to the call of our faith to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to hold ourselves and each other accountable for the times when we fall short of our best selves.

**Expectations:** Those involved in Jefferson Unitarian Church can expect to be treated with dignity, respect and consideration at all times, whether in person, or in online/digital venues. Each of our members should abide by the Covenant of Respectful Relationships adopted by our church, and should expect to be treated by others in ways consistent with the Covenant of Respectful Relationships. No single definition of disruptive behavior could cover all circumstances, but we provide here a range of examples of kinds of unacceptable behavior that may be addressed through this policy. Disruptive behavior and/or harassment, including the examples listed below, may occur in person, behind other’s backs, via telephone, in email, on social media, or other digital means. Such behavior is unacceptable, regardless of the venue -

- Speaking disrespectfully
- Engaging in slander or libel
- Spreading falsehoods about another person
- Dominating conversations in ways that prevent others from speaking
- Continuing to speak to another person after they have made clear they want the conversation to end
- Touching another person in unwanted ways or without their consent
- Threatening anyone or engaging in behavior that causes reasonable people to believe a threat exists
- Interrupting meetings or services, or entering into gatherings to which you are not an involved party
- Intentionally damaging church property, or engaging in behavior that could reasonably be expected to cause property damage

**Response:** When disruptive behavior is observed or experienced, members present may notify staff or ministers, get help from a church leader, ask for a cool off/time out period, adjourn, have a one-to-one discussion, request that the disruptor leave the premises, and/or call 911 for help. If it is suspected that a crime has been committed the law enforcement shall be called. When deciding on the appropriate course of action, the significance of the behavior should be considered. Is the behavior-

- **Dangerous:** is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **Disruptive:** what is the level of interference with church activities? Threatening, harmful, destructive, creating disorder?
- **Offensive:** is the behavior likely to drive existing members and visitors away?

If the immediate health or safety of any person or the church are at risk, law enforcement shall be contacted. Anyone threatening another person shall be instructed to leave the church immediately. A subsequent conversation shall be scheduled between the senior minister and/or their designee to communicate with those involved about when or if the person who has posed such a threat may return to the church. Members who have threatened or harmed others may also have their membership revoked by a vote of the Board of Trustees and be banned from church premises or activities.

If the behavior is disruptive or offensive, but not dangerous, and it is safe to do so, parties to the conflict are encouraged to first engage in direct communication with the person(s) involved to resolve the problem.

If the parties to the conflict cannot resolve the situation between themselves, they may ask for assistance from the professional ministry team or other trusted individuals within the congregation to address the behavior. Responses should consider why the disruptive behavior is occurring, how frequently the person/people have engaged in disruptive behavior in the past, and the probability of change to behavior in the future. Possible responses to disruptive behavior include:

1. discussing the problem with the offending individual(s)
2. making a participation agreement with the individual(s)
3. barring the individual(s) from the kinds of activities they don't manage well
4. barring the individual(s) from all activities at which no staff is present
5. barring the individual(s) from the property, and
6. recommending to the Board that the individual(s) be removed from membership.

**Notification:** Timely notification of the incident shall be made to Senior Minister and the Board of Trustees President regardless of the resolution of the incident.

### **Reports of Disruptions**

A report of disruptions and actions taken will be kept in the church office. This file shall be kept by the church administrator with access restricted to the ministers and those they deem have a need to know. The information in the report shall include:

- Date
- Name, address, phone number of person reporting
- Description of the incident (what, when, where, who)
- Injuries, if any
- Missing/destroyed items
- Witnesses: names, phone numbers
- Immediate action, if any
- Sheriff's report attached if applicable

- Subsequent actions taken (follow-up to persons involved, investigation results, actions taken and at what venue)

## Covenant of Respectful Relationships

### Preamble

We, the members of the Jefferson Unitarian Church covenant to practice our UU principles in daily life. Yet, seldom do we bring to consciousness these formally stated principles. In our ongoing interactions with one another, we easily find satisfaction in the spontaneous, creative, and respectful climate which permeates the atmosphere at JUC. It is one of the reasons we choose to participate in the activities of the church.

Throughout our years of congregational life, we have nonetheless experienced some stormy weather. We have learned that divergent views accompanied by strong feelings can create turbulence regarding the actions of the JUC Board of Trustees, ministers, church staff, members expressing personal views in writing and at church meetings. In the heat of the moment, we sometimes lose sight of the principles we practice so naturally when good weather prevails.

The following short list of respectful behaviors offers each of us renewed perspective when we become blinded by feelings of anger and distrust. In such circumstances the Covenant of Respectful Relationships can remind us of the opportunity to continue practicing our religious principles and thereby grow in our spiritual journey.

### Covenant of Respectful Relationships

As a member of Jefferson Unitarian Church, I covenant to do the following:

- I will speak truthfully with care and compassion.
- I will seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- I will speak directly to any person(s) with whom I have a concern rather than complain to others.
- I expect that there will be differences among us, and I will accept and care for others despite those differences.
- I will not disparage people with whom I disagree. I will refrain from judging other people's motives.
- I will test my assumptions and examine my own motives.
- I will honor my responsibility for upholding the spiritual principles and traditions of our community.
- In all things, I will cherish the health of the congregation above individual agendas.

- I will remain engaged with compassion and respect when conflict occurs and participate in the process, knowing that truth emerges from a free and open exchange of ideas.

Adopted by the congregation at the Annual Spring Meeting – May 22, 2005