

# Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

## **Safe Congregation Policy**

Replaces Disruptive Behavior policy 2009; Safety policy 2016; Sexual Harassment policy 2009

Approved by Shared Ministry Committee, DRE and Safety committee July 2023

Approved by Board: August 2023

### **General**

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is committed to providing a safe and welcoming experience for congregants and visitors. The inclusion of a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our Unitarian Universalist Association's purposes and principles. We are guided by our Congregational Covenant in how we will behave toward one another, and we affirm the belief that our congregation should maintain a facility and atmosphere where security and openness can exist. This policy addresses a range of internal and external forces, potential conditions or emergencies, and appropriate behavior for groups and individuals, as well as the process for handling the situation when a problem arises.

When the Fellowship's, a group's, or a person's physical well-being, emotional well-being, or freedom to safely express beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires a limiting of access or expulsion of the offending person or persons. Whenever possible, restorative principles should be used. The goal is to set appropriate boundaries, make amends, create healing and safety, and build community by calling into covenant.

Note that no GUUF policy or procedure supersedes the rights of any individual to contact law enforcement on their own behalf if threatened by the behavior of others.

### **Safety for Sunday Services**

For Sunday Services, the Safety Team is responsible for initiating responses – in accordance with the team's Safety Procedures (a separate document) – should any urgent situations including, but not limited to, the following arise: Medical Emergency, Protester, Fire, Presentation of a Weapon, Active Shooter, Bomb Threat, Serious Weather Event. In the case of an emergency, members of the Safety Team should be notified immediately. Congregants should then follow directions and leadership from the Safety Team.

The Safety Team, in their planning and preparation, considers numerous potential circumstances, evaluates their likelihood of occurrence, and takes preventive measures. However, there is still a possibility of an incident. If an

incident does occur, after it is resolved, the Safety Team performs a follow-up and debriefing process.

If any congregant or guest has a safety concern on Sunday morning, that person should consult with a member of the Safety Team.

## **Protection of Children and Youth**

The safety of all children and youth who are a part of our religious community is particularly important. It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, in partnership with parents, to create and maintain a safe environment that supports the growth and welfare of children and youth in our church programs.

The supervision of children and youth while on Fellowship grounds and during Fellowship functions is a very important aspect of maintaining a safe congregation. Parents or guardians of children and youth are responsible for their children at all functions, unless specifically left in the care of a childcare volunteer or staff member during religious education programming.

However, for those times when children and youth are in a supervised relationship with Fellowship staff or volunteers other than their parents, several policies, important procedures, and appropriate protocols guide the interaction. Combined, the Children and Youth Religious Education (CYRE) policy, procedures, and protocols provide the following:

- guidelines for maintaining a religious education program and facility that provide physical, emotional, and spiritual safety
- guidelines regarding appropriate behavior for adults who interact with the children and youth of our church
- guidelines for training, appropriate procedures, and protocols to reduce the likelihood of any inappropriate behavior
- guidance on how to effectively respond to incidents that may occur

Policies, procedures, and protocols may be found in the CYRE area.

## **Destructive Behavior**

Destructive behaviors are actions or words which are destructive, disruptive, in violation of our Congregational, or cause harm to the Fellowship or to people and relationships. This policy addresses such behavior within the Fellowship community, whether on the premises of GUUF, off campus in a Fellowship program or activity, or in cyberspace.

Destructive behaviors may lead to concerns about the following:

- perceived threats to the physical or emotional safety of anyone

- disruption of Fellowship activities
- offensive behavior that drives people away from congregational activities or harms the reputation of the Fellowship

The Fellowship is committed to providing an environment that is free from all forms of behavior that can be considered harassing, coercive, or destructive, including sexual harassment. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on an individual's sex, race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other characteristic need not be tolerated. Bullying or harassment is destructive behavior, and so are words that violate our values or threaten the Fellowship in ways that are counter to our covenant. Anyone who experiences or observes destructive behavior may address it and/or immediately report it to any member of the Shared Ministry Committee (SMC).

### **Destructive Behavior – Individual, non-emergency**

Destructive behavior does not need to be tolerated by anyone. If it occurs, it is advised that the individual talk with the offending person. If the individual seeks advice or assistance from the Fellowship, that individual shall make a confidential statement (complaint) – verbally or written – to any member of the Shared Ministry Committee (SMC). The SMC's process is described further in this policy.

### **Destructive Behavior – in a Group, non-emergency**

Destructive behavior does not need to be tolerated by any individual or group. When it occurs, any group member or leader should draw the offending person aside and state that the behavior is not acceptable.

It is highly recommended that the group member or leader consult with a member of the Shared Ministry Committee (SMC) on how to manage the situation, whether before or after the offending person has been approached. The SMC's process is described further in this policy.

If the destructive behavior persists, a formal communication will be written by the appropriate leader to the person, stating that the behavior must be corrected and the kind of behavior expected, with a copy to the SMC. The communication should state that the individual may request that the SMC mediate the dispute.

### **Destructive Behavior – in a Group, requiring immediate intervention**

In some situations, immediate action is warranted and should be taken. It is appropriate to call law enforcement (911) to remove a person exhibiting violent and/or threatening behavior.

If an immediate response is required, this should be undertaken by the Minister, President and/or leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person(s) to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, law enforcement may be called. At that point, law enforcement becomes the primary authority in the matter.

Whenever any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister or President being present, they must be notified as soon as possible. The Minister or President should notify the SMC to initiate their process which is described further in this policy.

### **Destructive Behavior – Shared Ministry Committee Process**

The Shared Ministry Committee's role in this process is to offer confidential support, advice, and counsel with concern for the safety of all parties involved. The SMC will meet within ten days of a complaint being received to consider the circumstances. Options will be explored with appropriate resources. The SMC will discuss the problem and may assign member(s) of the SMC to meet with the people involved. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:

- Dangerousness - Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- Disruptiveness – How much interference with GUUF functions is occurring?
- Offensiveness - How likely is it that prospective or current members will be driven away?

Within twenty days of a complaint being received, the SMC shall reach a consensus regarding next steps. If, after careful investigation by the SMC, it is found that misconduct has occurred and the situation has not been resolved, the SMC will make a report and recommendation to the Board. The SMC will provide information and findings to assist the Board in its consideration of any limitation, restriction, or disciplinary action for the offender. To aid in determining the recommendation, the following points will be considered:

- Gravity of the destructive behavior
- Causes - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the congregation? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
- History - What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past?
- Probability of Change - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

“If the above attempt fails and the destructive behavior persists, the complaining group or person may request the Board take further action, such as denying the person access to the group or activity in question, possible termination of membership, or even a notification to the proper law enforcement authorities.

Consideration of any complaint against a minister will include the Fellowship President and, if warranted, UUA and/or UUMA personnel. Consideration of any complaint against staff members will include the lead minister who supervises staff.

A written record shall be kept of any complaint and its resolution. Unless otherwise required, this confidential record shall only be accessible to the SMC, the Board of Trustees, and the Minister. Access shall be further limited if the complaint involves any of these parties.

### **Destructive Behavior – Possible Reinstatement**

Any request for reinstatement of access, permission to participate, or to membership must be made by the individual whose access was limited or denied. The request may be made no sooner than one year following the limitation or removal. The request must be submitted in writing to the Board and must contain information concerning the following:

- a statement of understanding of the reasons for which they were limited or denied access
- an explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified

The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether to reinstate. The decision of the board is final. If a reinstatement request is not granted, any subsequent reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the negative decision on the previous request.

### **Sexual Harassment or Abuse**

Harassment or abuse of a sexual nature is deemed to be particularly sensitive and warrants separate reference.

Sexual harassment refers to behavior of a sexual nature that is unwelcome, personally offensive, or interferes with the performance and/or effectiveness of the recipient. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment and should not be tolerated. Anyone who experiences or observes sexual harassment is urged to report it as soon as possible to any member of the Shared Ministry Committee.