

Congregational Safety Policy

Background

GNUUC seeks to improve the wellbeing of its ministers, its members, and their children. Therefore, we must begin with a commitment not to harm their spiritual, emotional or physical well being. This policy sets out guidelines for congregational life that help reduce the likelihood that someone experiences harm in our community.

Definitions

Right Relations

The covenant we abide by in our relationship with each other. A person is “in right relations” with other when they are abiding by the covenant. A person is “out of right relations” when they break the covenant.

Wellbeing

A feeling of comfort and happiness.

Consent

Permission freely given for an action to occur, with a full understanding of its consequences.

Minor

A person who cannot legally give consent. In Tennessee, anyone under the age of 18.

Ministerial Misconduct

Any violation of the GNUUC Ministerial policy.

Restorative Justice

A system of conflict resolution that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large.

Policy Scope

This policy seeks to establish guidelines to monitor and improve the safety of GNUUC. It provides instructions for improving the safety of meetings and other

activities at the church building itself and for official GNUUC activities occurring in other locations. It provides specific instructions for each of the stakeholders.

Stakeholders

Settled Minister

Rev. Carmen Emerson, GNUUC's Settled Minister

Associated Ministers

Rev. Michelle Pederson, Community Minister Ordained by GNUUC

Rev. Dan Rosemergy, GNUUC's Minister Emeritus

Paid Staff

These includes the administrative secretary, music directors, custodians, and caregivers.

Volunteer Leaders of GNUUC

These include committee chairs, taskforce, and team coordinators, trained lay caregivers, RE teachers, and Small Group Facilitators.

Members of GNUUC

These include all members of GNUUC, who must be 18 years or older.

Minor Children of Members of GNUUC

These include all children of members of GNUUC 17 years old or younger. Children of GNUUC members that are 18 years old or older do not fall within this category since they are either members or non-members of GNUUC in their own right.

Healthy Congregation Team

The Healthy Congregation Team advocates for the emotional wellbeing of all members of GNUUC. It helps members and minor children of members return to right relations with each other when they fall short of the covenant.

The members of the Healthy Congregations Team are trained to help bring people back to right relations. This may include helping to mediate disputes, referring problems to the minister, or just lending a sympathetic ear.

Policies

Membership

The bylaws create certain membership processes: (1) becoming a member, (2) earning the right to vote and hold office, (3) voluntary resignation from the church, (4) removal of members who have “not actively participated in the life of the church” for more than a year.

Welcoming a New Member to GNUUC

A person becomes eligible to sign the membership book after completing the following welcoming steps:

1. Attend at least 6 worship services.
2. Successfully complete the “Welcome to Unitarian Universalism” class.
3. Make a financial pledge.

The “Welcome to Unitarian Universalism” class shall be led by the minister who shall be assisted by at least one member of the Healthy Congregation Team. The class will introduce prospective members to (1) the basic history of the UU tradition, (2) the basic history of GNUUC, (3) the role of the 7 principles and 6 sources in living as a UU, (4) the concept of covenant in the UU tradition and the specific covenants that guide GNUUC.

Removing a Member from GNUUC

GNUUC shall practice restorative justice. If there is a failure of the restorative justice process with a particular offending member, the Minister in consultation with the Healthy Congregation Team may revoke the membership privileges of the offending member. A failure of the restorative justice process will have occurred if:

1. A member has been the subject of at least 3 restorative justice interventions by the Healthy Congregation Team.

OR

1. The Minister, after appropriate review, and with the consent of the Congregational President, finds that a member has caused intentional physical harm to another member or to the minor child of a member.

AND

2. The offending member has failed to successfully complete the restorative justice program required to address the harm.

The “Restorative Justice Process” shall be led by the Minister who shall be assisted by at least one member of the Healthy Congregation Team. The process may include training in any relevant material possibly including:

1. The covenants of GNUUC
2. The use of inclusive and welcoming language
3. The history of oppression in the United States
4. The role of the 7 principles and 6 sources in living as a UU
5. The concept of covenant in the UU tradition and the specific covenants that guide GNUUC.

Those affected by the offense shall participate in the restorative justice process: offender, victim, and family members. The offending member will be encouraged to take responsibility for their past actions and to take additional action to right any wrongs they have done. The goal of the process is to return to people to right relations and to avoid future offense.

Consent

GNUUC strives to treat others as they wish to be treated. This mean we must ask for and receive consent in all our activities.

Minors cannot give consent.

No everyone is capable of giving consent. Minor children cannot give consent. They do not possess an adult understanding of the consequences of actions. They cannot act freely on their own because they are dependent on adults. The parents and guardians of minor children must give consent on their behalf.

People in emotional or physical distress cannot give consent.

Their distress will likely influence their decisions. Seeking consent from people before they become distressed allows them to give instructions freely and with time to appreciate the consequences of their choices.

Two people must be in equal positions of authority to give each other consent.

Since people in positions of authority have, by definition, a certain amount of influence or power over others without similar authority, consent cannot be freely given. Ministers and members of the congregation have inherently unequal positions of authority.

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing

Of Everyone

People will act with goodwill toward each other. People will speak kindly to each other at GNUUC. People will not offer unsolicited advice or criticism.

Of Minor Children

While at GNUUC, minor children are the exclusive responsibility of their parents or guardians. Those parents or guardians may consent for their children to be in the care of a RE volunteer or staff member during RE classes or other GNUUC sponsored event.

The Religious Education Committee will maintain policies for vetting and properly training RE volunteers and staff to ensure compliance with consent given by parents or guardians during RE programs.

Adults who have not been received consent to take responsibility of minor children by their parents or guardians will not offer those children unsolicited advice or criticism.

Of the Older Members

As people age and friends and family members pass away, a strong sense of community is important in supporting emotional wellbeing. Ministry at GNUUC will encourage the creation of multi-generational community.

Of Members with Mobility Limitations

GNUUC will strive to make all its facilities ADA compliant allowing people to move as freely as possible. We will seek input of members with mobility limitations so we can quickly identify and remove barriers to movement.

Of Members with Sensory Limitations

GNUUC will strive to provide its services using as many sensory modes as possible. We will work to remove barriers for those with vision and hearing limitations so that they may participate as independently as possible at GNUUC.

[Cross-reference to Building and Grounds Accessibility / ADA Compliance Policy]

Reporting Emotional Injury and Returning to the Covenant

A member or minor child of a member of GNUUC who feels they have experienced an emotional injury, should contact one of the designated members of the Healthy Congregations Team to share their experience.

The Healthy Congregations Team will designate a number of “first contact” people to serve as points of initial contact for people who need help from the team. The team will publicise its role as in maintaining right relations in the congregation. It will publicize the contact information for people who are designated as points of first contact.

[Cross-reference to Healthy Congregation Team congregational conflict policy.]

Supporting Physical Wellbeing

Of Everyone

Ministers and Members of GNUUC will refrain from non-consensual behavior.

Ministers and Members will seek affirmative consent when physically interacting with each other. The Fellowship committee will develop affirmative consent policies and provide training to GNUUC Members.

GNUUC will maintain first aid equipment and train people in the use of the equipment.

GNUUC will work with public safety experts to develop emergency safety plans for our members and their minor children.

Of Minor Children

The Religious Education Committee will maintain policies for vetting and properly training RE volunteers and staff to ensure compliance with consent given by parents or guardians during GNUUC RE programs.

[Cross-reference to RE Committee safe staffing policy.]

Of Members with Mobility Limitations

GNUUC will take steps to reduce the risk of falls on our campus.

Of Member with Sensory Limitations

GNUUC will install upgrades to the facilities that improve the safety of those with sensory limitations.

[Cross-reference to Building and Grounds Accessibility / ADA Compliance Policy]

Reporting Physical Injury

In the event of a medical emergency, 911 should be called immediately. Notify the minister when it is safe to do so.

[Cross-reference to Healthy Congregation Team injury reporting policy.]

A physical injury of a minor child of a member that occurs during a GNUUC activity should be reported to the RE volunteer in charge of the minor child.

[Cross-reference to RE Committee injury reporting policy.]

Supporting Appropriate Ministerial Conduct

The Minister is in a position of profound emotional and spiritual power in a congregation. An effective Minister intentionally cultivates the trust of each member of the congregation because that trust is essential to the advancement of the congregation as a whole.

UUA Ministers are governed by a number of covenants and ethical codes. Specifically, the The Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry.

One of the most important recent changes to those guidelines came in 2013 when the UU Ministers Association adopted this language:

“I will not engage in sexual contact, sexualized behavior, or a sexual relationship with any person I serve as a minister.”

The Guidelines, published at www.uuma.org, cover a wide range of topics and form the basis for identifying ministerial misconduct.

Reporting Ministerial Misconduct

There are three paths to addressing ministerial misconduct: the Healthy Congregation Team, the GNUUC Board, and the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety. Members are encouraged to use the resource that they feel is most appropriate.

A member may contact the Healthy Congregations Team which will publish contact information for designated points of contact for any member to discuss failures of right relations including ministerial misconduct.

A member may contact the GNUUC Board of Directors which will publish appropriate contact information.

A member may contact the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety. The Board will publicize the contact information which appears below.

Intake Officer: Heather Bond

Contact Number: (617) 948-6462

Hours of Operation: 9am to 5pm Eastern Time

Response Time: 48 hours

[Ministerial misconduct will be handled according to UUA and UUMA process.]