

Procedures for Responding to Controversial Communications & Related Issues

Responding to accusatory or controversial media or conversations

Accusatory or controversial remarks between congregants can be referred to the Healthy Congregations Team, in consultation with the minister. In the event of a conflict which involves multiple people (such as factions) and deep division, the Board, in consultation with the Healthy Congregations Team and the minister, may decide to ask a local conflict resolution organization such as the Community Dispute Resolution Center for assistance.

Accusatory or controversial remarks made by someone outside of the First Unitarian Society can be referred to the Board and the minister, who will determine how to respond.

In general, the initial response should be one of curiosity and concern rather than defensiveness. We should strive to fulfill the Second Principle by promoting justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, recognizing that compassion is especially called for in the current environment of pervasive pandemic stress. The person (or people) responding to the situation can begin by setting aside their own emotional reaction to what has been said and seeking to understand the feelings and point of view that prompted the remarks. Drawing out the person who made the remarks can help defuse the situation somewhat, help the person feel they are being heard, and also reveal their underlying assumptions, which can help the responder determine how to help them come back into covenant. Make sure that both parties are clear about what the other is saying. Paraphrasing the other person's statements and confirming that the summary is accurate is essential.

Who speaks for the Board of Trustees

The Board's designated corresponding member may speak for the Board in answering questions or responding to messages from congregants, using judgment to determine when an issue needs to be referred to the Board as a whole. Similarly, Board members designated to be liaisons with the staff may speak for the Board in answering staff members' questions and responding to their messages, using judgment as to when an issue needs to come before the Board as a whole. The Board should inform the congregation as to who these designated Board members are.

In other situations, where a Board decision is required, the Board will decide the issue by majority vote. However, in a situation that calls for a quick decision, the Executive Committee (ExCo) may decide and then report its actions subject to reconsideration and amendment by the full Board (Bylaws, Article IV, section 4). If an immediate decision is required and there is no

time to consult ExCo beforehand, the Board President may decide the issue and then report their actions subject to reconsideration and amendment by the full Board.

Response to visitors on Sunday morning

If a visitor asks for immediate assistance just before or during the service or coffee hour on Sunday morning, they can be courteously directed to the Engagement & Outreach representative at the newcomers' table in the parlor. The E & O representative will have on hand a list of resources that the visitor can be referred to. Hospitality Team members should be aware of the situation and know to direct the visitor to the newcomers' table.

Education process

We should seek to educate our congregation, and to remind them on an ongoing basis, as to what our covenant says, what it means to be in covenant, and how they can communicate respectfully and with an open mind and heart. The minister, the DRE, and the Healthy Congregations Team can all contribute to this ongoing education process in various ways, such as periodically giving a sermon on the topic, conducting or sponsoring an annual workshop on the topic, etc. In the absence of a minister, the Board, the Team Leaders Council, and the Healthy Congregations Team may coordinate the proposed educational actions for each church year.

Communications Policy Committee

1/22