

Policy for Addressing Disruptive Behavior

Mountain Light Unitarian Universalist Church

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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 an individual's behavior threatens the emotional and/or physical security of our members and friends. The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained to whatever extent is possible given the circumstances. The fellowship will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child and elder 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 troublesome 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 Speaker, leader of the group or other member of the congregation 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. If the Speaker is not available, he or she should be notified of the incident and actions taken as soon as possible. If the situation warrants further action, a C of C will appoint an ad hoc committee (as specified below) to make a disciplinary determination.

For situations not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or persons who witnessed it, to the Speaker. The officer will determine whether he/she wishes to handle the situation privately, or request the formation of an ad hoc disciplinary committee appointed by a C of C to further investigate the matter. When appropriate and whenever possible, the Committee will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.

The Speaker or the ad hoc Committee will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgment, without defining acceptable behavior in advance.

- o People and situations will be dealt with individually.
- o Stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.
- o The Committee will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.

The following questions must be considered by the Committee:

- o **Dangerous:** Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property, including himself or herself?
- o **Disruptive:** How much interference with church functions is occurring?
- o **Offensive:** How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

The following questions may be considered by the Committee:

- o **Causes:** Why is this disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the fellowship? Does it appear to be caused by mental health condition?
- o **History:** What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
- o **Probability of Change:** How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

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 Committee can implement:

- o **No Action:** It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the President will explain and discuss this with the person who filed the complaint.
- o **Warning:** The Speaker or a member of the Committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and expectations for future behavior.
- o **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.
- o **Expulsion:** The Committee recommends that the offending individual should be expelled from membership in MLUUC. If expulsion is approved by a 2/3 majority vote of a C of C (per MLUUC Bylaws III.C.4), the Secretary will write a letter to the individual explaining the reasons, the individual's rights and possible recourse.

A member shall be given written notice of intent to suspend or terminate membership, stating the reasons thereof, not less than fifteen (15) days before the effective date of such action, and must be given the opportunity to be heard by the ad hoc disciplinary committee through an oral or written statement not less than five (5) days before the effective date of the action.

The Speaker or leader of the ad hoc committee will convey to the Secretary a written report of the complaint and the action taken on the complaint, which will be confidentially maintained as part of the Secretary's records.

Procedure for appealing an Expulsion: In the event a disciplined person has defended him or herself to the ad hoc committee and the expulsion has not been rescinded and the disciplined person wishes to further contest the decision, he or she may be considered for reinstatement by requesting a C of C meeting. The congregants will review the reasons for which the termination was made and determine whether any remediation or restitution deemed necessary has been made. In order to be unconditionally reinstated, there must be approval for reinstatement by at least two-thirds of the congregants.