

OUUC Non-Covenantal Behavior Policy

adopted by the board on March 19, 2024

Overview

Our covenant expresses our commitments to each other. In the covenant we promise “to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all our members ... assist those among us who have urgent needs for care and support; and provide opportunities for personal and spiritual growth” and “to speak with each other directly and honestly from a position of respect, kindness and love”.

This policy provides a path for ensuring these promises, so that we provide responsive, responsible, identifiable, and accessible structures which reflect fairness and shared stewardship for the health of our congregation.

Applicability

This policy applies to all members and friends of OUUC as well as any guest participating in OUUC-sponsored activities regardless of the location, including online.

Definitions of Types of Non-Covenantal Behavior

- Concerning behavior is defined as conduct which a reasonable person would-consider undermining or negatively impacting another person’s sense of belonging, well-being, or inclusion in the congregation or OUUC-sponsored activities.
- Disruptive behavior is defined as conduct which a reasonable person would deem an interruption or an impediment to the regular operations and ministry of the congregation. This includes and is not limited to conduct that is: counter to our principles and values; prevents a congregant, friend, guest, volunteer, or employee from fully participating in OUUC-sponsored activities or engaging in their responsibilities. Disruptive behavior may occur one time and be severe or be less severe and occur repeatedly. Concerning behavior that has been addressed directly and which persists may be considered disruptive behavior.
- Imminent threat is defined as an action or communicated intent to harm self or others.

Guidance for Addressing These Behaviors

If any congregant observes or experiences behavior that they believe is concerning or disruptive, our covenant calls on each of us to speak directly with the individual involved. Addressing a congregant, or a guest, with an orientation to the covenant and with compassion, care, and curiosity is the ideal way in which to understand the behavior and express concerns about the experience or potential impacts of the person’s behavior.

Addressing individuals lovingly and directly can be difficult; if a congregant needs help engaging in or preparing for this type of conversation, they are encouraged to explore the resources listed at the end of this document or to seek assistance from the Healthy Congregations Team.

Members of the Healthy Congregations Team are equipped to help those directly reporting concerns or to refer them to resources for assistance.

While every member of our community is responsible for directly addressing concerning or disruptive behavior, members of the Healthy Congregations Team, Board members and other congregational leaders are even more responsible for directly addressing concerning or disruptive behavior which they directly observe or experience.

If a congregant observes an individual engaging in behavior which is an imminent threat that puts their own or someone else's physical safety or well-being at risk, that congregant may immediately intervene if they feel safe doing so or they may seek appropriate assistance from emergency response personnel.

The Board and the Healthy Congregations Team take reports of concerning or disruptive behavior seriously. Behavior that is determined to be concerning or disruptive must be addressed to observe our covenant and to be a safe, inclusive, loving, just and healthy community.

Protocol for Addressing Reports of Non-Covenantal Behavior

1. **Definitions:** The person who is purported to have engaged in concerning or disruptive behavior will be referred to as the Respondent; the person making the report will be referred to as the Reporter for the purposes of this policy.
2. **Fact Finding:** Upon receiving information regarding concerning or disruptive behavior the Healthy Congregations Team will interview the Reporter to pursue as complete an understanding as possible of the circumstances and the behavior of concern. The Healthy Congregations Team will then advise the Respondent of a report of concerning or disruptive behavior and interview the Respondent to pursue as complete an understanding as possible of the circumstances in question from the perspective of the Respondent. As a result of this interview, the Healthy Congregations Team could seek additional information from the Reporter and/or from additional people to have a more complete understanding of the circumstances and behavior in question.
3. **Determinations:** The Healthy Congregations Team will consider all the information available, and determine if the report meets the definition of disruptive or concerning behavior. Then they will take the appropriate actions which may include but are not limited to one or more of the following:
4. **Actions**
 - a. **Concerning Behavior:** The Healthy Congregations Team will advise the Reporter and the Respondent that the behavior does not meet the definition of disruptive

behavior, and will encourage the Reporter to address the concerning behavior directly. The Healthy Congregations Team could determine that an informal direct conversation or facilitated conversation between the Reporter and Respondent could result in resolution, if both parties are amenable. The Healthy Congregations Team will ask both parties to consider this option and assist in coordinating this informal resolution. The Healthy Congregations Team may seek additional outside mediation support and request reasonable funds to support such activities.

- b. **Disruptive Behavior:** The Healthy Congregations Team could determine that, given all the information available, the Respondent did engage in disruptive behavior and will communicate this determination in writing to the Respondent and the Board. A written report with specific details is preferred. In communicating this determination, the Healthy Congregations Team will seek to work with the Respondent to identify a right action that may address impacts of the disruptive behavior and afford remediation, restoration, and/or prevention of future disruptive behavior.
 - i. If the Healthy Congregations Team and the Respondent are unable to agree on a right action, the Healthy Congregations Team and the Minister will recommend a right action to the Board.
 - ii. The Board, in executive session, and in consultation with the Minister, will determine the appropriate right action(s). Then the Board President (or their delegate) will inform the Respondent, verbally and in writing, of the action(s) to be taken. The right action should match the circumstances. Motivation, frequency, and severity of behaviors must be considered as well as scope of impact. Less severe disruptive behavior with high frequency, may require the same right action as a very severe single incident may warrant.
 - iii. If the Respondent does not follow through with the recommended right action, then the Minister may ask the Board to consider an appropriate response which may include restriction, suspension or expulsion of the Respondent. The Board, in executive session, and in consultation with the Minister, will determine the appropriate response, which the Board President (or their delegate) will communicate to the Respondent, verbally and in writing.
 - c. **Imminent Threat:** Following an emergent response to an imminent threat, the Healthy Congregations Team will find facts and write a report and the disruptive behavior protocol may be followed.
5. **Follow-up:** Following either an Imminent Threat or a determination of Disruptive Behavior, the Minister, the Healthy Congregations Team or the Board President, or designee, could determine that one or both parties is in need of care and support for extenuating circumstances or conditions and refer the individuals to appropriate resources.

Principles of Care

Reports should be written and submitted as soon as possible.

- All communication and outcomes of addressing a report of concerning, disruptive or threatening behavior will be kept as confidential as is feasible.
- All parties should be kept informed of the progress of responding to the report.
- The covenant should guide the response to the report.
- The well-being of the community must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of an individual whose behavior is dangerous or destructive.
- A concerted effort will be made to understand power imbalances and cultural differences that may be at play.
- Respondents and Reporters will be treated with respect for their dignity and worth as individuals.
- At the end of this process the *Safer Congregations Team* will choose a congregant (who was not involved with the process) to conduct separate “exit interviews” with the Reporter and Respondent. This is meant to offer them an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience with the process. This information will augment the “lessons learned” by the Healthy Congregations Team, and should be used to improve this policy/process.
- After conducting exit interviews with the Reporter and the Respondent, and any members of the Healthy Congregations Team and the Board who were directly involved, the congregant-interviewer will submit to the Healthy Congregations Team a written report of “Lessons Learned” from the process.

Communication and Conflict Resolution Resources

- <https://www.uua.org/safe/conflict>
- <https://www.mediatethurston.org/>
- <https://virtualspeech.com/blog/crucial-conversations>

Sources

- <https://www.uua.org/safe/destructive-behavior-policies>