

## **Covenant of Right Relationship**

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Somerset Hills, (UUCSH) is a place of safety and integrity for each person's mind, body and spirit. We are a supportive and nurturing faith community, honoring and respecting the rich diversity of those gathered here. Recognizing that warmth, beauty, kindness, and passion will shape us as a congregation of goodwill, generosity, and presence, we covenant to affirm and promote:

- Honesty and authenticity in our relationships
- Words that express support, encouragement and caring
- A welcoming and non-judgmental attitude
- Respect for each person's boundaries of mind, body, and spirit
- The assumption of good will
- Integrity in our dealings with each other
- Respectful and honest representation of the UUCSH to the outside community
- Respect for the authority of UUCSH leaders and staff to remind members, friends, and visitors of these behavioral expectations and remedial measures.\*
- Respect for the authority of our Covenant of Right Relationship to govern how we treat each other and gently call ourselves and others back into covenant if we step out of it.
- Understanding that the same behavioral expectations apply to members, friends and visitors of all ages, to the extent that they are developmentally capable of understanding / acting in accordance with them.

\*While leaders have certain authority and responsibility to uphold the covenant of right relationship on behalf of the congregation, every member, friend, and visitor shares a responsibility to uphold the covenant and to respectfully – and directly, if possible—point out when others are acting out of covenant.

Openness to diverse 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 worship, learn, socialize and or express their 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.

**Policy Regarding Disruptive Behavior** Disruptive behavior of an individual on UUCSH property or other environments in which congregants gather may lead to concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived or actual threats to the emotional and/or physical safety of any adult or child.
- Disruption of church activities.

- Diminished appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership.

Therefore, the following shall be the policy of the church with regard to disruptive behavior by an individual or individuals.

*Reporting Disruptive Behavior* Any person who believes that they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior or who has had a disruptive behavior incident reported to them should take the following steps:

1. If the problem is offensive to you or to your family member, speak to the offending party directly, if possible, to clearly communicate the nature of the perceived problem and to discuss a way to address it in a mutually respectful manner.

2 (a). If Step 1 does not resolve the issue, and if the person(s) involved is age 18 or older, report the incident to the Minister or the Board President.

- If you identify a problem with the Minister and choose not to address it directly with the Minister, report the incident to the Committee on Ministry (COM) or to the President.\*\*
- If you identify a problem with the President and choose not to address it directly with the President, report the incident to the Minister. \*\* 2 (b). If Step 1 does not resolve the issue, and if the person(s) involved are under age 18 or on the Religious Education teaching team or Nursery staff, report the incident to the Director of Lifespan Faith Development.

\*\* Other options: Complaints may also be registered with the COM. Or, the complainant may broach the issue with the individual in question and a neutral third party of the complainant's choosing who may help ensure that both parties are heard accurately.

All congregational leaders and staff are required to immediately report any knowledge of disruptive behavior, harassment, abuse or misconduct to the Minister(s) or the President. If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the Minister, President, or a designated member of the church staff will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

The UUcSH will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. While the UUcSH cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individuals involved only on a "need-to-know" basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

*Immediate Response* The Minister(s) and/or other leaders will respond as quickly as possible to complaints of disruptive behavior. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending a meeting or activity until such time as it can safely be resumed. The police department may be called if further assistance is required. Any time such actions are taken, the Minister and the President and Vice-President of the congregation must be notified. They, in turn, will consult with the Committee on Ministry (COM) to determine what

steps must be taken before the offending person(s) may be allowed to return to the activities involved. A letter detailing these steps will be sent to the offending party or parties. An incident report will be kept in a confidential file at the UUCSH.

*More Deliberate Response* All incidents will be referred to the COM by the leader who receives the incident report, the victim, the perpetrator or any third party having knowledge of the incident. The COM will respond in terms of its own judgment, observing the following.

- COM will respond to problems as they arise.
- There will be no attempt to define “acceptable” behavior in advance.
- Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.

LEVEL ONE—COM will meet with the person or persons and other related parties to communicate its concern about the disruptive behavior and seek a resolution. If the behavior cannot be resolved, management of the issue will proceed to Level Two, and the full Board will intervene. Additionally, the behavior will be referred directly to the Board if:

1. The individual has been involved in similar situations before, and the COM infers that past communication has not been responded to positively effectively;
2. The issue affects the larger congregation.

COM will collect all necessary information. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:

- DANGEROUS—is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- DISRUPTIVE—how much interference with UUCSH functions is occurring?
- OFFENSIVE—how likely is it that prospective or existing members will be harmed or driven away by the disruptive behavior?

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 UUCSH? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed neurological or psychological condition?
- HISTORY—what is the frequency and degree of disruption in the past?
- PROBABILITY OF CHANGE—how likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

The COM will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. In consultation with the Minister, the offender may be asked to sign a behavioral contract signed by the offender and the Minister.

LEVEL TWO—The offending individual(s) actions will be reported to the full Board of Trustees if the normal resolution process does not resolve the situation and the disruptive behavior continues. The Board, in consultation with the Minister, may determine that the offending individual(s) needs to be excluded from the UUCSH and/or specific congregational activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons for such action and the conditions of return made clear in a written notification. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing to the offender. The decision is final and not subject to appeal.

POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT OF REMOVED INDIVIDUAL Any request for reinstatement must be made by the member who was removed from membership/involvement with UUCSH. The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement: 1) a statement illustrating an understanding of the reasons for being removed from membership and 2) a detailed explanation of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified.

The request for reinstatement shall go to the Minister, who will review the request, and consult with the Board regarding the request. The Board shall, within sixty days, respond to the individual as to whether such request has been granted. The Board may institute such limitations on such request as it deems necessary in order to best carry out the spirit of this Covenant. The decision of the board shall be final and not subject to further appeal. A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the removal. In the event that a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent reinstatement requests may be made no sooner than one year following the individual having been informed of a negative decision on the previous request.