

## **Metropolitan Community Church of the Palm Beaches POLICY REGARDING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**

It is the sincere desire of this church and its congregation to provide a safe space and welcoming place for members, regular attendees, and visitors alike to experience the presence and liberating love of God within this community.

While openness to a wide variety of individuals is one of the prime values held by our congregation and expressed in our denomination's purposes and principles, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's physical, emotional or spiritual well-being is threatened; when a person feels unsafe to attend church worship or events; or when a person feels unsafe to be their authentic self, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

There have been times when disruptive behavior of an individual in the church building, on the church grounds or on social media has led members to voice their concerns about one or more of the following:

- Perceived threats to the safety of any person
- The disruption of church activities
- Diminishing appeal of the congregation to its potential and existing membership.

The following shall be the policy of the Metropolitan Community Church of the Palm Beaches in dealing with these issues:

If an immediate response is required, actions will be taken by the pastor, if available, and/or the Vice Moderator of the Board of Directors (Board) or another Board member. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such time that it may be safely resumed. If further assistance is required, the police may be called. This should be a last resort, as police presence is dangerous for many individuals.

Any time any of these actions are taken without the pastor, the pastor must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing the offense and the action taken because of the offense should be written and distributed to the pastor and the Vice Moderator of the Board. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the Board. The Board will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:

- The Board will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance.
- Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals except in such cases when another is directly and inextricably involved.

- Stereotypes will be avoided.
- The Board will collect all necessary information.

To aid in evaluating the problem, these points will be considered:

- **Dangerousness** - Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
- **Disruptiveness** - How much interference with church functions is going on?
- **Offensiveness** - How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

To determine the necessary response, these points will be considered:

- **Causes** - Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition; such as mental illness or addiction?
- **History** - What is the extent, if any, of disruption caused in the past?
- **Probability of change** - How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

The Board will decide on the necessary response on a case-by-case basis. However, three levels of action/response are recommended:

- **Level one** - The Board shall inform the pastor of the problem and either the pastor or a Board member shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern; with the intent to end the disruptive behavior.
- **Level two** - The offending individual(s) is excluded from specific church activities for a limited period of time, with reasons and conditions of return written and made clear, with a copy going to the offender and one going into the church files.
- **Level three** - The offending individual is permanently excluded from church premises, all church activities, and blocked from the Metropolitan Community Church of Palm Beaches social media. If the Board agrees (by simple majority vote) that the expulsion take place, a letter will be written and sent by the Board to the individual outlining the expulsion, the individual's rights, and any possible recourse. The letter will be sent via USPS registered mail and via email if possible. A copy of the letter and any proof of receipt will be kept on file by the pastor and in the church files.

**Level two and level three actions:**

- **May be appealed.** The offending person may appeal, in writing via letter or email (to the church address). At the Board's discretion, this may be followed by a face-to-face meeting that includes the offender, the pastor, and a Board member to discuss and begin the reconciliation process.

- **Will be communicated to the congregation.** It is important the congregation be advised when action has been necessary to temporarily or permanently exclude.

The Metropolitan Community Church of the Palm Beaches strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as Board members must reflect this emphasis on security. In all such matters and actions, the Board covenants to pray for healing and reconciliation of the relationship between offending individual(s) and the church; that all may be ultimately restored and made whole by God's grace and love. In all that we do, may we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit with great care and a spirit of love.

Enacted Feb. 19, 2020 by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors