

A Safe Congregation

WHAT IS A SAFE CONGREGATION?

A safe congregation is one in which those who participate in the religious community—members, guests, ministers, and employees—are free to engage in activities and explore ideas and beliefs without fear or concern for their physical and emotional well-being. It is a congregation that strives to uphold all of the UU Purposes and principles, and most specifically the following three:

- 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

WHY DOES FUS HAVE A SAFE CONGREGATION TEAM?

Openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our Purposes and Principles. First Unitarian Society of Madison is committed to promoting a safe and welcoming environment that is supportive of personal and spiritual growth. For most people, and for most of our history, this acceptance of the diverse needs, styles, and opinions of the people who enter our doors has enriched our community. Because seriously harmful or disruptive behavior is rare in our community, we have been unprepared to respond effectively when it has happened. In November 2002, the First Unitarian Society Board of Trustees adopted a Safe Congregation Policy.

This focuses on two issues that may arise in the course of our relationships and interactions with each other:

- Sexual misconduct, harassment, and abuse by members of the FUS community against other members of the FUS community.
- Disruptive behavior that threatens an individual's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs or opinions.

The work of the Board and the Safe Congregation Team has been informed by efforts of the Unitarian Universalist Association and several congregations around the country.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY AND PURPOSE OF THE TEAM?

The Safe Congregation Team is available to anyone in our faith community who has concerns about incidents that cause them to feel unsafe while on the grounds of First Unitarian Society, or while participating in activities sponsored by First Unitarian Society.

It is neither the goal of the Board nor the role of the Safe Congregation Team to prevent or curtail the fervent expression of ideas and points of view. Passionate challenging of another's beliefs, strong philosophical disagreements, personality conflicts, and even people simply not being nice to each other occur as a part of normal, everyday life. As defined by the Board, the Safe Congregation Team enters only in those narrowly defined situations that involve actual or threatened harassment, abuse, intimidation, or seriously disruptive behavior that threatens the wellbeing of our religious community.

HOW DOES A COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION GET STARTED?

Anyone – a member of the staff, the congregation, or the community – can bring an issue to for consideration before the Safe Congregation Team (SCT). To start the process, please contact a minister, the chief operating officer, or any member of the board of trustees.

An SCT member will have a conversation to get basic information that will allow the Team to determine whether the complaint falls within the scope of the SCT:

- Possible sexual abuse, harassment or misconduct internal to the FUS community
- Possible disruptive behavior that is perceived as a threat to the safety of any adult or child, or that seriously disrupts congregational activities and participation.

If it appears to the SCT member that the issue clearly is or may be within the charge of the SCT, the SCT member gives the person making the complaint a copy of the complaint form, and asks that it be returned to the SCT member within 7 days. This complaint form describes the actions or incidents leading to the complaint, identifies the person or group against whom the complaint is made, and identifies witnesses to any incidents that occurred.