All Souls Church Unitarian Security Policy
April 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Recent events in January 2020 at All Souls Church Unitarian (ASCU) and in the larger world have compelled ASCU to undertake a holistic review of the church's security policies. The Board of Trustees, staff, and congregants agree that it is important and necessary for ASCU to have a comprehensive security policy. The Board of Trustees established the Security Committee in April 2020 in order to recommend a comprehensive policy to the Board.

ASCU recognizes that the word and concept of "security" is complex and subjective. We know that our understanding of security must be broad, including emotional and spiritual as well as physical concerns. Heeding the call from communities and individuals who disproportionately experience police violence, as well as guidance from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), this policy and its recommendations invite us to make a paradigm shift in how we define security and how we respond to situations that demand it. In sum, we propose moving from a fear and police-based model that centers the comfort of white people to a justice-based model that centers the needs of those most at risk and prioritizes non-police alternatives.

In recent years, both on the denominational and congregational level, we have begun a thorough review of our policies and practices for evidence of white supremacy culture. The Security Committee understands that disruptive behavior is sometimes the only way institutions with 'power-over' are called to be more just, more welcoming, more whole. Disruptions of patterns of behavior that have left people out is good disruption. Indeed, disruption can lead to "good trouble." However, the essence of the ASCU security policy remains the same: to support a healthy congregation that is inclusive and makes everyone feel safe and welcome.

Equally important, however, is grounding all our responses in a conceptual framework that explicitly names the historic and current reality of oppressive policing and commits us to ongoing education and reflection about how to create a new culture both within and beyond ASCU. This framework draws on the bedrock values of Unitarian Universalism and the 8th Principle, combined with a deepening recognition of how our congregational practices can reinforce racism and white supremacy rather than foster equality and liberation.

Relationship of Security Policy to ASCU's Goals and 8ᵗʰ Principle

The Board of Trustees recognizes that any security policy it adopts must address safety in a manner that will ensure, when possible, the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of the ASCU community. This policy shifts the ASCU's approach to how we define security and how we address a variety of security related situations. In considering its recommendations, the Security Committee recognized the difficult and sometimes life-threatening experiences members of marginalized communities have had with law enforcement. Therefore, the proposed security policy recommendations presented to the Board of Trustees uplifts a justice-based model that centers the needs of those most at risk and prioritizes non-police alternatives, rather than a fear and police-based model that is primarily concerned with preserving the comfort of white people.

Additionally, the Security Policy seeks to support a healthy and vital congregation in dealing with behavior that is antithetical well-being -- such as bullying, harassment, abuse, and intimidation. Such behavior is destructive to the common good and may make others feel unsafe or unwelcome. Above all else, the Security Committee in making its recommendations seeks to hold true to the value and dignity of every person who walks through the doors of ASCU.

Historically, the UUA congregational safety policies, which have guided us here at ASCU, included what were called "Disruptive Behavior" policies. The policy recommendations herein take into consideration guidance from both the UUA and historical interactions that have occurred at ASCU between the congregation and the community. Those interactions have ranged in severity from inconvenient or annoying to disruptive and emotionally threatening.

Currently, ASCU does not have existing safety policies. There is a current evacuation policy, a Religious Education safety policy and a ministerial team policy on disruptive persons. The policy proposed by the Security Committee is intended to be the umbrella of the aforementioned safety guidelines and incorporates existing policies by reference where applicable. This policy supersedes prior ASCU these previous and is framed by our 8ᵗʰ Principle and is intended to meet the contemporary needs of ASCU. Additionally, the Security Committee recommends amending the Congregant Behavior Policy to reflect current recommendations from the UUA to focus on destructive behavior.

Primary Issues Addressed in the Security Policy

After the January 2020 incident of an extremist group protesting outside ASCU, it became abundantly clear to church leadership that views among the congregation about when to call law enforcement varied drastically. The same proved true after a series of interviews were conducted

with key stakeholders who have an interest in, or share directly or indirectly, in the security of the congregation.[1]

This policy seeks to provide clarity for the staff and notice to the congregation about how the church will respond if and when it is faced with various degrees of threatening behavior. The policy asserts that de-escalation and the non-involvement of law enforcement is the primary goal; however, preparations must be made for the potential of terrorist threats and violence against the church, staff and visitors. The policy takes into consideration historical interactions with both members of the congregation and the community which have ranged in severity from disruptive behavior (low threat) to physically aggressive behavior (medium threat).

Accordingly, it is the general recommendation of the Security Committee that police are not to be notified when the threat is low-medium. In such instances, the Security Committee recommends that intermediary tactics be used, such as de-escalation and notification of District of Columbia Government services, such as the Department of Behavioral Services. If the threat is high risk, such as when weapons are brandished and there is a threat of violence against the staff, the congregation and/or visitors, law enforcement will be notified and asked to respond.

Informally, church staff have long maintained a general practice of pursuing de-escalation, mental health treatment, and other non-police alternatives. This policy accepts this approach as official policy with: (1) clarification of authority between Board of Trustees and Executive Team; (2) recommendations related to specific situations, procedures, and roles and (3) recommendations for additional and ongoing training

Finally, monitoring of policy compliance will require the ongoing partnership between the Executive Team and lay leaders. Any security policy adopted by the Board of Trustees will require regular review and updating as ASCU security measures evolve. The Security Committee advises that the recommendation outlined in the Navigate 360 Hazards and Risk Assessment[2] requiring the formation of a threat assessment team, in the form of a safety committee, be implemented as soon as possible. (See Appendix 1).

---

[1] The Security Committee extended interview invitations to key ASCU groups. Those who consented to the interviews were the ASCU staff, the Transformation Team, the 8th Principle work group; Ushers and Greeters, and a General Group interview with those who responded to the September survey and agreed to take part in an interview.

[2] Although this policy is largely focused on the physical safety of the congregation, the preservation of the facility and the protection of ASCU's information technology infrastructure is equally paramount. Both were addressed in the findings of the Navigate 360 Hazards and Risk Assessment.

In September of 2020, Traci Hughes-Trotter and Siri Fiske (Head of the Mysa School) participated in the risk assessment. The comprehensive 95-page report assessed ASCU's overall preparedness in the following areas: Hazard & Threat Assessment; Emergency Operations Plan; Prevention Programs; Response & Training; Technology and Infrastructure; and Recovery Planning. Overall ASCU scored in the 28% percentile, ranking Very Low in preparedness. The Navigate 360 risk report recommended several areas of improvement and is a solid framework upon which a Safety Committee could build.

This policy shall apply to all members of the church community– Executive Team, ministers, church staff, congregation, and staff of the Mysa School.

Security Committee Membership

The Security Committee is an ad hoc committee of the Board of Trustees, formed in 2020. The Security Committee is made up of a cross section of church stakeholders and is chaired by Executive Director Traci Hughes-Trotter and Board Trustee Cathy Tortorici. Members of the Security Committee are: MJ Crom (Secretary, Board of Trustees), Rosalind Eaton (Office Administrator), Rev. Robert Keithan (Minister of Social Justice), Emily Koechlin (Usher) and Dolores Miller (Religious Education Director).

Security Policy

This Security Policy shall limit the circumstances in which police would be called to the church building. Further, in order to reduce reliance on policing, actions to implement the Security Policy shall minimize police contact. In general, ASCU shall not seek any training or support from police agencies except as related to the situations in the table herein. The instances in which ASCU shall allow police on church grounds are:

1. In emergency situations when:

   a. There is an imminent threat of physical violence, such as a direct threat or the presence of a deadly weapon; and de-escalation techniques have failed or are not feasible; and there is not a feasible alternative to calling the police.[3]

   b. Appropriately trained individuals call 911 and medical emergency and police are the first responders.

If/when an event involves the police and there is communication to the congregation from the Executive Team or the Board about the incident, the communication shall proactively recognize the fear/trauma caused by the presence of police and be transparent about the reasons the police were involved. The Board and the Executive Team shall be mindful of the guidance from the UUA[4] about actions to take in non-emergency situations when:

   c. A legal warrant is presented.[5]

   d. A crime or death has occurred that must be investigated by the police.

   e. ASCU hosts a speaker that requires the presence of law enforcement.

---

[3] As an employer, All Souls is responsible for safety in the workplace. Therefore, until or unless an alternative is identified, employees must have the ability to call the police to protect their own safety.
[4] See, *Alternatives to Calling the Police*
[5] See, *All Souls Policy on Law Enforcement Entry*

The table below outlines responses that shall be taken to address destructive behavior scenarios based on threat level, keeping in mind the importance of avoiding, whenever possible, police presence at the church in response to such incidents.[6]

Responses to Address Destructive Behavior Scenarios Based on Threat Level

---
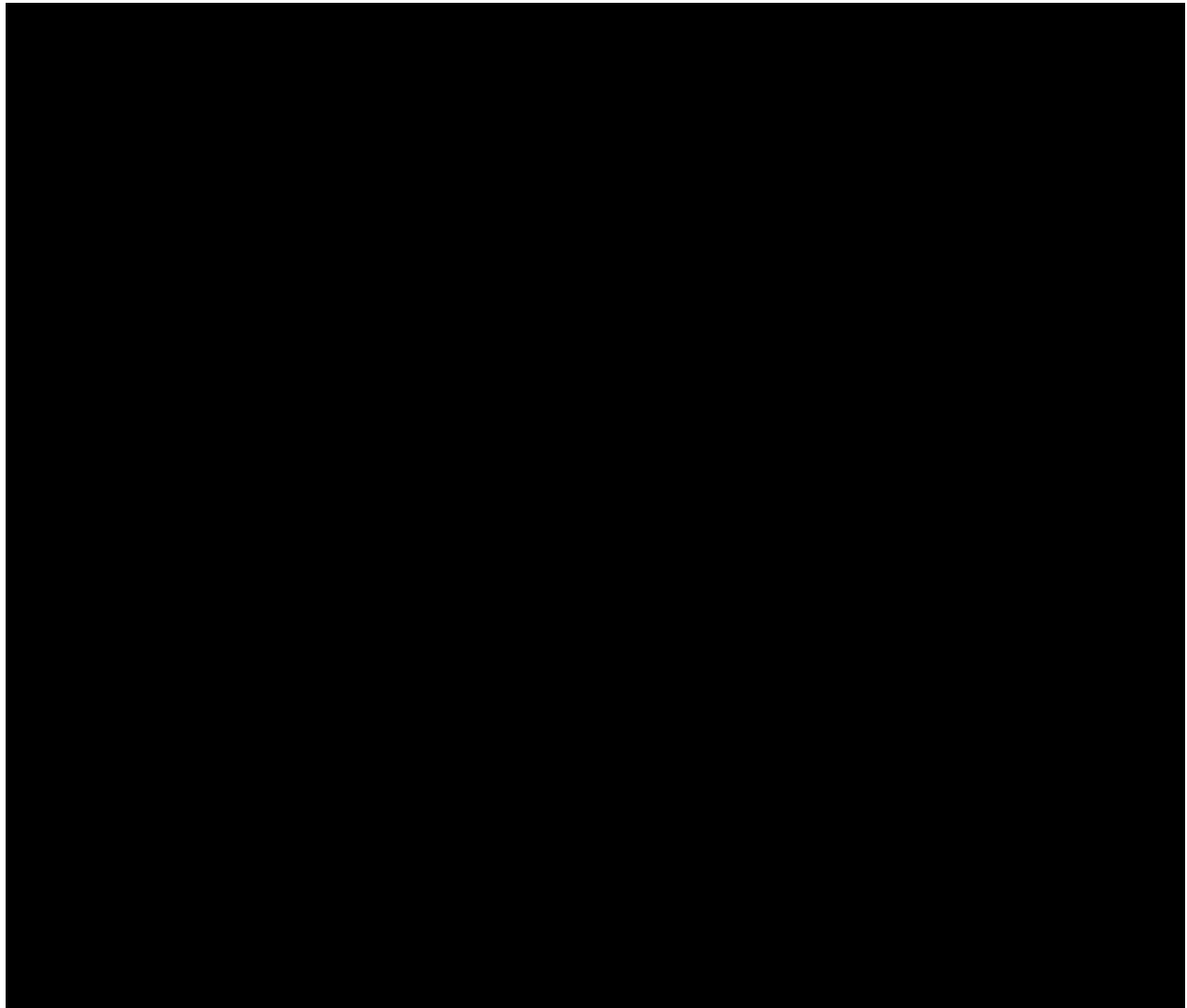
[6] By using tools that included congregant interviews, survey responses and research from the UUA and other sources, the Safety Committee crafted security scenarios and responses giving important consideration to the negative impact that police presence at the church can have on individuals and communities who disproportionately experience police violence.
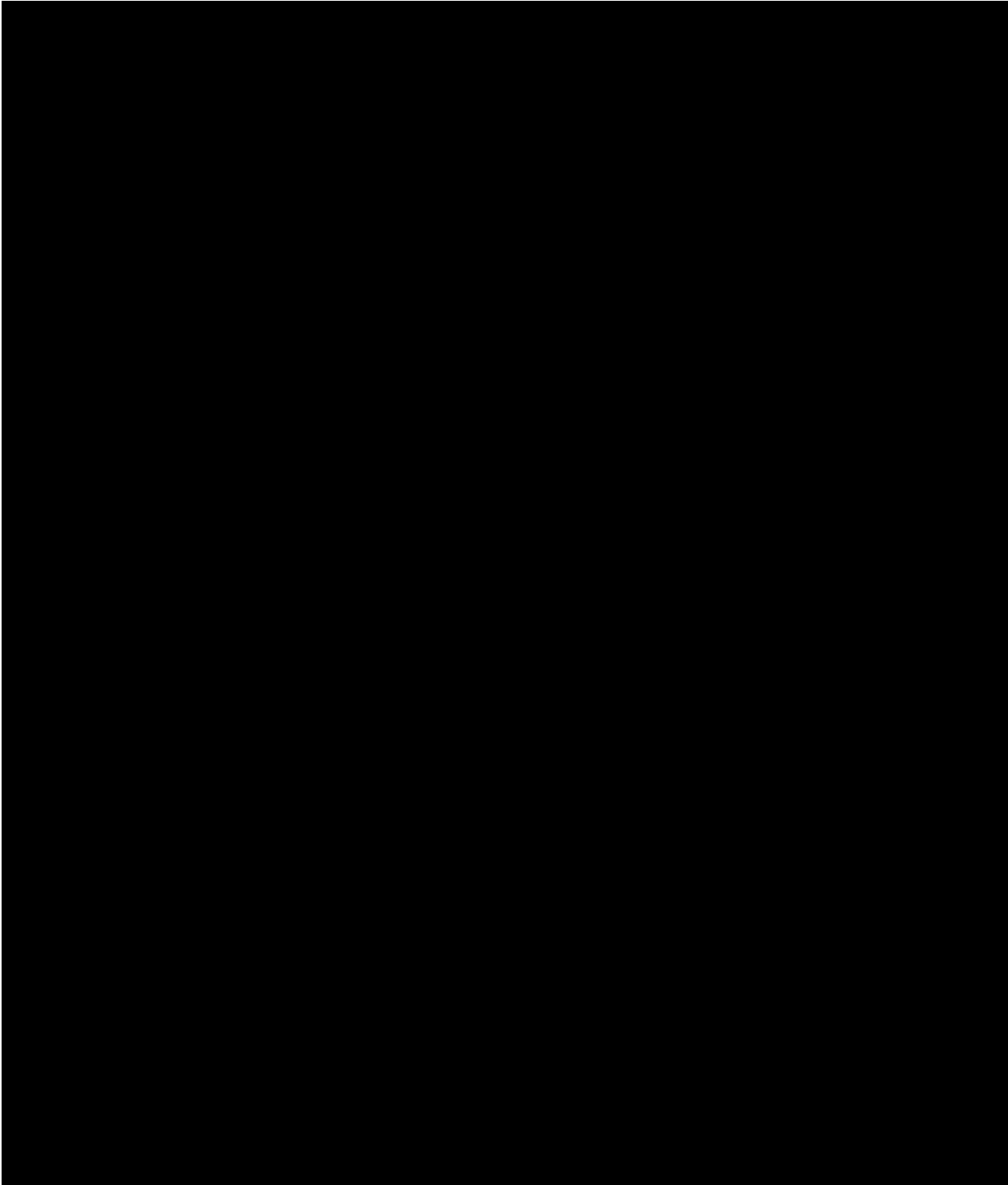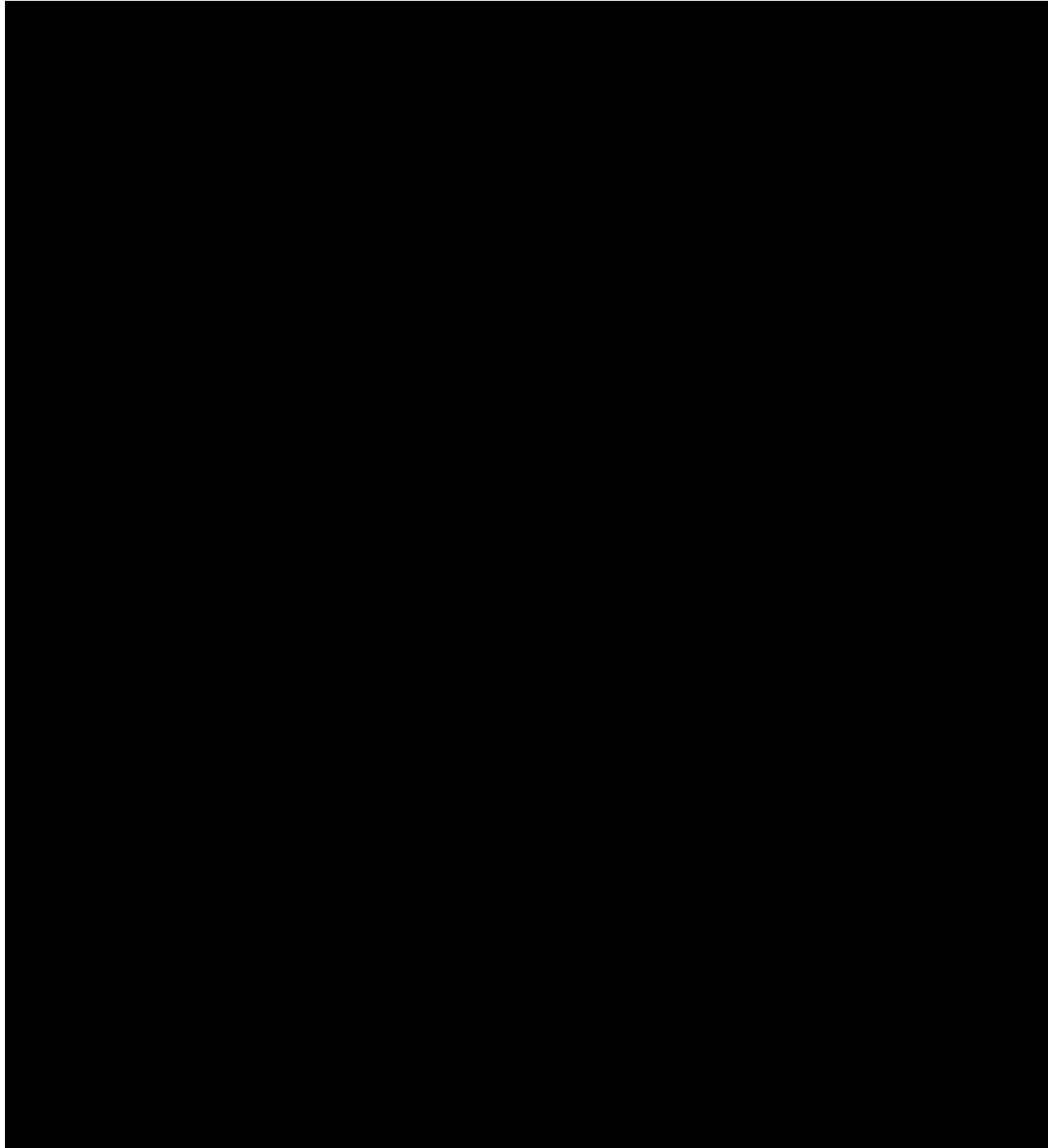
Board of Trustee Responsibilities

In the ASCU governance system, the Board of Trustees is responsible for establishing policies. The Executive Team, consisting of the Senior Minister and Executive Director, shall implement this policy and is accountable to the Board of Trustees for doing so. The Board of Trustees shall adopt a policy with a clear conceptual framework and end goals for the Executive Team.

Executive Team Responsibilities

The Executive Team shall establish procedures to implement the security policy. The Executive Team reserves the authority to interpret the policy and provide clarity with regard to: (1) specific situations, procedures, and roles; (2) determine the need for ongoing training of the staff; and (3) alignment with strategic policies and goals.

As with all church policies, the Board of Trustees is responsible for monitoring through schedule compliance reports from the Executive Team. The sensitivity around issues associated with the implementation of this policy will require regular review and updating as circumstances change and new information becomes available.

The Executive Team shall be responsible for the training of staff and volunteers. Training shall include:

- A recognition of the mental health challenges, including proactive strategies for combating implicit bias and engrained patterns of racist and oppressive thinking.
- De-escalation techniques, including proactive strategies for combating implicit bias and engrained patterns of racist and oppressive thinking.
- Tactics on how to respond when there is an active shooter on the premises.
- Practice drills so in the event of an actual emergency, congregants have rehearsed the procedures and are aware of what to do.

Safety Committee Responsibilities

Among the recommendations of the Navigate 360 Hazards and Risk Assessment included establishing a Safety Committee to address security-based issues at ASCU. This Safety Committee shall made up of the Executive Team, lay leaders and ushers. The Safety Committee shall work in collaboration with the Executive Team to propose and implement security related actions at ASCU that support a justice-based model.