

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION
New London, Connecticut

BEHAVIORAL COVENANT

PRINCIPLES

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, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

There have been times when the disruptive behavior of an individual within the church community or when knowledge of accusations or prior convictions of sexual or other violent offenses have led members and/or active friends to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
- The disruption of church activities;
- Substantial diminishment of the appeal of the church to its community.

We affirm our Unitarian Universalist principles by the policies described herein:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

A. DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR POLICY¹

All Souls invites congregants to be involved in the decisions that affect them. As an initial step in dealing with any disruptive and challenging situation, individuals are encouraged to first attempt to address their concerns directly with the other individual(s) involved. In the case of an unsatisfactory outcome to a direct attempt at resolving disruptive/intimidating behaviors, the following shall be the policy of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Congregation:

1. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the minister, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person(s) to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the minister's presence, the minister and the Ombuds Committee must be notified. A copy of this policy and a follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the minister and the Ombuds Committee to the offending party or parties.

¹ Approved by the All Souls Board of Trustees: May 10, 2001
Updated: October 2005 and February 2007, February 2008
Reviewed March 2012

2. Situations not requiring an immediate response will be referred to the Ombuds Committee, which is appointed by the All Souls Board of Trustees. The Ombuds Committee will determine if the behavior / situation falls outside the bounds of this policy. If so, the committee will respond by first providing a copy of this policy to the individual whose behavior is outside the bounds of our covenant. Then the committee will observe the following in terms of their own judgment:

- a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
- c. The committee will collect all necessary information.
- d. To aid in evaluating the situation, the following points will be considered:
 - DANGEROUSNESS – Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
 - DISRUPTIVENESS – How much interference with All Souls' functions is occurring?
 - OFFENSIVENESS – How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?
- e. 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 congregation? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition or 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?
- f. The committee will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:
 - LEVEL ONE– The committee shall inform the minister of the problem and either the minister or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.
 - LEVEL TWO – The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear.
 - LEVEL THREE – The offending individual is permanently excluded from the All Souls premises and all All Souls activities. Before this is carried out the committee will consult with the Board of Trustees and the minister. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the minister, explaining the expulsion and the individual's rights and possible recourse. Any action taken under item f (above) may be appealed to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees.

All Souls Unitarian Universalist Congregation strives to be an inclusive community affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of our congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.

B. SEXUAL OR VIOLENT OFFENDER POLICY²

This policy applies to a current member/friend or newcomer who is accused or has been convicted of a sexual or other violent offense. It seeks to balance principles that are sometimes in tension but stem from our deepest conviction that the church is a space of radical hospitality and fundamental respect for the worth and dignity of every individual, on the one hand, with our deep commitment to ensuring that it is a safe space, in which the actions of participants do not jeopardize the welfare of others. We start with the assumption that persons entering the space and programs of All Souls will conduct themselves with integrity and deep respect for all who are here; violations of this standard will be addressed through the following procedures:

Procedure Including Access of Information:

When the minister becomes aware of an individual accused or convicted of sexual or violent offense, s/he will meet privately with the individual to explore with the individual the nature of the accusation or conviction and assess its potential impact on the congregation. Among the issues to be considered will be the nature of the accusation/conviction, when it occurred, whether it appears to be a single episode or part of a pattern, its current legal status (e.g. accusation only; conviction with parole/probation completed; conviction and current parole/probation), the likelihood of the behavior occurring within the church or its programs, and its potential to cause anxiety to or threaten the welfare of congregants, particularly children.

The minister may seek substantiating information from public records and, with the individual's permission, from a parole/probation officer or other person in a position to evaluate the likelihood of risk to the congregation of the individual's participation. The minister will also consult with the Ombuds Committee for guidance on appropriate limitations, if any, in the individual's participation in All Souls services or programs. The minister may also request that the Ombuds Committee meet with the individual for an independent assessment.

For all cases involving accusations or convictions of sexual offenses, the minister will seek substantiating information from public records and report the case to the Board of Trustees and, if appropriate, the Director of Religious Education.

When warranted by behavior or evidence of the likelihood of behavior that jeopardizes the wellbeing of community members, the individual will be asked to sign an agreement stipulating limitations on his/her access to specific programs, spaces, activities of the church. Such limitations will be developed with due consideration for the specific circumstances of individual cases and may include some or all of the provisions included in *Appendix B. Limited Access Agreement*. The details of the Limited Access Agreement will be developed in consultation with

² First draft, April 2006; revised November, 2006; approved by Board of Trustees: February 2007; Reviewed March 2012

the Ombuds Committee. The Board of Trustees will be informed when the minister and Ombuds Committee have determined a Limited Access Agreement is necessary.

If the individual refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement s/he will be denied the opportunity to participate in congregational activities. If the individual violates the terms of the Agreement, s/he will be asked to leave the church premises/program by a member of the Ombuds Committee, Board of Trustees, or minister. If s/he refuses, the police will be called for assistance.

Reasons to deny access to All Souls:

- Refusal to allow the minister to contact the current parole/probation officer
- Refusal to sign and abide by the Limited Access Agreement
- Failure to uphold any one of the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement
- Report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high risk for recidivism.

If the minister is accused or indicted of a sexual or other violent offense, the President of the Board of Trustees will contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA and / or the Clara Barton District Executive.

The Ombuds Committee will receive training and support in handling sexual abuse and other violent behavior.

Appendix A: Ombuds Committee³

Purposes:

The Ombuds Committee serves in two important, but slightly different, capacities, each requiring sensitive and compassionate judgment and discretion. In cases of disruptive behavior, the Committee role is mediator and arbiter; in cases involving persons accused or convicted of sexual or violent offenses, the Committee assists the minister in assessment and, where necessary, the development of a limited access agreement. Specifically, the Committee's responsibilities are:

1. In cases of disruptive behavior, the Committee provides support and guidance to members and friends of All Souls in encouraging direct resolution of the disruptive and/or intimidating behaviors at All Souls. If direct resolution efforts do not result in a satisfactory outcome, the Committee shall review and determine appropriate courses of action as described in the All Souls Behavioral Covenant, Section A. Disruptive Behavior Policy.
2. In cases of sexual or violent offense, the Committee shall advise the minister in the counsel and monitoring of the accused or convicted individual as described in the All Souls Behavioral Covenant, Section B. Sexual and Violent Offender Policy, and assist, as warranted, in the development of a Limited Access Agreement.

Job Description:

The Ombuds Committee is responsible to the Board of Trustees and the congregation. It will be a three-person committee appointed by the Board of Trustees. The responsibilities of the committee include supporting members and friends in directly addressing conflict and disruptive situations within the All Souls community and providing a neutral forum for review and settlement when a direct one-to-one approach was unsuccessful. The Ombuds Committee will meet on an as-needed basis when situations arise. The committee will report to the Board of Trustees regarding any official action taken or recommendations made, and will communicate annually with the minister.

Members of the Committee must be able to:

- Maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality regarding matters that are brought before them;
- Demonstrate effective listening and communication skills, empathy for others, objectivity and flexibility.

³ Approved by the All Souls Board of Trustees: May 10, 2001
 Updated: October 2005 and December 2010
 Reviewed March 2012

Appendix B: LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT
CONFIDENTIAL

(Template: to be adjusted according to individual circumstance)

All Souls Unitarian Universalist Congregation 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 background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation, as well as one to one contact with adult congregants. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership, but your participation will be limited to ensure the congregation's safety and to assure that you will not be subject to undue accusations.

The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk of an incident or accusation.

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 the All Souls premises or congregation-sponsored events and unsupervised contact with adult congregants. This agreement requires that you honor the following boundaries:

- Do not talk with the children and youth.
- If a child in the congregation approaches you either at All Souls or in the wider community, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the encounter.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone, or participate in events for children and youth including religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Do not enter the religious education rooms of the building.
- Avoid being in the buildings unsupervised.
- Avoid being alone with another congregant in any part of the buildings.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances to assure the congregation's safety and well-being:

- Minister
- Director of Religious Education
- Board of Trustees
- Ombuds Committee

I accept that one of the following people must be in my presence at all times when I am in the church buildings or at a church event:

_____.

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

I understand that this agreement will be reviewed as the Board of Trustees determines and will remain in place for an indefinite period.

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Witness	Date
_____	_____
Minister	Date
_____	_____

Director of Religious Education

Date

Board Chair

Date