

## HARMFUL BEHAVIOR POLICY

Guided by our Covenant of Right Relations, this policy addresses incidents of actions or words that harm our community.

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

Conflict is normal and healthy. We value a diversity of views and perspectives; “we do not need to think alike to love alike.” This policy is not intended to circumvent the work of the Right Relations Committee to assist the congregation with dispute resolution and encourage safe, respectful, and healthy dialogue and collaboration. Rather, this policy acknowledges there are times when words or actions have caused Harm to the Community (as defined below), and it may be necessary to give priority to the well-being of the community, over the privileges and inclusion of an individual.

Each individual tasked with the responsibility under this policy to discern whether there has been an incident of Harm to the Community, has a duty to exercise their own independent judgment, while acting in the best interest of the congregation as a whole.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Harm to the Community** includes Abuse, Harassment and Destructive Behavior.

**Abuse** is behavior, including words, intended to frighten or intimidate someone.

**Harassment** is any unwanted behavior, physical or verbal, that continues over time and reasonably makes a person feel uncomfortable, humiliated, or mentally distressed. It is an intentional campaign to hurt, demean or disempower another person. Generally, the person is first asked to stop, though this is not always required for unwanted behavior to constitute harassment.

**Destructive Behavior** means actions or words that harm church activities or negatively impact the church’s appeal to potential and current members of our community. Generally, a request is first made to stop, make amends or change one’s behavior, though this isn’t always required for actions or words to constitute Destructive Behavior.

### **STAFF**

This policy does not apply to any allegations of Abuse, Harassment, Destructive Behavior, or any other legally prohibited behavior by, or against, the Minister or any other church staff. The Personnel Policy supersedes this policy with respect to allegations of abuse, harassment, bullying or other legally prohibited behaviors toward the Minister or any other staff. A member of the church community who believes they have been the victim of abuse, harassment, bullying or other legally prohibited behaviors by a member of the staff should make a report to the Minister, or if by the Minister, to a member of the Board of Trustees. The Right Relations Committee is otherwise available to assist members of the church community in resolving interpersonal conflicts with the Minister [and other staff].

### **REPORTING HARM TO THE COMMUNITY**

Any person who has witnessed, experienced or been told of an incident they believe may constitute Harm to the Community, should make a report to the Minister, a Board member or member of the Right Relations Committee. If a person isn't sure whether there has been an incident of Harm to the Community, they are encouraged to confer with the Minister or a member of the Right Relations Committee.

Any report of Harm to the Community, whether requiring an immediate, or deliberate response, will be referred to the Right Relations Committee, and documented in the form attached as Appendix A, with a copy to the Minister. In addition, if required by law, the Minister will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

Each member of the Right Relations Committee must first discern whether they can fairly sit in judgment of the matter, with an open-heart and open-mind. A member should strongly consider recusing from the matter if they have negative feelings about any of the individuals involved, or find the situation especially triggering. If any member has a conflict of interest with respect to the alleged incident of Harm to the Community, the Board of Trustees will select a suitable alternative, with a focus on individuals experienced in healthy communication, restorative practices and mental health.

Every reasonable effort will be made to maintain confidentiality, disclosing the identities of individuals involved only to the extent required to resolve the matter.

### **FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONDING TO REPORTS OF HARM TO THE COMMUNITY**

The following framework will guide the congregation's response to incidents of Harm to the Community:

- **Dangerousness:** Is the individual a threat to the safety of persons or property?
- **Destructiveness:** How destructive is the behavior to the congregation's mission or activities?
- **Congregational Integrity:** How likely will the behavior make participants in our church community, as well as visitors-being especially sensitive to those who hold marginal identities-feel unsafe or unwelcome?
- **Causes:** Why is the behavior occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Might the behavior first be addressed by the Right Relations Committee outside of the framework of this policy?
- **History:** Does this person have a history of engaging in Harm to the Community?
- **Probability of Change:** How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

### **IMMEDIATE RESPONSE**

If an immediate response is required in the face of an apparent incident of Harm to the Community, it should be undertaken by (in order of preference) the Minister, LDRE, member of the Right Relations Committee, the group leader, or a Board member. The response may include asking the person to leave, suspending the meeting or activity, or calling 911, when faced with a dangerous threat to safety.

[www.uua.org/safe/handbook/alternatives-calling-police](http://www.uua.org/safe/handbook/alternatives-calling-police)

Whenever there is an immediate response to an apparent incident of Harm to the Community, no matter the severity of the response, the person carrying out the

response (if not the Minister) must notify the Minister and a member of the Right Relations Committee. The Right Relations Committee and the Minister will complete an incident report in the form attached as Appendix A, and send a letter to the alleged offender advising them they are temporarily banned from participating in church activities, until further notice. The Right Relations Committee will then undertake a Deliberate Response (see below) to the incident that gave rise to the immediate response.

### **DELIBERATE RESPONSE**

A deliberate response to an apparent incident of Harm to the Community will be documented by the Right Relations Committee in the form attached as Appendix A, with a copy to the Minister. For all reports of alleged incidents of Harm to the Community, including those that required an immediate response, the Right Relations Committee will avoid a rush to judgment by acting with care and deliberation, exercise its own judgment, on case-by-case basis, and do its best to (1) avoid prejudging “acceptable behavior”, (2) treat all parties as individuals, and (3) be mindful of the ways in which culture of origin, generation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability and other factors shape behavior and conflict. If you quickly conclude there is only one way to view the conflict, consider whether you are failing to take into account how culture affects the way people communicate. For example, culture can affect tone, volume and speed of speech and how open people are about expressing their feelings or sharing personal details. In your response, consider carefully whether you are showing respect for cultural differences within the community.

When responding to all reports of alleged incidents of Harm to the Community, the Right Relations Committee will lead with empathy, and an intention to cultivate a healthy, loving relationship with all those involved in the matter. Before determining whether there has been an incident of Harm to the Community, the Right Relations Committee will make its best efforts to meet directly with all relevant parties, coming from a place of curiosity, endeavoring to understand everyone’s perspective, and why they acted as they did. When meeting with the Right Relations Committee, an individual may request the presence of the Minister, or another support person.

The Right Relations Committee may decide the reported incident doesn’t meet the definition of Harm to the Community, in which case the person(s) making the report, and the alleged offender, will be notified that no further action is warranted and any temporary ban from participation in church activities has been lifted.

If the Right Relations Committee determines there has been an incident of Harm to the Community, the committee will document the nature of the incident, its decision and subsequent actions, on the incident report attached as Appendix A. All incident reports are to be kept for 7 years in a locked cabinet in the Minister’s office. When the Right Relations Committee determines there has been an incident of Harm to the Community, the following three levels of response will be followed:

#### **Level One**

The Right Relations Committee, and at the committee’s discretion, the Minister, will meet with the subject(s) of the report, and other parties affected by the behavior, to communicate their concern about the behavior. They will then work with the subject(s)

and other affected parties to: (1) set appropriate boundaries, (2) encourage the subject(s) to make amends and (3) promote healing, safety and the restoration of community. Whenever possible, restorative principles should be used at this stage of the process.

### **Level Two**

At their sole discretion, the Right Relations Committee may refer the matter to the Board of Trustees, along with the related incident report, documenting the committee's recommendation for how the Board of Trustees should respond to the incident of Harm to the Community.

The Board of Trustees will make an independent determination of how best to respond to the incident of Harm to the Community. The offending individual may be excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear to them in a written letter. The Board of Trustees will document its decision, and attach a copy of the letter to the related incident report.

### **Level Three**

The Board of Trustees may determine that the person who did Harm to the Community should be removed from membership and, if appropriate, excluded from the church premises and some or all church activities. Notification of the Board of Trustees' decision will be made in writing, explaining the affect on the individual's membership and participation in the church community. The Board of Trustees will document its decision, and attach a copy of the letter to the related incident report. The removal of an individual from membership in the church will be announced in the church newsletter with the statement: In accordance with the Policy on Behavior Harmful to Our Community, a member has been removed from membership. Any church member who wishes to know the identity of the removed member may ask the Minister or a member of the Board of Trustees.

### **POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT OF REMOVED INDIVIDUAL**

Any request for reinstatement must be made by the member who was removed from membership. The request must contain information concerning the rationale for the reinstatement: 1) a statement of understanding of the reasons for which they were removed from membership and 2) an explanation in detail of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that reinstatement would be justified. This should include a plan for repair and healing for those harmed. The request shall go to the Board of Trustees. The Board may consider the behavior of the former member in the intervening period. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the removed member. 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 member being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

### **HEALING THOSE HARMED**

The Minister shall offer pastoral support to those affected by incidents of Harm to the Community. The Right Relations Committee shall consult with and inform the persons

most affected or targeted by the behavior about any and all decisions regarding boundaries, participation and reinstatement of the subject(s) of the report.

**REGIONAL STAFF AS RESOURCE**

The Minister, Right Relations Committee, and Board of Trustees are welcome and encouraged to consult with UUA MidAmerica Staff for best practices, resources, and, if necessary, to be an outside evaluator of this process.

*We have benefited from guidance received from published policies of the UUA and the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rockford, IL.*

**Approved by the Board of Trustees on June 13, 2024**

**APPENDIX A**  
**INCIDENT REPORT: BEHAVIOR HARMFUL TO THE COMMUNITY**

DESCRIPTION OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT OF BEHAVIOR HARMFUL TO THE COMMUNITY: WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHO?

WAS THERE AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE?  Yes  No

If yes, attach copy of letter was sent by Minister and Right Relations Committee to alleged offender giving notice of temporary ban from church activities,

DELIBERATE RESPONSE

Names of participating members of the Right Relations Committee (or appointed substitute in the case of a conflict of interest):

WAS THERE A DETERMINATION THAT AN INCIDENT OF BEHAVIOR HARMFUL TO THE COMMUNITY HAD OCCURRED?

Yes  No

If No, attach letter sent to person(s) making the report, and the alleged offender, notifying that no further action is warranted and any temporary ban from participation in church activities has been lifted.

If yes, describe the nature of the incident, basis for the decision and Level One actions taken by the Right Relations Committee:

Did the Right Relations Committee make a Level Two referral of the matter to the Board of Trustees?  Yes  No

If Yes, describe the basis on which the referral was made, and the Right Relations Committee's recommendation for how the Board of Trustees should respond to the incident of Harm to the Community:

Did the Board of Trustees take action at Level Two?  Yes  No

If Yes, describe the rationale and action taken, attaching a copy of the Board's letter sent to the offending person documenting its decision.

Did the Board of Trustees take action at Level Three?  Yes  No

If Yes, describe the rationale and action taken, attaching a copy of the Board's letter sent to the offending person documenting its decision.