

## **RIGHT RELATIONS POLICY**

### **Introduction**

*Based upon feedback within the church community, it has become the determination of the board to implement a policy encouraging fairness and civility in discourse among those participating in church activities. Further, the policy has the intent of encouraging even the more reticent to express their views with the understanding that their views have value along with the views of the more vocal participants. We seek a civilized and respectful exchange of opinion that precludes the assumption that only one viewpoint can be considered. At the same time, we seek to retain a balance within discussion that encourages authentic individuality and the right to promote his or her views.*

*We recognize that as human beings that we do speak and act imperfectly and choose to treat those acts in others with forbearance, but we are prepared through this policy to rise to the defense of the well-being of our church community where the degree or repetition of aggressive behavior or hurtful speech reaches the level of requiring action to protect the wellbeing of our congregation. The process of dispute resolution does not include private disagreeable remarks between two individuals that do not affect church activities.*

### **POLICY**

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our church 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 express his or her beliefs or opinions is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed.

Disruptive behavior of an individual within the church building may lead to concerns about one or more of the following:

- Diminished appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership.
- Disruption of church activities.
- Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child.

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 report it to any of the following:

- The minister
- Any member of the Board

If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the minister or a designated member of the church board will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities. The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint.

### **IMMEDIATE RESPONSE**

The minister and/or the leader of the group involved will undertake an immediate response to such behavior. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the 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 any of these actions is taken, the Minister and the President of the board must be notified. They, in turn, will then consult with at least one additional representative from the Board of Directors to determine what steps must be taken before the offending person or persons may be allowed to return to the activities involved. A letter detailing these steps will be sent to the offending party or parties with a copy of the letter retained within a locked cabinet on church property.

### **MORE DELIBERATE RESPONSE**

Both situations requiring or not requiring an immediate response will be referred to an ad hoc Conflict Management Panel by the group leader involved in the initial incident, the victim, perpetrator or any third party having knowledge of the incident. The Conflict Management Panel is comprised of 3 people:

1) a member of the Board's Executive Committee, 2) one additional board member or Minister, and 3) one non-board member. The Conflict Management Panel will respond in terms of its own judgment as problems arise, observing the following:

- 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.

The Conflict Management Panel will collect all necessary information. A written record of the meeting and the agreed upon results will be confidentially retained in a locked file cabinet at the church. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following guidelines will be considered:

- **DANGEROUS**—is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **DISRUPTIVE**—how much interference with church functions is occurring?
- **OFFENSIVE**—how likely is it that prospective or existing members will be 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 the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition or mental illness?
- **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 Conflict Management Panel will decide on the necessary response on a case-by case basis. However, the following levels of response will be followed:

**LEVEL ONE**—The Conflict Management Panel will meet with the person or persons and other related parties to implement the conflict management process. The Panel will communicate their concern about the disruptive behavior. If the behavior cannot be resolved, it would proceed to level two and the full Board will intervene. Additionally the behavior will be referred directly to the Board:

1. If the individual has been in significant incidents before, then the Panel will infer that repeated visits have not worked.
2. If the issue affects the larger congregation.

**LEVEL TWO**—It may be determined that the offending individual(s) actions need to be referred to the full Board of Directors. If, after conflict management process consultation attempts to implement its normal process does not resolve the situation and the disruptive behavior continues, the full Board of Directors will become involved. The Board of Directors may authorize the Conflict Resolution Panel to order the disruptive person not to enter the church premises or contact the directly threatened person(s) pending final decision of the board, so as not to delay emergency action. It may be determined that the offending individual(s) needs to be excluded from the church and/or 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 to the person involved with a duplicate copy retained in a locked area on church property for confidentiality.

**LEVEL THREE**— the Board of Directors, after careful consideration, may determine that the offending individual(s) may 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 explain the individual's right and possible recourse. Any action taken under Level Three may be appealed, in writing, to the Board of Directors within thirty days of the letter of notification. An ad hoc Appeal Committee shall be formed by the Board of Directors in the event that the action taken under level three is appealed. The Appeal Committee shall be composed of three people: one active member of the church chosen by the removed person, one member from the Conflict Management Panel and a third person chosen by the Board of Directors. In a case where the individual does not have a member to propose, the church member would be selected by the two members of the Appeal Committee. The majority decision of the Appeal Committee shall be final and not subject to further appeal.

#### 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 s/he was removed from membership and 2) an explanation in detail how circumstances and conditions have changed. The request shall go to the Board of Directors. The Board will review the request and respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the removed member. 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 member being informed of a negative decision on the previous request.

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