

# Executive Team Grievance Procedure

Approved by the Executive Team: December 11, 2012

## **Preamble:**

First Unitarian Church has a Covenant of Right Relations among all of its members to treat each other according to UU principles and values. In most cases, this covenant is followed unconsciously. However, there are times in which people may mistreat each other or behave in ways that are destructive or disrespectful. In these cases, their behavior is out of compliance with the church's Covenant of Right Relations. We have used Gil Rendle's book "Behavioral Covenants in Congregations" published by the Alban Institute, as the foundation for this procedure.

## **Purpose:**

To give guidance on how to reconcile with a member whose behavior is in violation of the congregation's Covenant of Right Relations.

## **Applies to:**

This procedure applies to ministers, staff, and lay people who are members, friends, and in some cases visitors of First Unitarian Church of Wilmington. They may or may not be members of a team or small group that functions under the supervision and direction of the Executive Team.

## **General Procedure:**

1. At any point in this process, if a person or persons are in immediate physical or emotional danger, then the person who is creating the threat will be asked to refrain from attending church for a specific period of time. During that period, the Executive Team, in consultation with the Board President, will make a decision regarding their membership status and continuing involvement at First Unitarian Church. See #6 below.
2. When a conflict exists between two people, they are encouraged to speak to each other about the matter directly. This alone will eliminate most of the conflicts that inevitably occur in the course of church life. The parties involved in the conflict may wish to have a third party present to observe their conversation, but keep it confidential. The focus should be on feelings, needs and objective behaviors, not summary judgments of the other. At no point in this process is it appropriate to pass along gossip and rumors without a name attached.
3. Should this prove insufficient to resolve the matter, the conflict should be brought to the attention of the Team chair or group facilitator, in the case of a member of a team or small group. If the persons involved are not a member of such a group, then the minister

whose portfolio includes pastoral care should be notified of the conflict. That minister will act as a facilitator and mediator for the process, but will first encourage the two parties involved to resolve the issue themselves. Again, the focus should be on feelings, needs and correcting the behavior that is out of compliance with the behavioral covenant. The consequences of continuing the destructive behavior in question will be clearly laid out for all concerned.

4. If this does not resolve the conflict, then the parties in question shall meet with the full Executive Team. The Board President, or another Board member designated by the President, shall also be present at this meeting. The Executive Team may ask a person to leave specific teams and/or small groups if their behavior is sufficiently destructive. The details of this meeting will be confidential.
5. If the person continues to engage in behavior that is in violation of the Covenant of Right Relations, then the Board and the Executive Team will jointly create an action plan for correcting the behavior in question. The Senior Minister and the Board President will send them a letter detailing an action plan for ending the behavior and remaining a member in good standing of the congregation and/or fully participating in the life of First Unitarian Church. The action plan will:
  - a. Name the specific behavior that is out of compliance with the Covenant of Right Relations with documented examples.
  - b. Outline a new pattern of behavior that is clear, attainable and is compliant with the behavioral covenant.
  - c. Give a timeline for when the person has to make the changes described.
  - d. Name a date at which the person's behavior for the period of the action plan will be reviewed. This will consist of a meeting between the Senior Minister, the Board President, and the member in question.
6. If the person fails to comply with the action plan or does not respond, then the person will be removed from membership and church participation in accordance with Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 of the Bylaws. The person will be notified of the decision to remove or retain their membership and/or barred from further participating in the church, at the meeting to review their action plan, with written confirmation provided. If the person refuses or cannot be present for that meeting, he or she will be notified by mail with the church retaining a copy.
7. If the Executive Team deems it appropriate, the Pastoral Care Team and the minister in charge of pastoral care, may sponsor a series of small group conversations to help the members of the congregation to grieve the departure of the member and to process the congregation's feelings about his or her destructive behavior.

**Special Considerations:**

Sometimes leaders of the church may be the ones whose behavior is in violation of the Covenant of Right Relations. In these circumstances additional rules and covenants may come into play:

1. **Executive Team**—If the complaint involves a member of the Executive Team, then the member in question recues him/herself while the remainder of the Executive Team is deliberating or in discussion about the complaint. The Executive Team will function as described above under “General Procedure” without the ET member in question. On matters NOT pertaining to the complaint, the member may rejoin the Executive Team and function in his or her normal capacity.
2. **Board Members**—This procedure applies to individual members of the Board of Trustees. The Board, which has a covenant of its own, may have additional policies regarding the behavior of its members. The Board President would act as this person’s leader/supervisor. If the Board President is the person whose behavior is alleged to be out of compliance with the behavioral covenant, then the Vice President will take the President’s role in the General Procedure described above.

### **Appendices:**

#1 First Unitarian Church’s Covenant of Right Relations (passed at the Annual Meeting May 18, 2008)

With a sincere desire that our congregation flourish, I promise:

- To **be mindful to nurture** my own spiritual health, so that I may help bring a spirit of balance and wholeness to our church community;
- To **be attentive** to guests and new members as well as supporting and encouraging those whom I already know, thereby contributing to an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality;
- To **seek to understand** others with humility and an open mind, and interact with my fellow UU members with integrity and respect;
- To **use wisdom and patience** in challenging or conflicting situations, and to seek honest reconciliation while recognizing we may not always come to agreement;
- To **be involved**, knowing that my skills, resources, wisdom and good will are important to my church community; to **uphold our covenant** to each other in our interactions in the wider community, as exemplars of our empowering faith.

I join with others in this covenant as we seek to become known for our vitality, warmth, and transformative energy

#2 Bylaws (as of May 2011)

Section 4.3.3 Removal from Membership. In accordance with fair and reasonable procedures to be established by the Senior Minister and approved by the Board, a member may be removed from membership for clearly unacceptable behavior that violates the congregation's established Covenant of Right Relations.

Section 4.3.4 Prohibition from Participation. In accordance with fair and reasonable procedures to be established by the Senior Minister and approved by the Board, a member or friend may be barred from participation in church activities for clearly unacceptable behavior that violates the congregation's established Covenant of Right Relations or jeopardizes the safety of others or of church facilities.