Policy on Disruptive Behavior

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church and expressed in our Unitarian Universalist principles, we affirm that we must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist consistent with the well-being of our church community. When any person’s physical and/or emotional well-being 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.

Disruptive behavior of an individual in the church building, on church grounds, at church endorsed activities, or through communication including, but not limited to, email, regular mail, phone, or through social media may take one or more of the following forms:

- Perceived threats to the safety or well-being of any adult or child through such behaviors as bullying, intimidation, sexual harassment, or verbal abuse.
- Disruption of church activities.
- Degrading the experience of the church to its members, friends, and guests.

Reporting Disruptive Behavior

Any person who believes that they have witnessed or experienced disruptive behavior, or has had a disruptive behavior incident reported to them, should report it to the Senior Minister(s) or any church trustee. The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. While the church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individual(s) involved only on a “need-to-know” basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint.

Immediate Response

If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Senior Minister(s), if available, or an individual witnessing or experiencing the disruptive behavior. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending a meeting or activity until such time that it may be safely resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called. Any time such actions are undertaken without the involvement of the Senior Minister(s), they should be notified. The Senior Minister(s) must ensure that a follow-up letter detailing the offense and the action taken because of the offense is sent to the president of the Board of Trustees.

Evaluation of the Situation

Whether or not the situation requires an immediate response, the Board of Trustees will either take up the issue directly, or appoint an ad hoc task force, to investigate the situation. In either case, the evaluation process will involve determining:

- Danger – is there a threat or perceived threat to persons, property, or the church itself?
- Degree of disruptiveness – how much interference with church functions is occurring?
- Degree of offensiveness – how likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away by the disruptive behavior?

The Board or ad hoc task force will assess the necessary response on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration:
• Causes – why is the situation occurring?
• History – what is the frequency and degree of disruption in the past?
• Probability of change – how likely is it that disruptive behavior will not recur?

Levels of Response

Optional Preliminary Levels – If an ad hoc task force has been appointed, after investigating the situation it has two options:

• Notify the Board that it is referring the situation to a CARE Covenant Team to implement a conflict resolution process. The ad hoc task force will provide both the Board and the CARE Covenant Team with their confidential assessment of the situation. The CARE Covenant Team will attempt to engage the parties involved in the situation in a conflict resolution process. The CARE Covenant Team will determine whether or not it feels that the situation has been resolved through its efforts, and will confidentially report its assessment in writing to the Board.
• Confidentially report the findings of its investigation directly back to the Board in writing.

Concluding Levels – The Board, in consultation with the Senior Minister(s), has four options of progressive action. The Board may respond at whatever level it deems appropriate. These options are:

• Engage the services of a CARE Covenant Team in the same manner as noted above, where this attempt at conflict resolution has not already occurred.
• Determine and communicate to the offending individual(s) the Board’s degree of concern about the disruptive behavior, and the expectation that their disruptive behavior will not recur.
• Determine that the offending individual(s) needs to be excluded from the church, or from specific church activities, for a limited period of time, with the reasons for such action and the conditions of return made clear in a written notification.
• Determine that the offending individual(s) needs to be removed from membership and, if appropriate, excluded from the church premises and all church activities. Notification of such a decision will be made in writing, and will reference the church’s bylaws, Article II, Sections 3 and 4, that define the rights of the offending individual(s) regarding termination of membership.