**Safe Congregation Policy**

**Theodore Parker Church**

While openness to diversity is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's Purposes and Principles and our church’s bylaws we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. Concern for the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual.

The following policy shall guide us in actively and promptly addressing situations in which individuals' behavior, past convictions or actions in direct violation of UU Principles and Purposes threaten the emotional and/or physical security of our minsters, staff, members and friends. The privacy/anonymity of the allegedly offensive individual will be maintained at all times, except in cases in which he/she poses a threat to others. The church will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child sexual abuse.

**Disruptive Behavior**

Since it is serious business to file a formal complaint against a fellow member, doing so should never be taken lightly. Every attempt should be made to resolve disruptive situations by addressing them directly, with compassion and concern, before resorting to the use of this policy.

When a person's disruptive behavior requires an immediate response, the minister and/or the leader of the group involved will undertake it. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called.

Any time such actions are required and the Minister is not present, then the Minister and the Standing Committee Chairmust be notified as soon as is practicable.

A follow-up letter or document detailing what steps must be taken by the offending party or parties before he/she/they may return to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister to the offending party or parties.

For ongoing situations and those not requiring an immediate response, the process begins with a written, signed explanation of the disruptive behavior and its impact, from the person or people who witnessed it, to the Minister. The Minister will determine whether he/she wishes to handle the situation privately, or request the formation of an ad hoc committee (the Response Team) appointed by the Standing Committee. This committee shall include the Minister, the Standing Committee Chair, a second member of the Standing Committee or the RE director if the accusation or conviction involves a child) and will further investigate the matter. When appropriate and whenever possible, the Minister will inform the person that a complaint has been filed and is being investigated.

The Minister and/or the Response Team will respond to situations as they arise, using their own judgment, without defining acceptable behavior in advance.

People and situations will be dealt with individually and stereotypes or stereotyping will be avoided.

The Minister and/or the Response Team will collect any additional information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation and research any applicable laws.

When the minister and/or the Response Team considers such information essential to performing its task, the Standing Committee shall authorize funds to pay costs for a professional background check, to provide such facts as the correct identity of the person in question and records of past criminal activity involving threats, harassment, or actual harm to other persons or property.

Note: Unitarian Universalists have a long history of public engagement with issues of individual freedom and social justice. Therefore, acts of conscience or civil disobedience that may have resulted in criminal charges or convictions will receive distinct consideration and careful attention under this policy.

The Minister and/or the Response Team *must* consider the following questions:

* Dangerous: Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property, including himself or herself?
* Disruptive: How much interference with church functions is occurring?
* Offensive: How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

The Minister and/or the Response Team *may* consider the following questions:

* Causes: Why is this disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? 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?

The Minister and/or the Response Team will respond on a case-by-case basis. Mediation by a neutral party is also a possibility. The following levels of response are options the Minister or the Response Team can implement:

1) No Action: It may be determined that the complaint is not warranted, and the minister will explain and discuss this with the person who filed the complaint.

2) Warning: The minister or a member of the Response Team shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern and expectations for future behavior.

3) Suspension: The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific activities for a limited period of time, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing.

4) Recommend the issue to the Standing Committee for further consideration/action (and a possible vote for expulsion).

**Registered/Accused Sex Offender**

If it comes to the attention of a member, friend or staff member of TPC that a *Level 3 convicted sex offender* is attending services or church sponsored activities, he/she will be asked to leave and suspended from attending services or church sponsored activities until a determination is made of the safety of continued attendance.

If it comes to the attention of a member, friend or staff member of TPC that an *individual who has been accused or suspected of being a sex offender* is attending services or church sponsored activities, he/she *may* be prohibited from attending services and *will* be prohibited from attending church sponsored activities until a determination is made of the safety of continued attendance.

The minister may make this determination alone or with the help of the Response Team.

The Minister and/or the Response Team will consider the following questions:

* Dangerous: Based on the individual’s criminal history and recent behavior at church, to what degree is he/she a threat or perceived threat to others?
* Disruptive: How much interference with church functions is occurring?
* Offensive: How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

In assessing the dangerousness of the individual and in accordance with UUA guidelines, a consult with a convicted offender’s parole officer may occur to determine what he/she thinks is the likelihood of the offender reoffending.  Consults with mental health professionals may occur as well.

If it is determined that the convicted or accused sex offender will be allowed to

attend services and/or other church sponsored activities, then a Limited Access Agreement must be signed (see sample in appendix)

**Draft Limited Access Agreement—Confidential**

**Introductory paragraph in cases of allegation:**

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the children and youth in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be made known only to the Minister and the members of the Response Team.It will be kept in a locked file in the office.

**Introductory paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:**

Theodore Parker Church affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your conviction, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited.

**Agreement:**

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in adult worship services, coffee hour, committee meetings, adult education, all adult social events, and well-supervised intergenerational events. You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

* Do not talk with children.
* Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
* While at church or while at church sponsored activities, a designated member of the congregation will accompany you at all times.  This will be done surreptitiously.
* If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
* Avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as nursery school or youth group.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care: INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property.

I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Date:

Minister:

Date:

Director/Minister of Religious Education:

Date:

Standing Committee Chair:

Date: