

Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church

Policy for Serious Covenant Breaches

I. Introduction

A. The foundational principles guiding our relationships are expressed in our UU principles, the church Mission Statement, and in our Covenant of Healthy Relationships. We define a breach of Covenant to be the explicit and clear violation, of either our Covenant of Healthy Relationships or UU principles, which continues beyond the point when the person committing such violations has been told to cease.

B. OCUUC strives to be an inclusive community, embracing our differences in beliefs, opinions, and life experiences. Yet we know that a robust inclusivity and sense of freedom are stifled when relationships are unhealthy or feel unsafe; thus we are committed to ensure that relationships in our community are strong and vibrant. Significant and repeated breaches of our Covenant are injurious to our relationships, and threaten the vitality and viability of our community.

C. We believe that OCUUC members and participants are each responsible for maintaining an atmosphere where both safety and openness thrive. When a breach of Covenant occurs, it is appropriate for persons in a position of leadership, or any individual who observes the breach, to address the situation promptly out of caring and with reference to our Covenant. A satisfying resolution is the desired outcome.

II. Scope of This Policy

This policy applies to situations that occur on OCUUC property, at off-site OCUUC sponsored gatherings, and in all forms of electronic and written communications. It applies to any individual, whether a member, staff, friend or visitor, whether an adult or child, and to two or more people and groups.

III. Definition of Chronic and/or Serious Covenant Breaches

A. Chronic and/or serious covenant breaches occur when a perceived serious breach of covenant that threatens the emotional and/or physical security of members, staff, friends and guests. The privileges and inclusion of any individual must always be balanced by concern for the congregation as a whole.

B. Some situations that might constitute a serious Covenant breach are: perceived threats to anyone's sense of safety; disruptions of activities; intentional and repeated violations or disregard for OCUUC policies, procedures and official decisions.

IV. Guidelines for Reviewing Complaints

A. A Serious Breach of Covenant Team (SBCT) , consisting of the Board President, Chairperson of the Peace Committee, and Minister (Interim or Settled), shall be formed and dissolved on an as-needed basis.

B. The SBCT will maintain confidentiality regarding all such incidents except in cases in which a behavior threatens self or others, and then the decision to reveal information must be thoroughly considered. OCUUC will follow all applicable state laws and reporting procedures for child and elder abuse.

C. The SBCT shall follow these general guidelines:

1. Deal with people and situations on an individual basis.
2. Do not pre-judge until all the facts are known.
3. Focus on facts, and not on imagination, rumor, assumptions, biased opinions, or secret agendas posing as objective opinion.
4. Avoid stereotyping.
5. Gather the information required to obtain a complete picture of the situation.
6. Consult, as needed, useful, or prudent, with appropriate individuals and resources to get clarity about relevant laws and legal implications.

D. The SBCT shall consider the following questions:

1. Dangerous: Is the behavior a real or possible danger to persons or property?
2. Disruptive: How much interference is caused to safe, healthy interactions, the community as a whole, OCUUC events and the functions of the staff as a result of this behavior?
3. Offensive: How likely is it that existing or prospective members will be driven away by this behavior?

E. The SBCT shall explore the following issues related to the incident in question:

1. Causes: Why is this disruption occurring? Is it due to a lack of information or lack of familiarity with the OCUUC community? Is it due to cultural differences? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the community? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
2. History: What is the frequency and degree of disruption? Have there been other reported breaches of a similar or different nature in the past?

3. Probability of change: How responsive has the individual(s) been to previous coaching or intervention? How likely is it that the behavior will diminish in the future due to attempts at encouraging change?
4. To what extent might others in the community have provoked the disruptive behavior?

V. Process for Addressing Complaints

A. If an incident described in Section III above occurs, it is the responsibility of a leader or member of the congregation to bring this to the attention of the SBCT. When any one member of the SBCT is informed of a potential serious breach of covenant, that person needs to immediately inform the other members. The SBCT will then make a decision regarding a response.

B. The SBCT may decide that the incident:

- a) does NOT meet the threshold to trigger recognition of the incident as a behavior activating this policy, and that no further attention to the matter is merited.
- b) does NOT meet the threshold to trigger recognition of the incident as a behavior activating this policy, but DOES require (possibly quick) action to deal with the matter.
- c) does NOT meet the threshold to trigger recognition of the incident as a behavior activating this policy, but DOES need a response involving some form of mediation or reconciliation, and will therefore refer it to the Peace Committee.
- d) DOES trigger recognition of the incident as a behavior activating this policy, in which case the SBCT shall take action as described in Section VI below.

C. If the SBCT decides that a response is required, the Team will begin the process of response. When a serious breach requires an immediate response, it may be made by the Board President and Minister, or any person(s) to whom they delegate this responsibility.

D. Any time the SBCT takes action on or makes a response to such an incident, it needs to inform the Board as soon as possible.

E. In situations where a serious breach of covenant does NOT require an immediate response, but DOES merit a serious response, the SBCT may make an oral or written report to the Board for the purpose of keeping them informed, or to seek their counsel, or both.

G. The Board shall approve whether and when the SBCT should notify the person that a concern has been filed about their behavior and is being assessed under this policy. Such notification may be foregone if such action would be deemed unwise from a legal standpoint or if the Board believes that physical harm could result.

VI. Actions the SBCT May Take

A. Once a response is determined to be necessary, the SBCT may take one or more of a range of actions as described below. The ultimate step, all other avenues and approaches failing, would be to call the police for assistance.

B. The SBCT may implement the following levels of response, as appropriate to the situation:

1. **No Action:** If it is determined that no action is warranted, a designated person from one of the Team will explain and discuss this with the person(s) who filed the report. Mediation or other resources may be offered in the event of a conflict between two parties.

2. **Warning:** A designated person from the Team will meet with the individual(s) whose behavior is determined to be dangerous, destructive or offensive, to communicate the concern and behavioral expectations with reference to our Covenant.

3. **Suspension:** The individual(s) whose behavior is determined to be dangerous, destructive or offensive will be restricted from specific OCUUC activities for a period of time to be determined by the SBCT, with the reasons and the conditions of return made clear in writing. Restriction of activities may include asking the person(s) to leave the committee or group they were attending in which the behavior occurred; removing them from electronic networks; and/or suspending the meeting or activity they were engaged in until the matter can be satisfactorily resolved.

4. **Request to disengage the person from all church activities:** If the requested behavioral change is intentionally or repeatedly ignored, or the content of the breach is so serious, and after a thorough assessment and meeting with the parties involved, the SBCT may recommend to the Board of Trustees that the individual(s) be excluded from membership and/or participation in the congregation. The Board of Trustees may accept or reject the recommendation. If the Board rejects the recommendation, they must come up with an alternative plan it is prepared to implement and follow through with. Consistent with the requirements of the By-Laws, if the Board accepts the recommendation, they will call for a congregational meeting to vote on the recommendation. In either case, the Board shall write a letter to the individual explaining the reasons for the action taken.