

GNUUC Emergency Shelter Policy

Background

From time to time, the Congregation may become aware of people who require emergency shelter (“sanctuary”) to protect their safety or provide a temporary refuge. While our building is not equipped for long-term residency, it can provide adequate short-term emergency shelter. In this document, the term, “guest(s)” will refer to those receiving emergency shelter.

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) provides guidance to congregations addressing safety, security, and the provision of sanctuary in practice of our shared values. Please see the references noted below for more information.

Stakeholders

In drawing up this policy, the Board consulted with the Buildings and Grounds Team, the Social Action Team, and the Worship Team. Before issuing the final policy, the Board circulated a draft for congregational input.

Policy

1. “Emergency shelter” means day and night occupancy for a specific period of time, of at most 30 days, for the purpose of transitioning to permanent housing.
2. Applications for emergency shelter will be coordinated through and approved by the Minister, the Social Action Team, and one or more representatives from Building and Grounds.
3. Emergency shelter will be offered without regard to age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, marital status, disability, or medical history. Yet, the available space may not be physically appropriate for all people, and the Minister, Social Action Team, and Building and Grounds Team will address this when evaluating a request for shelter.
4. Emergency shelter may only be extended to one individual or family unit at a time.
5. Prior to beginning emergency shelter, the Minister will designate a member of the congregation who will serve as liaison between the guest(s) and congregational leadership.
6. When emergency shelter is awarded, an end date will be agreed upon prior to occupancy. Within 1 week of the end of the shelter period, the liaison will meet with the guest(s) and the Minister to either extend or terminate the emergency shelter.
7. Either the main building or the RE building can be used to provide emergency shelter. Individual situations will be considered and all relevant stakeholders will be involved in space considerations.
8. During a period of emergency shelter, the guest(s) may use the bathrooms and the kitchen in the fellowship hall as well as a room in the RE building or the fellowship hall stage.
9. Congregational leadership will provide the congregation with periodic updates on the status of any guests, while maintaining appropriate privacy.
10. People receiving emergency shelter may use the church address for the receipt of mail.

Dynamics to Keep In Mind

These guideline excerpts are taken from the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice (UUCSJ) Congregational Sponsorship Handbook; please see [Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers, Handbook for Congregations](#) for complete information.

- *Honoring your guest's independence and sense of agency*
Through self-reflection and the support of your own community, consider what practices will help you find the balance between offering support while refraining from imposing your own sense of “what’s best” for your guest. It is especially important that we stay mindful of dynamics around identity and power – related to race, gender identity, age, citizenship, survivorship and other factors – that may impact this relationship.
- *Identity, Power & Privilege*
We all have a variety of identities, lived experiences, and social locations related to privilege and power that inform how we move through the world. In relating to guests seeking asylum and temporary sanctuary in our home, it’s important to remember that an imbalanced power dynamic exists, and to seek to equalize this wherever we can.
- *Managing expectations*
Honoring and affirming your guest’s preferences, even when they vary from your own, is part of making your home a place of sanctuary
- *Coping with Trauma*
Trauma manifests in people in many different ways, and healing from it also comes about in a wide variety of forms and practices. Being flexible with guests’ coping mechanisms without judgment will help to create a supportive environment during this transitional time in their lives.

As time goes on

- Try to be patient and compassionate with your guest and all involved, even when you’re feeling stressed – and extend that compassion to yourselves too!
- Help your guest think about long-term preferences, especially in terms of location and preferred work.
- Know your own needs and limits.
- Be mindful of the opinions you hold about your guest’s choices.

Accountability

The Minister and Social Action Team has primary responsibility for compliance with this policy. The Social Action Team will work with the Minister to evaluate the period of emergency sanctuary and provide feedback to the Board as needed to improve the policy.

Reference

Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers, Handbook for Congregations Fall 2019
UUSC/UUCSJ (Retrieved May 10, 2021)

<http://uucsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Congregational-Sponsorship-Handbook.pdf>