

General Policy for the Church

Per Standing Committee Meeting September 13, 2018

Disruptive Behavior

First Church of Jamaica Plain (hereinafter called the church) is a place of safety and integrity for each person's mind, body and spirit. We are a supportive and nurturing faith community, honoring and respecting the rich diversity of those gathered here. Recognizing that warmth, beauty, kindness, and passion will shape us as a congregation of goodwill, generosity, and presence, we covenant to affirm and promote: Honesty and authenticity in our relationships; Words that are supportive and caring, not belittling or demeaning; A welcoming and non-judgmental attitude; Respect for each person's boundaries of mind, body, and spirit; Refraining from displays of temper; and Honoring the gifts and blessings of thought and deed.

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's 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, 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 within the church building may lead to concerns about one or more of the following:

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

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 described to them should inform any of the following:

- The minister
- Any member of the Standing Committee
- Any paid member of the church staff

If required by law, ordinance or similar regulation, the minister or a designated member of the church staff will immediately report the incident to the proper authorities.

The church will not retaliate against anyone who brings forward a complaint. All church leaders and staff are required to immediately report any knowledge of disruptive behavior, harassment, abuse or misconduct to the minister or the Standing Committee.

While the church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, the church will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing the identity of the individuals involved only on a “need-to-know” basis and as necessary to investigate and resolve the 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 may be called if further assistance is required. Any time any of these actions is taken, the Minister and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the congregation (the “team”) must be notified. They, in turn, will then consult with at least one additional representative from the Standing Committee 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.

MORE DELIBERATE RESPONSE. Whether a situation requires an immediate response or not, it will be referred to the designated team by the group leader involved in the initial incident (if any), the victim, the perpetrator, or any third party having knowledge of the incident. The team will respond using the following guidelines:

The team will respond to problems as they arise. 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 team will collect all necessary information.

To aid in evaluating the problem, the following will be considered:

- Dangerous – is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- Disruptive – how much is the behavior interfering with church functions?
- 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 team will decide on a response on a case-by case basis. The following levels of response will be followed:

Level One -- The team will meet with the person(s) and other related party/parties. The team will communicate their concern about the disruptive behavior.

Level Two -- If the team’s efforts do not resolve the situation, or if the issue affects the larger congregation, the full Standing Committee will become involved. 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 reasons for such action and conditions of return made clear in a written notification.

Level Three -- The Standing Committee, after careful consideration, may determine that the offending individual(s) may be removed from membership and/or 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. The action may be appealed, in writing, to the Standing Committee within thirty days of the letter of notification, in which case the Standing Committee will create an ad hoc appeal committee composed of two members of the Standing Committee, two active church members appointed by the Standing Committee, and a fifth active church member chosen by the removed person. In a case where the individual does not have a member to propose, the fifth member would be selected by the other four members. The majority decision of the appeal committee shall be final and not subject to further appeal. The congregation may be informed of the removal of an individual from membership in the church in written communication.

POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT OF REMOVED INDIVIDUAL. Any request for reinstatement must be made by the member who was removed from membership. A reinstatement request may be made no sooner than one year following the removal. 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 of how circumstances and conditions have changed, such that a reinstatement would be justified. The request shall go to the Standing Committee, which will respond within sixty days as to whether or not to reinstate the removed member. The decision shall be final and not subject to further appeal. 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.