

## **Report to the UUA Board: Reviewing UUA Policies and Procedures for working with Victims of Misconduct by UU Religious Professionals: a Gap Analysis**

The Rev. Sarah Lammert, Director of Ministries and Faith Development March 31, 2014

### **Brief History of UUA Task Forces on Misconduct and Sexual Health**

Two major task forces have been convened by the UUA to review and recommend policies and procedures regarding the prevention and response to sexual misconduct. The first, which completed its work in 2000, involved some false starts and confusion about who should own the problem – UUA staff or a task force made up of representatives of various stakeholders. Ultimately the work done was incredibly valuable and offered some first real steps in both institutional accountability and restorative justice for victims. In 2010 a second effort led by the Rev. Debra Haffner of The Religious Institute served to broaden the framework of the conversation from focusing on responding to misconduct to a more comprehensive plan for building a “Sexually Healthy and Responsible UUA.” Her plan includes an emphasis on prevention (for instance requiring better training for ministers on sexual health and boundaries) and on broader sexual justice issues such as advocacy for the LGBTQIIA community. She found that while the UUA is a leader in some areas of sexual justice, there were still key areas to be addressed. In 2013 a petition by a group called Safety Net called on UUA leaders to focus on assessing and improving our response to victims of misconduct.

### **Changes Recommended and Implemented**

- The Office of Ethics and Safety in Congregational Life was created in 2002. An intake person outside of the Ministries Department (now Ministries and Faith Development) was designated as a more neutral, safe person to report to, and a dedicated phone line was installed. A Consultant for Ethics in Congregational Life was contracted to work with complainants and investigate claims.
- A commitment was made to assign an advocate (also called “liaison support”) to official complainants. The role was envisioned as a counterpart to the Good Officer role for religious professionals – someone who could guide the victim in terms of UUA process and advocate for their rights during any proceedings.
- Many resources were generated to support safe congregations. These are aggregated on [uua.org](http://www.uua.org/safe/index.shtml) under the heading of Safe Congregations (<http://www.uua.org/safe/index.shtml>) . The process for filing a complaint is explained; and links are provided to reports of like “Restorative Justice for All” and “Towards a Sexually Healthy and Responsible UUA” as well as other resources like “Balancing Acts” which identifies steps for congregations to take to create safe congregations (including working with sex offenders who may come to congregations). The UU World regularly reports on relevant issues, and *Interconnections* highlights resources as well.
- The UUA partnered with Church Mutual to provide risk assessment tools to congregations.
- Trainings in safe congregations are available on line, through districts and often at General Assembly.
- A public apology to victims/survivors was made by the UUA at the Nashville GA. A letter of apology was generated to send to victims by the UUA President when appropriate .

- A file summary was added to the information offered to congregational search committees to offer greater transparency about the contents of ministerial records.
- The MFC Executive Secretary keeps complainants informed when there are disciplinary hearings, and shares the outcomes of those hearings with the complainant. The MFC Chair and Secretary inform congregational leaders about such outcomes and keep key district staff in the loop.
- The MFC added a Sexual Health, Sexual Boundaries, Sexual Justice competency for ministerial candidates. The Religious Institute offers an online course for ministers and other religious professionals, and there are additional required readings for ministerial candidates.
- The UUMA strengthened its ethical code regarding sexual ethics and the MFC is holding ministers responsible for that standard.
- The UUA strengthened its inclusion and non-discrimination policy and its sexual harassment policies and training for staff.
- The UUA re-invested and re-committed to keeping Our Whole Lives up to date, training adequate facilitators, and providing staff support for this program. We continue to revise OWL and are currently adding an OWL program for elders.

### **Gaps in Implementation**

- There is some confusion about when and how advocates are assigned for complainants. While the intention was to assign such an advocate at an early stage, currently advocates are only offered to official complainants of professional misconduct.
- No training of advocates has been held since 2000. No list of current advocates is available to staff.
- Policies and procedures regarding the handling of complaints is not as transparent or easily accessed as one might hope for. While the information is on uua.org, some victims might find it confusing to figure out who to call – in their own congregations, their districts or regions, or at the UUA.
- District staff are not regularly trained in how to be helpful to victims of misconduct and models are lacking for the healing of congregations in the wake of misconduct.
- When ministers self-report instances of misconduct there is no investigation called for in MFC policies and thus there is a reliance upon the minister to provide the data upon which a decision is made about the misconduct.
- The MFC and UUA staff have inadequate knowledge of laws regarding current standards of professional practice or sexual assault.
- There continues to be a greater emphasis on the process of adjudicating the complaint than on pastoral care of the victim and congregation, or on addressing public safety.
- There is no means of holding congregations accountable to having solid safe congregation policies and procedures and there is confusion in congregations about the difference between unhealthy secrecy and confidentiality. There is a lack of understanding in congregations about the ethical standards of ministry.

- There is appearance of conflict of interest at times because the MFC (and MFD staff supporting the MFC) has a role in ministerial formation as well as disciplinary proceedings.

### **Recommended Actions**

- Offer the Safe Congregations Intake person and Consultant for Ethics in Congregational Life greater discretion around offering to provide an advocate to a person considering filing a complaint of ministerial misconduct, or to an individual who provides information about their victimization but does not step forward as the official complainant.
- Hold a training for 5-10 advocates and maintain a roster of trained advocates within the Office of Ethics in Congregational Life [depends on funding of approximately \$10-15K].
- Develop models for working with congregations on healing and wholeness following incidences of professional misconduct by staff members; train interim and developmental ministers in “after pastor” ministry; regularly train district staff in working with both victims of misconduct, other forms of sexual violence, and with congregations struggling with a variety of issues related to sexually healthy and safe congregations.
- Hold trainings every three years for key UUA staff and MFC members in sexual ethics, boundaries, and legal standards.
- Continue work to develop an incentive program for designated “Safe and Sexually Healthy Congregations.”
- Add an obvious direct link from the uua.org home page to the Safe Congregations resource page.