

The Safe Congregation Handbook

Nurturing Healthy Boundaries
in Our Faith Communities

Patricia Hoertdoerfer and
Fredric Muir, editors

Unitarian Universalist Association

Boston

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You say the little efforts I make
Will do no good; they will never prevail
To tip the hovering scale
Where Justice hangs in balance.
I don't think
I ever thought they would.
But I am prejudiced beyond debate
In favor of my right to choose which side
Shall feel the stubborn ounces of my weight.

—Bonaro Overstreet

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Foreword

An email arrives from one of our ministers, saying that he has been speaking with the spouse of a victim of a clergy sexual abuse. The abuse remains unreported after many years; the abuser is now retired and unlikely to be reported in the future. My friend and email correspondent writes that he said to the victim, "On behalf of Unitarian Universalism and on behalf of its ministers, present and past, I apologize."

A call comes from a congregational president. A popular member of the congregation is discovered to be a convicted pedophile. What can that the congregation do to provide both safety and compassion?

A religious education teacher reports that one child seems disturbed, anxious, and preoccupied with sexuality in a way far beyond her years. Should the possibility of abuse, the slim hunch, be reported. If so, who should report it and to whom?

It hurts to write it but it is true: A church is not by definition a safe place, not even our beloved Unitarian Universalist churches. The same human frailties and sins play themselves out here as elsewhere. They are, however, particularly heartbreaking in a church, the place we go for solace and clarity and to make justice, to find religion.

No congregation, no place on earth, can guarantee that it is a safe place. But we can make our beloved congregations "safer," with education and clear policies and with moral courage and informed decisions.

That is what this book provides: education, clear policies, moral courage. The writers have, among them, many years of commitment to building a just and beloved community and many experiences of naming tough things when others would have preferred that such matters remain unnoticed and unnamed. The Unitarian Universalist Association is indebted to them and to the congregations that have dealt with the hard work of being in community under painful circumstances and have done it, ultimately if not at first, with grace and compassion.

Kay Montgomery
Executive Vice President
Unitarian Universalist Association

Introduction

Our religious heritages—Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist—compel us to address the important, widespread, and complex social issues of interpersonal violence and abuse. Our faith is a covenantal faith with a relational theology at its core. Hospitality and justice are essential elements of our covenant with one another and with the Holy. The lifeblood of our covenant is community: community in worship, community in lifespan religious education, community in justice-making service, and community in caring relationships. Where we gather in communities of trust and faith, we call that place holy ground. When we gather we welcome others—newcomers and strangers—and we welcome our true, best selves. As we elicit the best in others we elicit the best in ourselves and thereby faithfully live our Unitarian Universalist values and principles.

In religious communities breaches of trust and safety undermine the foundations of our personal and communal covenants. Unitarian Universalist congregations and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations are committed to practicing hospitality and promoting justice for all people.

In her Foreword to *Creating Safe Congregations: Toward an Ethic of Right Relations*, published eight years ago, Nancy Bowen reminds us, “Ministry is the work and the reason of Unitarian

Universalist congregations. Everything congregations do is ministry.” Ministry is called to the particularities of time and context, which shape it with relevance, direction, and passion. In 1997, when *Creating Safe Congregations* was published, it was a response to the growing alarm that we had seen in our congregational life as a result of clergy sexual misconduct and child abuse. The stories, insights, and lessons that we heard from our professional ministry and lay leadership informed that book. While these issues remain a priority for Unitarian Universalist communities—and have been given renewed and deeper commitment after the alarming revelations of child and sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church and the subsequent secrecy and subterfuge—we have not stood still. Congregations and their ministries change, as do people. We are gratified to know that candidates for our ministry, lay leaders, and religious professionals used *Creating Safe Congregations* as a resource to shape their calling and programs significantly.

The time is right for another book defining anew what it means to be not only a safe congregation but a healthy one. This book is not an effort to replace *Creating Safe Congregations*; we feel that those essays and workshops will remain valuable resources and opportunities for insight for many years to come. It is our hope that this

new book addresses the changing and additional needs of congregations and ministries. We have explored congregational life, we have listened to UUs name the challenges and ministry they face, and we have identified what creates safe and healthy relationships. It is time to share what we have learned and heard.

Unitarian Universalism has taken a bold, clear, and intentional path toward naming and creating healthy congregations. Publication of *Creating Safe Congregations*; UUA vice president Kay Montgomery's apology to victims and survivors of clergy sexual misconduct; the Safe Congregations Panel report; safe congregation workshops for seminarians, lay leaders, and religious professionals; the *Our Whole Lives* curriculum series; the creation of the Office of Ethics and Safety with the Ethics in Congregational Life Program, and now the publication of this book indicate that we have embraced the work of right relations as meaningful theological and spiritual work. With vision and deliberateness, we have become reactive rather than proactive by creating, supporting, and nurturing healthy and safe congregations. Yet there is more to do. The issues and challenges addressed by this book's essayists move us closer to this goal.

Another assumption that informs this book of essays and workshops is that Unitarian Universalism is a maturing, growing, and deepening faith. One reason why lay and professional leaders understand the value of safe and healthy congregations is because our liberal faith communities are essential to people's lives. Repeatedly, we have witnessed and heard from many people how life-span religious education, ethical and moral decision-making, pastoral care, and Sunday morning worship are integral to their well-being. UUs expect this guidance from their congregations; this is how they want to serve; this is the ministry they want to share. Unitarian Universalists have often been accused of being only tangentially committed to the maturing of their institutions. We have felt a noticeable shift in attitude: UUs want to nurture congregations that are safe and challenging,

deep and affirming, structured and responsive. This book is just one of the many ways to embody this shift.

A third assumption that shapes our work is the explosion of shared and small group ministry in Unitarian Universalist congregations. It seems that everywhere—in congregations of all sizes—covenant groups, spiritual direction, pastoral care programs, worship associates, and social justice ministries are just a few of the ways that laity serves. In all of these shared ministry contexts, lay leadership now recognizes what professional religious leaders have known: Trust and power, caring presence, and responsive leadership need to be thoughtfully balanced with awareness, compassion, and faithfulness. As laity shares the ministry, we know that the issues and challenges named in this book can respond to increasing needs.

Also informing this book is the assumption not only that Unitarian Universalist congregations seek to heal and transform the world (*tikkun olam*) but that our faith communities can be living embodiments of the Beloved Community: By living our vision of the Beloved Community as it is named in our Principles, UU congregations model for their members and friends, their children and youth, and the wider community our vision made real. Rebecca Parker reminds us, "In the midst of a world marked by tragedy and beauty there must be those who bear witness against unnecessary destruction and who, with faith, stand and lead in freedom with grace and power." With Parker's words in mind, we have set out to affirm that for any congregation to be healthy, it must work toward justice; for any congregation to be safe, it must be just. All our congregations can be models for right relationship guiding us toward the Beloved Community. Right relationships, safety, and health are fundamental to restorative justice, an idea that is intrinsic to our faith and to living in Beloved Community. With restorative justice as a guiding congregational principle, our desire to affirm and witness beauty, freedom, and grace can be made real and we can heal and transform people's lives and the world.

Our final and most basic assumption is that people come to Unitarian Universalist congregations to be in relationships with ideas, a vision, our heritage, the Holy, and of course people. Rituals, creeds, and liturgy are some of the ways to establish and nurture relationships. For UUs, covenants, deeds, and polity have also been ways of entering into relationships. Ours is a covenantal or relational theology (instead of creedal or fixed) that is explored, deepened, and strengthened with responsibility and accountability, respect, and compassion.

We have seen and heard from many who have shared their personal and congregational stories. Relationships don't maintain themselves or grow unaided. Guidelines, structure, and affirmation are necessary. Right relationships—healthy, safe, and just relationships—take work, and they must be celebrated. This book is written toward this end. We hope you and your congregation grow in our shared Unitarian Universalist faith because of the issues and challenges addressed in these essays and workshops.

Using the Program

Program goals for participants and congregations are to increase their understanding, expand their skills, develop their faith, and learn about resources that they can use when addressing and responding to the dehumanizing experience of interpersonal violence. This program complements and enhances the other printed and online resources available from the UUA as well as resource personnel from Congregational Services, Ministry and Professional Leadership, Lifespan Faith Development, and Identity-based Ministries Staff Groups along with the twenty district offices and various associate member and affiliate member organizations. The editors of this book encourage further congregational work to discern healthy and safe relationships and appropriate actions in social ethics consistent with Unitarian Universalist values and principles.

This program can be used in a variety of settings and situations, such as adult education

programs, timely congregational forums or meetings, religious education teacher development workshops, youth advisor training sessions, social responsibility programs, and family and intergenerational programs. Its open-ended format invites you to supplement the program with other resources important to your congregation.

The goals of the program for the whole congregation are to:

- help participants and congregations integrate values from this program into their system of UU Principles and values
- help congregations maintain the professional integrity of ministerial relationships, the integrity of lay leadership relationships, and healthy congregational relationships
- help congregations protect vulnerable and/or historically marginalized persons through practices of hospitality, effective anti-oppression education, responsible intervention, and appropriate responses
- help leaders provide opportunities for healing and justice, ethics, and self-care for their whole congregations.

The goals for individual participants are to:

- become more aware of the complexity of issues in interpersonal violence
- learn the components of a healthy and safe responsible congregation
- develop an understanding of the leadership tools and justice-making practices of healthy and safe congregations
- gain an understanding of the issues of power and boundaries in healthy relationships
- learn about abuse prevention and risk-reduction policies and procedures
- learn about available resources
- probe participants' attitudes and feelings and interpersonal violence and abuse
- become more comfortable communicating feelings, values, and information about sexual violence and unethical conduct with others

- protect, intervene, and respond appropriately to vulnerable people and/or victims explore ways to prevent abusive situations
- provide opportunities for hospitality, justice, and healing
- express and enjoy sexual and social ethics in responsible ways at each age of development.

Although this program offers a progression, it is not necessary to use it from beginning to end. It may be more meaningful to follow where the participants' needs and interests lead. Your congregation may choose a thirteen-session, four-session, or eight-session program. Here are some strategies to help you choose what to read and how to plan your schedule.

- Examine the essays in the table of contents. The essays address many safe congregation issues, including congregational culture, leadership, programs, and justice making. Although many of these essays are used in the workshops, they are also valuable reading in their own right.
- The program offers two workshops alternatives. Suggested participants are noted at the beginning of every workshop to indicate whose congregational leadership responsibilities would particularly benefit from the workshop content. The forty-five-minute workshops offer brief introductions to focused themes for specific leaders in your congregation. For example, the second workshop can concentrate an opening discussion of a board of trustees meeting on the issues of interpersonal violence and what actions and decisions the congregation needs to make. The two-hour workshops are educational components to some of the essays. Using these workshops, members of an adult education committee or safety and response team can grapple with safety issues through reflection on the corresponding essays, exploration of specific congregational situations and procedures, and integration of their learnings and decisions. An educational series of two-hour workshops on congregational safety on a weekly or monthly basis is an excellent way to

educate leaders in the whole congregation. After an educational series, congregational leaders may decide to codify or revise their safety policy documents and procedures.

- Examine the resources section at the end of the workbook. You may structure one or more sessions around some of these resources: *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* by James Poling; *Broken Vows*, a video by the FaithTrust Institute; *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*, a video and educational guide by Richard R. Hammar, Steven W. Klipowicz, and James F. Cobble; and *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*, by Marie Fortune.
- Read the first essay, "Healthy and Safe Congregations," for an overview of the core issues, dimensions, and contexts of the program. With this essay, work through the spiritual and ethical issues that have arisen in your congregation.
- Focus on an area of special concern in your congregation, such as justice making, healing the congregation, anti-oppression work, youth safety, or self-care programs.

Use this workbook as a motivator to gather people for education, moral discernment, spiritual nurture, and ethical action. Together you can help focus reflection and action toward safe spaces and healthy relations in a transformative process.

Program Leaders

We strongly recommend experienced, skilled, non-judgmental co-leaders who can deal responsibly with emotional and sensitive material. Co-leadership provides significant benefits for both participants and leaders. Co-leaders can share the workload, provide feedback to one another, and prevent feelings of isolation. They also provide participants with more perspectives, experiences, leadership styles, and role models than an individual can provide.

Try to create a supportive, safe, comfortable, and respectful environment in which participants can risk feeling vulnerable and can experience

and share at the levels where conviction and meaning grow. Leaders and participants need to be willing to re-examine their own attitudes and engage in discussions with careful thoughtfulness and integrity.

Leaders must be familiar with the entire program and to be clear about their group's decision-making process to determine the number of sessions, the scheduling of sessions, and the time frame for combining sessions in all-day or weekend retreats. Make a commitment to begin and end each session on time and ask participants for the same commitment. Respectful use of everyone's time builds trust within the group.

Prepare and plan. Having all materials and resources available before each session creates a relaxed and efficient environment. The quality of the program will be significantly enhanced if you take the time to evaluate experiences after each session and plan for the next one.

In planning your congregation's use of this workbook, acknowledge your religious community's strengths and gifts as well as its needs and shortcomings. Before beginning a process component or session plan, agree on guidelines for openness and sharing. Consider the following example and adapt, modify, or devise your own group guidelines.

Guidelines for Openness and Sharing

This program offers much potential for open sharing. On many occasions you will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore it is important that you let people know that you encourage them to speak only when they are comfortable, that it is always okay to pass if they choose not to share.

Establish a norm of respect for each other and each other's expression within the group. As much as possible, encourage participants to articulate and support this norm. Engage people in discussing the value of respect in a group and acknowledge that individuals are at different places in the journey toward a healthy and safe congregation.

To make this program work, participants must choose to be in relationship with each other for

mutual growth and faith development and to help create a congregation of healthy relations and safe spaces.

If this book helps you to think in new ways about healthy relations and safe space, develop deeper faith convictions as Unitarian Universalists, and engage in more responsible, nonviolent, ethical actions as a congregation, it has accomplished its goals. It is now in your hands.

Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sexual Ethics

This book is grounded in the Principles of our religious community, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

The inherent worth and dignity of every person

Every person's sexuality is sacred and worthy of respect; there, it is not to be violated.

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

We treat others, as we would want to be treated; therefore, sexual exploitation and interpersonal violence are wrong.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

Accepting each other as we are means doing no harm and fostering well-being in one's self and others.

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

In our relationship to others, our freedom of sexuality is as important as the responsibility for it.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.

As a community and an institution, we are responsible for creating a secure, safe, and non-violent environment.

The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

We have the opportunity to create the kind of environment that lends itself to peace, liberty, and justice in human interactions, and we can become a model for the rest of society.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

When we respect each person's sexual integrity, we honor the wholeness of life and respect the web of all existence.

Healthy and Safe Congregations

Qiyamah A. Rahman

Many Unitarian Universalists share Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of Beloved Community. Our Principles, which reflect on the interconnectedness of life—the significance of social justice, democracy, equality, and our search for truth—reflect those values that so many of us yearn for and seek to live out in community. Efforts to identify and address factors that compromise the safety of our Beloved Community have given rise to new and challenging initiatives, such as safe congregations and right relations. These are fairly new terms that continue to evolve as we expand our understanding about what it means to be in covenantal relationships within a community of Unitarian Universalists that shares vastly different theologies and beliefs. The Unitarian Universalist Association book titled *Creating Safe Congregations: Toward An Ethic of Right Relations* singularly addresses the two most common risk factors that pose potential and actual threats to congregational safety—compromised child safety and clergy sexual abuse. When *Creating Safe Congregations* was published, society reflected very clear guidelines about appropriate contact with children and we had many good examples and protocols to draw from. Thus we made great strides in our efforts to pinpoint child safety, what we believed it should look like, and how it might be accomplished in our congregations. Much of the credit

for the early awareness about child safety in our congregations can be attributed to the good instincts and deep caring of our religious education professionals, the UUA Religious Education Department, and the Liberal Religious Educators Association.

But another risk factor was equally real and took longer to detect—clergy sexual misconduct. Several factors pushed the issue into the light of day. The increase in the numbers of female ministers in our UU movement, coupled with the heightened sensibility of female interns and ministers who had experienced clergy sexual abuse, provided a strong incentive to challenge some people and remove others from our professional ranks. In addition, the larger women's movement and the Women and Religion movement captured the collective voices and concerns of UU women. This combined momentum over time that produced a climate ripe for truth telling. The courageous action of victims who came forward, demanding accountability, led to the development of policies and procedures naming sins and evils that many UUs were often afraid to name. To name them might mean acknowledging the illusion of safety. While we understand the reluctance to name the lack of safety in our midst, we cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand like ostriches. Instead, we have to be willing to be influenced by the facts.

Our congregations must experience a cultural shift in order to engage effectively in a conversation about healthy and safe congregations. We must create the necessary context. This conversation requires the courage of our ministers, lay leaders, staff, and members. It requires each individual to bravely bring his or her whole self to the discussion. We can begin by telling the truth. This workbook represents an opportunity to continue the sacred work by naming the issues, thus reconceptualizing healthy congregations to include a range of behaviors that compromise the safety of our communities.

Patricia Hoertdoerfer's essay, "Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response," reminds us that our faith "calls us to practice our relational theology by respecting the worth of every person . . . while honoring the wholeness of life . . . by doing no harm and acting responsibly." Kenneth Hurto uses systems theory to help us think about the creation of authentic, balanced, and meaningful relationships. He urges us to remember that transitional times stir things up and produces the potential for both conflict and creative thinking. Learning how to be a non-anxious presence and practicing this skill is a worthy goal.

Phyllis Rickter and Betty Hoskins examine the subject of leadership in "Leading a Community in Right Relations." They suggest that effective leadership facilitates right relations and safe congregations. But this requires a willingness to engage in open discussion and further the development of a covenantal community of right relations, thus fostering a culture of safety. Ken Brown and Angela Merkert round off the presentation on leadership with "Leadership with Vision." They share eight characteristics of strong congregational leadership and conclude, "If we truly want to develop and be transformational leaders, we need to take seriously the responsibility for making our congregations safe for all." Covenants have become a meaningful and explicit tool to structure congregational relations, especially as it affects leadership. The essay "Writing a Covenant" fully explores the use of covenant as a means of achieving health and safety in congregational life. Fredric

Muir not only provides an historical perspective on covenants, but also includes examples of covenants that have honored the rich diversity of our congregations. Leadership is often faced with issues of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. While there might be implicit understandings about these challenging issues, difficulty distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy secrets can pose challenges for all leaders and congregations. Rebecca Edmiston-Lange's essay, "Boundaries and Confidentiality," helps us reach clarity about the different kinds of secrets and apply issues of confidentiality more appropriately. "Mental, Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Self-Care," while written especially for religious professionals, is equally applicable to lay leaders. Fredric Muir recommends self-care as a way to prevent behaviors that may result in boundary violations. He provides a helpful definition to educate and engage the reader and identifies some common boundary violations, leaving no confusing gray areas. Supplementing this essay is a piece by William Finger and Debra Haffner, who are to be commended for tackling a difficult but important issue head-on in their essay titled "Sexual Attraction for the Religious Professional." Their advice to religious professionals on expressing sexuality encourages "holiness and integrity." Their concrete examples provide guidance to the reader while putting a face on the challenges and issues that religious professionals confront.

Tera Little and Laurel Amabile call on readers to, "stand up, dig deep, and let life emerge." As religious education professionals, they urge us to set up clear limitations and expectations and not leave to chance our interactions with the children in our church, nor assume that everything will be all right because we are all good Unitarian Universalists. Their central tenant is love, which causes us to be good stewards and work to create safety in our congregations. Their insights are invaluable, regardless of where readers might find themselves in the process. Debra Haffner's "Balancing Compassion and Protection" requires the reader to hold both the victim and perpetrators in a space of justice, compassion, accountability, and

safety. She reviews information about child safety that is equally helpful for the novice and the more experienced reader. Haffner's stories from the trenches about lay leaders and clergy, grappling with sex offenders, and other real issues are compelling. She offers steps to take to keep or remove individuals whose past and present behaviors may pose a threat to community and some examples about what others have done.

Sarah Gibb believes that working toward a safe congregation is an important vehicle for evangelism because the "opportunity to create and enforce safety policies is an opportunity to strengthen Unitarian Universalism." Her "Creating Policies with Youth Groups" should be recommended reading for all youth directors and advisors.

The essay titled "Just Relations in a Faith Context" uses the seven elements of justice making described by Marie Fortune, a well-known minister and activist. In this section, Fredric Muir demonstrates how our Unitarian Universalist Principles and sacred scriptures support a paradigm for just relations in a UU faith context. Tracey Robinson-Harris's "Working for Safety and to End Oppression" links justice, safety, and anti-oppression efforts and explores the need to "develop cultural competency that allows us to speak out of our own experience and listen to the experience of others without labeling or redefining it." She asserts that creating healthy and safe congregations allows everyone to bring their whole selves to religious life. Anna Belle Leiserson's and Phil Thomason's essay, "Healing," addresses the woundedness and brokenness that we experience when clergy sexual abuse occurs. They speak to the healing that is necessary to rebuild trust and include a compelling case study.

This new program about healthy and safe congregations represents a true reconceptualization of our work. That is, it moves us closer to addressing the intersection of diverse behaviors and relationships that promote safety and integrity in our efforts to build Beloved Community. It names those factors that compromise the safety of our communities and concludes with a final challenge and invitation toward a

more inclusive vision of healthy and safe congregations. Debra Haffner's essay, "Toward a Vision of Sexually Healthy Faith Communities," invites us to look deeper, reach farther, and become ever more faithful to our prophetic and pastoral Unitarian Universalist faith.

May our work continue to inspire the creative energies of community, because as the FaithTrust Institute reminds us, "Our faith communities are sanctuaries of safety worthy of our trust."

Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response

Patricia Hoerl

We live in a culture of violence. The Children's Defense Fund reported in 2003 that every day 2,140 babies are born in poverty, nearly 12 children and youth under the age of 20 die from firearms, 218 young people are arrested for violent crimes, 144 children are abused and neglected, and 5,760 women are battered. We live in a world of hate crimes and teen suicides, violent music videos and video games, high school shootings, and Internet pornography. Violence permeates American life from the private sphere to the public arena. We are a country born in violence and continually formed in violence—the violence of conquest, colonization, conversion, and civilization. The macrocosm of American culture and history is reflected in the microcosm of faith communities and UU congregations.

Each day we read news stories detailing the latest allegations and arrests of sexual abuse, clergy misconduct, and acquaintance rape in communities across our country. This culture has entered our lives, our communities, and our congregations. Family conversations and congregational discussions often take on violent language and heated rhetoric inappropriate for a UU family or a faith community. It happens in UU households or congregations when one person offers a different perspective or asks a difficult question, when one member passionately takes a position or accepts a leadership role. If

this disrespectful, uncivil behavior is not confronted and addressed, it becomes accepted and condoned. We must name the abusive behavior in its many forms, overcome the secrecy and shame, and address interpersonal violence. Until all relationships—between young and old, black and white, gay and straight, rich and poor, liberal and conservative—can be respectful and healthy; none of us is safe.

Our religious heritages—Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist—compel us to address the important, widespread, and complex social issues of abuse and interpersonal violence. Physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual abuse; sexual exploitation; partner abuse; child abuse; and elder abuse—all profoundly affect all participants by diminishing human dignity and free choice. In our religious communities breaches of trust, faith, and safety in our congregations undermine the foundations of our personal and communal covenants.

Our faith demands our service in promoting and creating communities of peace, love, and justice for all. Our faith calls us to practice our relational theology by respecting the worth of every person and the sacredness of every person's sexuality while honoring the wholeness of life in the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. Our faith calls us to treat others with justice, equality, and compassion

while we work to create environments, locally and globally, that lend themselves to modeling liberty, peace, and justice in human interactions. Our faith calls us to act in ways that foster well-being in ourselves and others by doing no harm and acting responsibly to create communities and institutions that are safe and nonviolent. Finally, our faith calls us to be courageous and committed leaders in the ongoing search for truth and meaning, spiritual freedom, and ethical responsibility.

Interpersonal violence is a form of dehumanization in our society perpetuated by those with power over others who use intimidation, coercion, threats, deceit, isolation, sexuality, and privilege to dominate and control. This violence is physical, emotional, sexual, social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and/or political behavior used to harm, oppress, and control children, youth, women, and men. In *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, Marie Fortune writes that interpersonal violence is a symptom of social conditions that maintain the imbalance of power and societal privilege.

Abuse and sexual violence can take many forms, including rape, sexual abuse, incest, sexual harassment, family violence, and child abuse. It is impossible to obtain complete and accurate data, but FBI researchers estimate that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before they turn sixteen, and that 75 to 95 percent of these abused children are victimized by someone they know—a sibling, parent, stepparent, cousin, uncle or aunt, grandparent, neighbor, or teacher. The vast majority of abusers are adults on whom the victims are dependent, physically and emotionally. The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect reports that 3 million incidents of abuse were reported in the United States in 2000. As shocking as this number is, the total number of children and youth involved in these reported incidents is closer to 5 million. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that 6 million more incidents go unreported each year.

Abuse—the misuse of power in a relationship to manipulate, control, or hurt—takes many forms:

- ◆ *Physical abuse* is deliberate and intentional harm to the body of a child, youth, adult, or elder. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (such as a knife or belt), burning, choking, fracturing bones, and other non-accidental injuries.
- ◆ *Emotional abuse* is harm that deeply affects a child's, youth's, adult's, or elder's self-esteem. This type of abuse exposes the person to spoken and/or unspoken violent language and emotional cruelty.
- ◆ *Sexual abuse* is the use, inducement, or coercion of a child, youth, adult, or elder by another person, who is usually older and more powerful, to engage in sexual conduct. Examples of sexual abuse include fondling, intercourse, incest, exploitation, and exposure to pornography and/or prostitution.
- ◆ *Neglect* occurs when a parent, relative, or caregiver endangers a child's, youth's, adult's, or elder's health, welfare, and safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection, or proper living quarters for a long time.

Abusers use their power—their age, physical strength, authority, knowledge, and resources—to take unfair advantage of their victims. Without some kind of intervention, the violence usually gets worse. For example, verbal/emotional abuse may start as name-calling and criticizing, escalate to yelling and humiliation, and end with the victim's suicide. Sexual abuse may begin with unwanted touching or viewing pornographic pictures, escalate to sexual talk and forced sex, and end in rape.

Sexual assault is the act of forcing or threatening a person to engage in an unwanted sexual act.

- ◆ *Rape* is simply defined as "forced sex." Stranger rape is perpetuated by a person unknown to the child, youth, adult, or elder assaulted. Marital rape or spousal rape is inflicted by a marriage partner, usually the husband. Coercion sex involves "consent" that is at least partly motivated by fear that rape will otherwise occur.

- ◆ *Acquaintance rape* and *date rape* are similar. These terms describe rape of an acquaintance. The perpetrator may be a family member or dating partner.
- ◆ *Incest* is sexual intercourse between two persons too closely related to legally marry.
- ◆ *Sexual harassment* is any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines sexual harassment as the use of one's authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or the creation of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Acquaintance rape and sexual harassment are forms of *sexualization*, the use of sexuality to influence, manipulate, or control others. Stereotypes of gender-role behaviors strongly promote sexual harassment and acquaintance rape.

These various forms of interpersonal exploitation can range from harmless manipulation (flirting) to extreme violence (rape). The term *sexualized behavior* includes various forms of touch and other physical and verbal behavior and refers to words, touches, or actions that communicate sexual interest. Sexual harassment is by definition abusive. Sexualized behavior is in itself neutral. It becomes good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, as a result of the balance or imbalance of power in the relationship and/or the presence or absence of choice. But this concept of sexualized behavior is complex because it varies between cultures as well as between subcultures. For example, for a woman to meet a man's gaze is considered provocative in some cultures whereas in other cultures, it is neutral or confrontational. For males to hold hands is considered an indication of sexual interest and/or homosexual orientation in mainstream North American culture, whereas in other cultures it is routine and conveys nothing about sexual orientation.

Safe Sanctuaries

While a faith community cannot guarantee the safety of every person, every UU congregation can be responsible for reducing the risk and eliminating the circumstances that lead to harm. Leaders and members need to work together to ensure that the congregation's covenant and mission are carried out in responsibly safe circumstances. Congregations must remember the pledge made to all children during their dedication ceremonies and the celebration of all youth during their Coming of Age services.

The work of UU congregations is to create and preserve the safety and trust in which spiritual growth and ethical action can occur. Violations of trust fracture a faith community and destroy the basis of ministry. Ministers are bound by their calling and lay leaders are bound by their covenant to lead faithfully and guard the safety of the congregation for all members. A sexual relationship or sexualized behavior between a minister and a congregant is an abuse of clergy power and is inappropriate. No congregation can afford—spiritually, ethically, legally, or financially—to fail to live up to its covenant of trust by implementing strategies for reducing and preventing abuse and interpersonal violence.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the mistreatment of one family member by another. In *Violence in the Family*, Marie Fortune states that *domestic violence* refers to a pattern of violent and coercive behavior exercised by one adult in an intimate relationship over another. Most often perpetrators of abuse and battering are spouses, ex-spouses, boyfriends, ex-boyfriends, or lovers. Most often victims of this kind of abuse are women and children. The abuse can be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, economic, and psychological. Domestic violence is a problem of epidemic proportions in our country and in our communities. Every fifteen seconds, a woman in the U.S. experiences the terror and humiliation of being battered by a spouse or partner, and

2 to 4 million women are assaulted each year by their husbands or boyfriends. In 2000, 1,247 women were killed by intimate partners. That same year, 440 men were killed by an intimate partner, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

As UU leaders we must teach that violence is not an appropriate way to handle conflict. Clergy are present as officiates and symbols at almost every significant rite of passage and occurrence in the lives of our congregants. Lay leaders fill an unparalleled role in offering care, healing, and hope to abused women, men, children, and elders. Our help must include compassionate caring, practical guidance, and nurturing faith.

UU clergy and lay leaders can become more knowledgeable about family violence and respond appropriately. We must acknowledge both secular awareness and religious concerns. We need to identify how the issues of diverse theology, ethnicity, age, and community define (and particularize) the characteristics of family violence. *Family Violence and Religion: An Interfaith Resource Guide* teaches us that with greater knowledge and understanding, we can resist evil, protect the harmed, and affirm the purpose of families.

In breaking the silence about family violence, religious professionals and lay leaders need to name it for what it is and become prophetic voices and powerful antidotes to the cultural and religious norms in our society. By confronting the myths about domestic violence, we gain an understanding of the problem and clarify our pastoral responses.

To further our understanding of domestic violence, consider the following myths and facts adapted from the SafeHouse Center Inc., in Ann Arbor, Michigan:

Myth 1 Domestic violence only occurs in minority, poor, poorly educated, or “dysfunctional” families.

Fact There are doctors, ministers, psychologists, and professionals who beat or abuse their wives. Battering happens in rich, white, educated, and respectable families. About half of the couples in the U.S. experience violence at some time in their relationship.

Myth 2 The problem is not really woman abuse. It is spouse abuse. Women are just as violent as men.

Fact In over 95 percent of domestic assaults, the man is the perpetrator. To end domestic violence, we must scrutinize why it is usually men who are violent in partnerships. We must examine the historic and legal permission that men have been given to be violent in general and to be violent toward their wives and children specifically. There are rare cases in which a woman batters a man. Battering does occur in some lesbian and gay male relationships.

Myth 3 When there is violence in the family, all members of the family are participating in the dynamic, and therefore all must change for the violence to stop.

Fact Only the perpetrator has the ability to stop the violence. Many women who are battered make numerous attempts to change their behavior in the hope that this will stop the abuse. This does not work. Changes in family members’ behavior will not cause or influence the batterer to be nonviolent.

Myth 4 Domestic violence is usually a one-time event, an isolated incident.

Fact Battering is a pattern, a reign of force and terror. Once violence begins in a relationship, it gets worse and more frequent over time. Battering is not just one physical attack. It’s one person’s domination and control of the other. It is a number of tactics (intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, and psychological and sexual abuse) used repeatedly.

Myth 5 Battered women always stay in violent relationships.

Fact Many battered women leave their abusers permanently, and despite many obstacles, succeed in building a life free of violence. Almost all battered women leave at least once. The perpetrator dramatically escalates his violence when a woman leaves (or tries to) because it is necessary for him to reassert control and ownership. Battered women are often very active (and far from helpless) on their own behalf. Their efforts

often fail because the batterer continues to assault them and institutions fail to offer protection.

Myth 6 The community places responsibility for violence where it belongs—on the criminal.

Fact Most people blame the victim of battering for the crime, sometimes without realizing it. They expect the woman to stop the violence and repeatedly analyze her motivations for not leaving rather than scrutinizing why the batterer keeps beating her and why the community allows it.

Myth 7 If a battered woman wanted to leave, she could just call the police.

Fact Police have traditionally been reluctant to respond to domestic assaults or to intervene in what they consider a private matter. People of color may be reluctant to call the police because law enforcement officers often exemplify racist attitudes and behaviors.

Myth 8 If a battered woman really wanted to leave, she could just pack up, go, and get help somewhere else.

Fact Battered women considering leaving their assailants are faced with the very real possibility of severe physical harm or even death. Assailants deliberately isolate their partners and deprive them of jobs and opportunities for acquiring education and skills. This, combined with unequal opportunities for women in general and a lack of affordable childcare, makes it excruciatingly difficult for women to leave. Some priests, clergy, and rabbis have been extremely supportive of battered women. Others ignore abuse, are unsupportive, or actively support the assailant's control of his power because of a lack of training and understanding.

Myth 9 Men who batter are often good fathers and should have joint custody of their children.

Fact At least 70 percent of men who batter their wives, sexually or physically, abuse their children. All children suffer from witnessing their father assault their mother.

Ministry in Response

The stories of interpersonal violence against children and women and in teen relationships are

everywhere. Tales of abuse in families are common in our communities. Marie Fortune writes in *Sexual Violence*,

Prevention of (interpersonal) violence requires addressing the root causes of the problem. Sexual violence is a widespread problem, taking place in a broad social context which allows and even encourages it to occur. Rape and child sexual abuse are life-threatening by-products of a violent, sexist and racist society.

Often victims first turn to their religious communities for help. In her essay "Ministry in Response to Violence in the Family: Pastoral and Prophetic," Fortune states that the task of ministry is to provide the resources of faith and the congregation to accomplish the following goals:

- ◆ *Protection of the victim/victims from further abuse.* The immediate safety of the person(s) harmed must be served.
- ◆ *Stopping the abuser's violence.* This means immediate cessation of the abusive behavior and calling the abuser to account in order to prevent its continuation. The minister can make it clear that this behavior is intolerable, immoral, and criminal in most states.
- ◆ *Restoration of relationship if possible or mourning the loss of the relationship.* But restoration of a relationship is impossible prior to the authentic achievement of the two more urgent goals of protection and ending the violence.

Religious professionals' and lay leaders' prophetic response to interpersonal violence and abuse begins by breaking the silence and speaking openly from the pulpit, in communities, and in congregational newsletters. Ministers and leaders should be prepared for disclosures from congregants of any age. They must empathize with victims, validate their experiences, and help them solve their problems. This response requires knowledge of local resources.

Religious educators can do their greatest ministry to families by providing education that

supports healthy family relationships and prevents abusive relationships. The *Our Whole Lives* lifespan sexuality education series offers opportunities at several significant points in the life cycle to provide healthy norms and expectations for right relationships. Children need prevention education. We need to teach them self-respect and self-confidence and give them permission and the skills to say “no” to any adult who may harm them. Teenagers who are exploring their sexuality and their relationships need accurate information in order to have expectations about mutuality, choice, and respect in a relationship. Adults who are approaching marriage and life-long commitment need to have opportunities to reflect carefully on their expectations of each other and their relationship. Adult children who are facing the illness or disability of an adult parent need information, resources, and congregational support to deal with the stress of possible elder abuse or neglect.

What does our faith require of us? Is a faithful response to interpersonal violence and abuse possible in our congregations? Can UU clergy and lay leaders speak prophetically and respond pastorally to all forms of interpersonal violence? Our faith calls us to work for justice that provides healing and promotes equality and compassion. The following essays articulate faithful responses to the many forms of interpersonal violence. May we cast our lot with those workers who, in the words of Adrienne Rich, “age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.”

A Systems View of Congregational Life

Kenneth Gordon Hurto

In a series of letters written to his children during World War I, Hugh Lofting invents a creature called PushMePullYou, a fanciful animal that looks like a llama with two heads trying to go opposite directions at once. It is an apt metaphor for understanding this point: We pull together to create new life (literally in reproduction, figuratively in all our shared activities). We give of ourselves for a greater good. We also find out who we are because we are in relationship to others. Equally, we need to follow our own star, separate from our relationships. When we do, we are held back by our wanting to belong. It seems becoming a distinctive *self* threatens the “us.” Even more, if we follow that star, we become anxious that we may end up all alone.

How can *you be you* and *I be me* and *we be we*, all at once? It’s a classic approach-avoidance dilemma. It is an age-old question. It is the very nature of our existence. How we manage this dilemma shapes all that we do.

Dr. Murray Bowen, a Washington, D.C. researcher who studied families in the 1950s, introduced a theory of the family based on empirical observation. In time, the theory evolved to include eight interlocking ideas premised on the notion that there are two primary forces that shape our lives: The *togetherness force* and the *self force*. The *togetherness force* includes all the things we do to establish and maintain relationships with each other. The *togetherness force* pulls us close, favoring

sameness and similarity. By contrast, the *self force* refers to all those qualities and actions that make us distinct individuals. The *self force* prizes uniqueness and diversity.

These forces drive our actions as we seek to find a balance between them. Often, they are in tension, within our own being and with those we love. Theologian Paul Tillich says much the same when he notes, “What is most characteristically human about us is the tension between the desire to be ‘free’—self-identifying and self-choosing—and to be ‘related’—to love and to be loved.”

Bowen’s Theory asks: How is a family—including the extended congregational family—trying to balance these forces? What is the interplay between connectedness and separateness? How can a congregation promote closeness so that no one dissolves? How do we help people live lives of integrity in which no one is violated? How does this family or group cope with the inherent tensions in the dance of *self* and *togetherness*?

This essay provides the reader with an overview of this thinking. Our goal is to offer a way of thinking about the issues of congregational life and the way individuals and groups function within them. To the extent that we can take a bird’s eye view of the emotional process of relationships within the congregation, we can be less reactive when things go wrong and think more clearly about how to

right them. Put differently, we'll be able to lead more effectively. We'll frame right relations in the context of theory more than in a prescribed set of rules and behaviors.

When people come together and form relationships, something truly new is born. We weave our lives together to create a living process. Our word choices reveal this is something new. At some discernible moment of closeness, the pronouns *we* and *us* appear. Indeed, the word *family* is premised on the notion that it is something far greater than the mere sum of its parts. A family may be comprised of persons, but it has its own group reality. Extrapolating from this notion, "we" can be a team to which one belongs, one's class or race, even one's nation, as in "we Americans." Each shared *togetherness* is as real as each individual *self*.

Once the "us" comes into being, something interesting follows: Part of my sense of who "I" am depends on that "we." I gain a sense of identity. I belong to my family, my congregation, my country, and so on. I even have T-shirts to prove it. With time and a growing sense of belonging I cannot even conceive of myself outside of the group identity. I will alter or sacrifice my desires and ambitions to further this sense of togetherness. Loyalty and team-playing are highly valued in our society. We prize mutuality and work hard to obtain and nurture it. *One for all; all for one!* is not just a romantic slogan; it is the very essence of our humanity. When we have it, life is good; when we don't, life is hell.

As long as the things the group does together satisfy my sense of myself, there is no problem. However, the pull of being a separate self conflicts with the desire to belong. What I want is often not exactly the same as what someone else wants, nor even what the group declares is important. "Get off my back!" we shout, in resistance to being absorbed. "Don't tread on me" remains a symbol of American independence. "Just leave me alone," whines the unhappy teenager. Too much togetherness is no fun.

In family life, our position in the family determines who we are. Each of us is assigned a role

that we play out every day. Because nature loves the quixotic, we are free to move beyond those roles but not easily or far. The family script can be a blessing or a curse, but it is real. We deviate from our roles at our peril, risking ostracism or pressure to conform. The togetherness force keeps us in line and the system in balance.

In a diverse and complex world, this dynamic can be truly confusing because we are also embedded in our fields of expectations. When we encounter someone whose family constellation calls for actions markedly different from ours, we wonder how they can possibly think and act as they do. We think they are strange and perhaps we put them down for being different. In congregational life, where many family constellations overlap, the ways different people are "supposed" to act not only diverge they can come into outright conflict and set the stage for even more tension, reactivity, and hard feelings in shared congregational life.

Unless we can step back and view the system cosmically, such variability is baffling. It's not a malevolent or even conscious choice that drives such arrangements. It is just that relationship systems tend to stay in their orbits, prizing the harmony of today's togetherness more than the challenge and promise of new ways of being.

Whenever people come into relationship, an emotional dynamic takes place among and between them. Intuitively we call that good or bad "vibes." It can also be called the emotional field. The emotional field may be compared to an electrical or gravitational field, the dominant feature of which is that in time it becomes independent of and more significant than the actions of its constituent parts. For instance, gravity holds planets in their orbits around the sun. Once a planet has entered the system and found its place, the planet cannot adopt a differing orbit of its own accord—the gravitational field keeps it in place.

Similarly, in family and other intimate networks, once people have found their place in the family balance, they cannot simply will themselves or others to function differently. While system change can be initiated by individual members,

natural resistance will keep everyone in their proper orbit. However, if a leader can function steadily in a new way, the other members of the system will adapt in time to a new emotional field.

Real change is about the whole system, not necessarily any constituent part. In the end, if the emotional field does not change, the system will return to its original status quo or the emotional balance before the onset of a change.

A question for anyone studying a congregation's emotional field is: What scripts are being played out here? How has this congregation been "formatted" to allow certain things and proscribe others? Who can do what? How are roles predetermined? And what happens to someone who does not fit into or who violates that field of expectation?

Dealing with Change

Most of the time, when we try to explain why something happens, we rely on a simple notion that one event causes a subsequent event, but causality is rarely so simple. A better way to think of it is that all parts of a relational system cause each other and in turn are reciprocally caused by each other. The point is that if we are to grasp the dynamics of family and congregational life, we need to resist simplistic explanations. There is good news, however: When a problem occurs (more neutrally stated as a change in the status quo), we don't have to know the precise cause. Left to its own devices, the system will restore its balance before long. This is why time heals many wounds.

The theory also suggests that in order to change an emotional field, we can exert pressure anywhere. In families and in congregations, we tend to focus our attention on something that is out of sorts. We tend to the "problem child" of the family or organization, which has the curious effect of organizing the whole system around that child or malfunctioning part.

Thinking relationally, we might be as well off turning our attention elsewhere. Does the choir sing off-key? Strengthen the religious education program. Your child doesn't turn in her homework? Take up a new hobby. Seemingly unrelated

actions can lead to profound change throughout the system. Evidence does support this notion. For instance, when parents work on strengthening their relationship with each other, their children do better in every way. Likewise, in congregations, acting up and out is often the anxious result of weak and unclear leadership. If a minister delivers a strong "Here I Stand" sermon or if the board has exciting priorities, people might agree to wear their name tags and rumor mongering might stop.

This notion of multidimensional causality also suggests that a period of imbalance or upset is necessary to change a relationship system. There is a silver lining when things go "wrong." Possibilities arise that were simply not considered before.

Family events like births, confirmations or bar/bah mitzvahs, marriages, divorce, disease, changes in work or residence, or the death of a family member change the emotional field. The members have to find a new balance. The jockeying back and forth, say, to include a new sister-in-law at the family Thanksgiving dinner is an example of what goes on all the time as families cope with changes in their relationships.

In congregational life times of transition also stir things up and lead to both conflict and creative thinking. An episode of unprofessional conduct or an upsurge in membership throws everyone off balance. The natural reaction is to try to restore the old balance. However, if leaders stay calm, this moment of confusion can lead to better functioning all around. There's nothing like a good squabble or a sudden, large bequest to force a group to attend both to how it gets along and what it values. Instinctively, we understand this by the way we create deliberate unsettling in the intentional election of new officers every year.

But there is no guarantee that a system will evolve after the emotional field has been upset; a system can just as easily devolve to a lower level of functioning. In times of great anxiety, families, congregations, and even nations frequently tear themselves apart before a new equilibrium is reached. This phenomenon, in which more people act out in increasingly immature ways, is

called *societal regression*.

Early twentieth-century mathematician Alfred North Whitehead argues that reality consists not of things per se but the way they interact. This understanding is very much along the lines of Bowen's theory. Our relationships, the many forms of "us" that we create over time are the substance of our reality. Individuals matter, to be sure. But individuals find their selves in relationships. The way the relational dynamic endures or changes and a person's place in the relationship determines how a person functions.

This suggests two mistakes to watch out for: focusing on a person or persons as the singular cause of events and becoming distracted by the substance or content of an event rather than the underlying emotional process of the relationship. Far too often when families have difficulties, they devote their attention to the person exhibiting symptoms (bad grades, a partner's affair, inappropriate words or touch, rebellion, irresponsible actions) rather than looking at the system of relationships and how the many parties involved submit to or even promote the symptomatic behavior. To illustrate: A congregant lights up a cigarette during worship. No one, including the ushers, says a word. After services, members complain to the minister or speak ill of the offender. It's rare for a parishioner to ask: *Why did we silently tolerate this?* This simple example calls for a response such as: "Sir, smoking is not allowed."

Other inappropriate behaviors are not so cleanly resolved, such as the church's "party-man" hugging women at church parties; the parishioner who feels she just has to have a say, and a negative one at that, every time there is a congregational meeting; or the member who comes to church unwashed and odorous; or the lonely bachelor who insists that the minister take his phone calls at dinner time.

Systems theory, noting a tendency toward equilibrium, informs us that hurtful behavior continues because the system tolerates it. Troublemakers need to be called to account. If they go unchecked, it is not because they are

inherently bad people but because responsible leaders have failed. For things to truly get better, the whole system has to reorganize and understand its own dynamics.

Emotional Triangles

Any relationship with another creates tension between the self and togetherness forces. The easiest and most natural way to ease that tension is to talk to a third party. When we talk *about* rather than *to* someone else, we create an emotional *triangle*. Triangles stabilize the emotional field. Bowen's theory says you cannot understand human behavior until you think in threes. The triangle is the basic molecule of any relational system.

Typical examples of triangles include:

- tattling, as when one child complains to a parent about her sister's unwillingness to share
- water cooler belly-aching about "management"
- board room lamentation about lazy workers
- e-mail exchanges between committee members about other members
- gossipy neighbors disapproving of someone else's new car
- church members criticizing the religious education director's way of telling stories to kids

Triangles can also be about ideas or events, anything that makes us anxious—the new carpet in your sister's house, the government's inability to balance the budget, or a congregation's ecology program.

There's nothing evil or immoral about triangles; in fact they're inescapable. Whether you like it or not, you will both triangle and be triangled; it's a way of coping. Much of the time, while a triangle may not resolve a problem, it can serve to provide a release of emotional pressure—thereby actually allowing one of the partners to approach the problem with less intensity and more creativity. This is why we hire consultants: We triangle them in to help us think more clearly.

However, many triangles are pernicious insofar as they are ways of not dealing honestly with one another. Wary ministers or church leaders will

hear alarm bells anytime they hear parishioners talking intensely about each other lest they find themselves caught up in the drama of an untended conflict.

The more intense a relationship is, the greater our need to bring others into the situation. A rule of thumb suggests that healthy families should have many triangles so the anxiety in the emotional field does not get stuck in any one person or idea. Living with others is often irritating as well as a blessing. The more ways we have to dissipate our anxiety, the less stress there is on any particular pairing. Put another way, the more friends we have, the less likely it is that any one of them will become excessively important to our well-being. The family unit tends to be more intense than other relationships; therefore it is more vulnerable to both healthy and unhealthy triangulation.

It's not easy to tell the difference. One person's blowing smoke is another person's vicious gossip. Sometimes when we're triangled into a situation, we find ourselves connected but manage not to take up the stress. Other times we get pulled in despite our best intentions.

One of the most injurious aspects of triangles is that the one talked about has no say (and often no knowledge) about what is being said about them. Often we're told that what we're about to hear is "just between you and me"—and our perception of the party talked about is forever changed. Once someone says, "Did you know the head of the preschool has a drinking problem?" you'll wonder the next time you see that teacher, whether it's true or not. This is why most family therapists and organizational consultants urge direct communication. To the extent that triangulation perpetuates secrets or promulgates falsehood, it can be a very destructive force. Hence the assertion "You're only as healthy as your secrets!"

The secret is to be aware and managing your sense of self in the triangle. Remember that the purpose of the triangle is to delegate anxiety out of the dyadic relationship. If a person is not careful and tries to step into the problem, she may find herself on the receiving end of considerable

hostility from her friends, who now blame her for their troubles. This phenomenon is well known to every police officer called to a domestic dispute; the moment she tries to intervene, the two warring parties turn all their angry energy on her, putting the helpful officer in danger.

The first rule of triangles is that anytime you try to fix another's problems you end up with stress. You know it's happened when in a moment of injured puzzlement, you say, "I was only trying to help." Anyone in a leadership position is especially vulnerable to this trap. Recognizing when you are in a triangle and getting unhooked is an important part of congregational leadership.

Emotional Leadership

Every family, every congregation, and every group needs someone to be in charge. Theories abound as to what constitutes effective leadership. Typically leadership is described as a set of character traits like vision, assertiveness, and focus on goals. Bowen Family Systems Theory, particularly as developed by Rabbi Dr. Edwin H. Friedman, takes a very different approach. Friedman argues that leadership is an emotional process, not a tactical one. It is not about a particular set of techniques or tricks. It is not about understanding. It is not about power, per se. It is not about making others different or persuading or willfully directing them to do anything. It is about self-regulation within the relationship. Leadership is primarily about the management of self, being somebody and being present. Leadership requires being aware of and modulating how you function in the relationships that mean something to you. It is about *differentiation*.

Using an analogy from biology, every body has to have a head. The head's function is to be clear about where it is going. The head defines the goal, the values, and the direction of the organism. A good head pays attention to what other parts of the body are saying—you cannot ignore a broken foot—but stays the course in terms of what it values and aspires to. The same

applies to the head of a family or organization.

In family life, everyone functions better when there is a head guiding the body. Children always do better when parents love one another, have clear values, manage their reactivity to life's stresses, and pay attention to (but do not focus on) the kids. Child-focused families tend to do less well, in part because they put the child (the least mature member) in charge of the family dynamic. In his early work, Bowen began to understand the reciprocal nature of systemic relationships when he observed that schizophrenic children improved as their parents worked to make their marriage more satisfying.

Similar things can be said of congregations: When the board is doing its job, the minister is on top of her game, and committee chairs understand their jobs and tend to them well, programs prosper, problems are addressed as they arise, chronic symptoms decrease, and acting-out children of any age do not call the shots. Conversely, when leadership is unclear and weak, the anxiety in a system is not contained and there is more acting out, more triangulation, less responsibility and self-regulation, and more conflict.

Leadership as *self-differentiation* suggests that the leader's job is to be connected to but not defined by the emotional field of her family or congregation. The better defined the leader is, the more she understands what matters and the more she is able to choose wisely from a variety of options. She is better able to take stands and provide direction.

Moreover, if the leader has her head screwed on straight, she helps others to do likewise. The leader's job, curiously, is not to pay too much attention to a family's or congregation's constituent parts (remember, she still has to be present), but to work on being clear about her own life values and direction. Of course, when the head is poorly defined and unclear, the body begins to develop symptoms.

For a leader to have a clear head, he must be aware. As we've noted, a person's function is profoundly shaped by the emotional field in which he

finds himself, particularly his family of origin, his primary family, and his work system (here, the congregation). These overlapping systems provide endless opportunities for a leader to work on his sense of self. Noticing what pushes his buttons, what makes him anxious, and how others react to him and trying to be clear about his life direction and values is the work of self-differentiation and the primary task of a leader.

Creating Healthy Relationships

Many essential aspects of creating functionally healthy groups and individuals, whether families or congregations, involve systematic thinking. The following are guidelines for fostering healthy congregations and families:

- Anxiety is a part of life. A primary task of leadership is to cultivate the capacity to stay calm and non-reactive amidst anxiety. To the extent leadership works to keep others calm and value-focused, anxiety will not overtake relationships.
- Symptoms (acting out, threatening behavior, chronic squabbles, under-functioning programs) reveal a lack of boundary regulation within the relational system. The issues and persons involved in a problem must be addressed in light of a family or congregation's values, but care should be taken not to scapegoat individuals.
- Change is more than a matter of fixing a problem; it is about redirecting the life-course of the family or congregation.
- Leaders can promote change by working on their own issues, clarifying what they value and the directions they want to go.
- As leaders need to work on defining themselves in relation to the congregation, so too a congregation needs to define itself to itself and to the larger world. This is more than goal setting; it is the emotional commitment to have a clear head and heart.
- Clarity of expectation defines what is acceptable or not acceptable in relationships. It makes it easier to respect each other and

each other's space.

- Boundary regulation requires intentionality. Regularly reviewing policies and goals helps members become clear about purpose. Explicit rules reduce conflict. Routinely checking how members of a congregation are together makes it easier to function together.
- Creating a healthy congregation requires real change, which will be resisted. You cannot will others to be different. Leaders need to be patient, thinking organically rather than programmatically.
- Life is a work in progress. There is no one way to create health and the tension of self and togetherness is never finally resolved. Healthy families expect and allow for change, have a high tolerance for ambiguity, and work to stay as calm as possible in the midst of confusing situations as they grow and change.
- Finally, it's all connected. We don't have to get it all right. Just working to do one thing well helps everything else go better too.

Leading a Community in Right Relations

Phyllis Rickter and Betty Hoskins

Because of our historic beginnings, Unitarian Universalist governance—our polity—ensures that each congregation is independent, self-governing, and autonomous. Because our polity means that governance is local, there is no bishop, chief rabbi, or spiritual leader with veto-power. In a broad sense then, in Unitarian Universalism we all have leadership roles. We're already congregational leaders, or we may become so. For many, taking a larger role in the organization is a part of belonging.

Unitarian Universalist ordained clergy hold a special relationship within a congregation, unique to only a few denominations that date back to Colonial days. Our mode of governance has a called and settled minister and an elected board, usually laity. The minister is not an employee but is called by a vote of the congregation's members to minister to and with a congregation.

Unitarian Universalist congregations choose to belong to the Unitarian Universalist Association, which serves its member congregations with institutional guidance and support, including credentialing ministers and enforcing ethical rules as established by the Association's Ministerial Fellowship Committee. The Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association and the Liberal Religious Educators Association are independent membership organizations that provide good practices and enforce a code of professional behavior.

Because "revelation is not sealed," our movement is adjusting and changing as new generations, ideas, and challenges become important. Underlying it all, however, is the desire to live in a community of harmony, justice, and safety—a community of right relations. Creating and sustaining such a community is the work of leadership.

Donna Bivens of the Women's Theological Center offers this helpful definition of transformational leadership:

Spiritual or transformational leadership is that aspect of leadership that involves: tending relationships at all levels—personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural or ideological; creating and maintaining environments that inspire growth and transformation in order to support individuals and collectives to live out our deepest, most life-affirming vision, mission, and values.

As leaders, we carry a fiduciary responsibility, which means that we are entrusted with property and power for the benefit of others. Such relationships are based on trust and reliance. Issues of safety and possible liability belong to the board. The board is ultimately responsible for the conduct of persons who serve the church in official capacities.

Many of us aspire to a religious community where there is maximum possible safety—physical

safety, safety in our interactions, and spiritual safety. We aspire to a place where we will not be physically or sexually abused; a place where we can give an opinion that rings true to us without being condemned or harshly criticized; a place where our thoughts and emotions are respectfully received and discussed; a place where telling the truth in love is the norm, and the increasing disclosure of ourselves and our thoughts and feelings toward larger realities is welcomed. Even though our world is never totally safe, we aspire and struggle to create a community in right relationship. We believe our congregations yearn to build such communities and that leadership is charged to implement this goal.

Church leaders want to be effective. Knowing *how* to be effective is a more complex matter. We bring work styles with us and we learn new modes. Underlying our actions is the desire to create and maintain a community of harmony and right relations. We ask ourselves about the qualities of effective religious leadership:

Am I assuming the responsibilities of leadership for the right reasons? What do we mean by “right reasons”? We assume—though realistically we may know better—that there are no hidden agendas or unrealistic ego needs to be met. Ideally, learning to be an effective leader means taking advantage of opportunities to know our religious and spiritual yearnings and the thought and emotional processes that call us to this work; recognizing our favored style; and being willing to change, to grow, and to enjoy the deepening of our relationships with individual people and with the congregation as a whole.

Am I taking into account the assorted skills of co-leaders? This mixture of assorted skills and experiences brings richness—but also complexity—to our leadership. Leaders must pause and ask about appropriate methods. In order to solve a problem, it’s important to understand it. It’s very easy to fall back on our tried-and-true procedures. When we’re puzzled by other’s behaviors, perhaps they are drawing on models that worked elsewhere and are different from our own. Good leadership requires us to be open to learning from

each other and to always remember that our goals and solutions may differ because we are a religious, spiritual, rational, and inclusive religious community.

How am I going to work with leaders and followers with different approaches? In a congregation of human beings, there are always areas of difference, varying world views, prejudices, and strongly held, often contradictory, beliefs. We hear such things as, “You can’t talk about the Middle East War here,” “We can’t take sides in this matter,” “Can you be a Republican here?” and “I’m pro-life. Am I welcome here?” In a congregation of right relations, openness about our personal truths is possible if we acknowledge the right and responsibility of others to share their different views.

Do I have a habit of openness and transparency in my communications with others? Leadership includes openness and transparency, truth-telling, in our governance processes. We may know that breaking the silence around forbidden subjects is the beginning of healing, but we also fear that the community will feel unsafe. We may wonder if truth-telling is worth the trouble it will cause? Should we just “let sleeping dogs lie” and negotiate a settlement that “pays the debt to society?” What about confidentiality? What about gossip? In response to clergy sexual misconduct, our work has led to a firm conviction that confidentiality too often becomes secrecy that protects the powerful. Too often the accusation of gossip prevents leadership from validating the story of a real person’s life.

Nobody has the absolute corner on truth. Leadership demonstrates and models behaviors of openness and respect for others’ views while being clear about one’s own. This is no easy task. (See “A Systems View of Congregational Life” and “Boundaries and Confidentiality”.)

Am I working with others to define what the problem is before implementing a solution? In order to understand the problem, we need to ground our conversations in our Purposes and Principles as a whole. For instance, our atmosphere of openness and acceptance may invite behaviors

that are out of bounds. What is the leadership's role in setting limits? How do we balance the "inherent dignity and worth of all persons" with individual rights and community maintenance? For the sake of congregational safety, we expect lay leaders and ministers to find the courage and have the skills to confront inappropriate and unwelcome words, touching, and intrusions of intimacy. How do we support leadership in this difficult task?

Creative, effective leadership knows that the congregation must be included in processes of decision-making and implementation. As a possible problem emerges, involve the congregation's religious professionals and elected leaders as soon as possible. There will be rumors and there will be sides taken. There will be personal reactions on the basis of each individual's past, private life experiences. Use this opportunity to clarify your hopes for justice. Use the UUA Principles and Purposes as affirmations of diversity and sound judgment. Call your district office. Contact the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety.

Do I place a high priority on training and empowering leaders who will succeed me? Effective and transformational leadership looks to the future. Potential leadership is encouraged and empowered. Skills are taught and learned. We may make mistakes but we can consider them learning experiences. Good leaders encourage others to test their skills and seek the guidance of district leadership when appropriate. Most of all, effective leaders demonstrate an abiding commitment to the well-being of the congregation and its members. Having done your best, you will retire gracefully and move on to further challenges.

Covenanting

A covenant statement is "the promises or commitments that people make to each other in the context of religious community" (see "Writing a Covenant"). Covenanting promotes working together on the question "What are the qualities we want in our life and work together?"

A covenant statement is related to a vision statement, *what* the congregation wants to create (at the present time) with its ministry, pro-

gramming, and outreach. A covenant statement is also related to the congregation's mission statement, *what* the congregation intends to mean to the community (or communities) in which it resides. *How* the congregation and its leadership enact their vision and mission depends upon values and skills. As participants in a religious community, we continuously discover our and others' identities. This is qualitatively different from a relationship of contractual obligations or a relationship focused on the goals and objectives of a particular project.

Becoming a covenanted leader requires openness and learning and a commitment to ongoing congregational transformation. Effective leadership calls for multiple forms of reflection and diagnosis in different situations and thoughtful agreement about appropriate boundaries and action. We bring a variety of skills into the congregational setting. We bring analytical, metaphorical, and management skills. Others bring legal training and professional codes of ethics as teachers, social workers, therapists, and health providers. Use them all to understand difficult situations.

The nature of religious authority is often murky for UUs. Polity means there is no final authority from above. Leaders ask, "What sort of problem is this?" and "What remedy is needed?" and then "Who should exercise authority?"

Ministers often speak of their call to ministry. Candidates for the ministry pursue seminary studies and develop the skills of ministry. At the same time, the minister's authority derives in large part from the fact that congregations ordain, call, and settle their ministers as their spiritual leaders. Congregations and ministers develop covenantal relationships.

Who calls the Unitarian Universalist laity to do its work? Laity are called by their congregation's covenantal relationships. We call ourselves by volunteering, learning leadership skills, and being elected by the democratic process of our congregation's members. We bring skills from our daily lives and work. For effective UU work, we must collectively represent many of the theological and ethical perspectives of our congregations. This

means continued study and dialogue by the laity, not just the ordained. Covenanted leadership continuously welcomes new participants, responds thoughtfully and spiritually to new situations, and thanks those who serve.

Given the complexity of life, the complexity of congregational governance, the requirements of law, and the constantly moving cultural milieu in which we live, what can we look for with hope? What do congregations of right relations give us? We have many reasons to doubt, to lose hope, and to despair of our own and others' behaviors. But despair is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Instead we choose right relationships. We choose to act as if people can be good and we can trust them. Trust them not blindly, not foolishly, but hopefully. We do this knowing that human beings are complex and that there are road blocks along the way. When our congregations choose to live our UU Principles and Purposes, we are reaching for right relations.

Effective, transformational leadership, that is leadership by us all, facilitates right relations and safe congregations that nurture us all. Thus our congregations become life-affirming communities where individuals can live out their best intentions, forgive themselves and others when necessary, and celebrate the gift of life and love in community.

Leadership with Vision

Ken Brown and Angela Merkert

In order to create a transformational congregation, it is crucial to understand the culture and heritage of the community and articulate a clear, shared mission. A congregation that has a shared mission, based on covenantal relationships, finds it easier to confront unethical behavior because it is so clearly outside the bounds of the mission. With a clear mission, it is easier for the leadership to create policies and procedures that deal with boundary issues.

To be a transformational leader in a Unitarian Universalist congregation means to lead with a clear vision of a vital, strong congregation. Core factors in that leadership are clear principles and strong character and a covenant to be in right relation with other leadership, the congregation, and the larger community. Without this covenant, trust is not possible and a leader loses his or her moral authority. The following eight qualities for transformational leaders in our congregations relate to how one deals with boundary concerns in a congregation. A transformational leader:

- is mission-driven and asks him or herself, “What am I called to do and to be, given my role as a religious professional at this time and in this place?”
- continually casts a vision, celebrates successes, and challenges the congregation to keep moving forward

- practices “radical hospitality” in all that he or she does, leads in love, and is welcoming to all
- values results more than activity by recognizing that life in a congregation often creates more activity than is needed or healthy for its vision; welcomes assessment of the ministry as a means of strengthening the vision and future of the congregation
- works with the polarity of safety and risk, knowing when to take risks that may bring the congregation to the edge without going over it (avoiding risk and change is maintenance rather than transformation)
- focuses on opportunities rather than problems; sees a glass as an opportunity to add more water rather than as half-full or half-empty
- thinks in terms of *we* rather than *I*; works with staff and lay leadership as a team; and models shared leadership in moving toward the vision; empowers people, thus increasing the capacity to engage in an ever-expanding ministry
- understands the culture of the congregation; knows that to be truly transformational, the congregation needs to engage with the larger community

All of these characteristics of a transformational leader require the ability to both honor and question the existing norms and status quo. A leader must be a risk taker who is not motivated

by ego and considers the greater good of the congregation. Leaders—religious, professional, or lay—need a clear understanding of the boundaries of their respective roles and the need for boundaries within congregational life.

One way that congregations have been proactive in dealing with the full range of relational concerns goes two steps beyond the articulation of a shared mission. First is the creation of a congregational covenant, through a workshop or series of meetings, that holds members accountable for how they treat each other. *Churchworks* by district executive Anne Heller offers a model. The next step is to create a congregational conflict engagement team that is trained to mediate and help leaders understand how to cope with conflict. Ideally this team trains committee chairpersons and other leaders in how to deal with low-level conflict and when to ask for help from the team. The team must also determine when to ask district staff for support in dealing with a conflict situation. Committees on ministry may also contribute ensuring that their assessment of congregational health includes consideration of the health of the relationships within the congregation.

Leaders, by the nature of their roles, are accorded trust, integrity, and respect. When the responsibilities of leadership are not engaged with integrity and the leader focuses on power *over* in contrast to power *with* and empowerment, the ability to be in healthy relationship is challenged. Open communications, clear statements of roles and responsibilities, and authority commensurate with responsibility are all important foundational characteristics of a congregation in which ethical leadership is supported.

It is not okay for leaders to threaten or misuse their influence to intimidate or take advantage of anyone in the congregational community, whether physically, psychologically, or emotionally. People of integrity “walk their talk” and their behaviors are consistent with the values they espouse. Unitarian Universalist leaders, both professional religious and lay, continually affirm the seven Principles. These Principles provide a strong basis for ethical behavior and are not always easy to

engage. They continually challenge us to live with integrity in the face of competing priorities.

Our Universalist tradition offers the concept of universal love and various sources charge us to “do no harm.” Yet we live in a real world where we must sometimes acknowledge and engage with a violation of the covenant that holds us together as a congregation.

A breach of ethics on the part of a minister is an egregious act that is destructive to congregations. In some ways we are still learning about the effects of such violations. In these circumstances, understanding the culture and heritage of the faith community is vital for leaders because they may be dealing with actions that are based in the past. The UUA, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association have developed strong policies and guidelines dealing with misconduct by religious professionals. Such proactive action by our leadership has been helpful to congregations trying to move forward after such an incident.

Congregations also struggle when a lay person breaches ethical standards. As district staff, congregations have occasionally asked us to deal with sexual predators who use the congregational community and our tradition of not drawing clear boundaries to prey on lay people, ministers, and children. These can be delicate situations in which the congregation does not want to get involved in a legal battle and is often frightened and reluctant to take action. In one situation, a member of the congregation was stalking the minister and the board was notified. After deep discussion and continued boundary violations, the board voted to remove the perpetrator from membership and asked him to leave the congregation. This strong action by the board to support the minister brought to an end a situation that could have gotten much worse if they had not acted.

In nearly all states the law requires us to report cases of sexual misconduct involving an adult and a child. In this situation the board must take strong action. Proactive work like background checks on all people working with youth and children may not uncover a tendency

to inappropriate behavior. In a number of situations the board has supported the staff of a congregation when they removed someone working with youth. In such situations the board may be informed in executive session about the action taken, but there also has to be a trusting relationship between the governing board and the staff in order to support the staff in protecting youth and children. In these and other situations the leadership must protect the privacy of all parties; the information must remain confidential. In these circumstances the whole congregation does not have the right to know what happened.

Leadership also needs to be aware that not all inappropriate behavior is sexual in nature. There have been a number of situations in which people have been abusive to other members or staff verbally and even physically. Again, a proactive stance represented by a covenant or at least a safety policy is the best way to be prepared for such situations. But even without such policies in place we recommend that congregations use the language in their mission or vision statements or even the seven Principles to talk to such people about their actions. If the abusive behavior persists, the board may have to proceed by asking the person to leave the congregation. Unfortunately this period of conflict with a member is not the time to write a policy or develop a covenant. Yet if we are truly committed to creating transformational congregations where people feel safe in taking part in all our activities, leadership must take action.

In some cases, boundary violators have left one congregation when confronted and moved to another nearby to continue their predatory behavior. Thus congregations need to communicate with each other about people who behave inappropriately. Transformational leadership understands that taking action in such cases is truly part of leadership that is mission-driven, vision-casting, radically hospitable, and understanding of the culture of the congregation. Leadership must be willing to take the risk of making changes that can eventually create a safe and vital congregation.

Leadership must also understand that the policies or covenants within a congregation should also deal with situations in which people act in a way that is destructive to community life. A safe congregation does not allow people to verbally attack others or use strong derogatory language and strident voices to suppress diverse ideas and genuine dialogue. In situations where such behavior has been allowed to continue, newcomers and members have chosen either to not become a part of the community or to remove themselves from the congregation.

To create transformational congregations where we help to change lives for the better, we must draw boundaries and use proactive tools. Transformational leadership does not ignore inappropriate actions or believe that destructive behavior can be changed by one-on-one conversation. The role of the leader is to help provide a safe environment where the majority of the congregation's membership can make their spiritual journey in a supportive community. Our congregations can be places where faith development includes the understanding that within our communities we have responsibilities to each other. If we choose to allow a few individuals to define the way we interact by virtue of their destructive behavior, we will never create the Beloved Community. If we truly want to develop and be transformational leaders, we need to take seriously the responsibility for making our congregations safe for all.

Writing a Covenant

Fredric Muir

In many of our congregations, the UUA's Statement of Principles and Purposes is conspicuously hung close to the building's entrance, included in the Sunday order of service, or even spoken during the Sunday service itself. It starts with "We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote . . ." and continues with seven Principles and six Sources, which some have memorized and most would recognize as unique to our way of faith. Indeed our Principles and Purposes stand as an affirmation of who and what it means to be a religious liberal in the twenty-first century; for a creedless religion, it's the closest we come to documenting our beliefs and intentions. But let's be clear about this: The Statement is not a creed. A creed is a formal and permanent statement of religious belief that the faithful accept and testify to (often in weekly unison prayer or by some other congregation-wide acknowledgment). No, our Statement of Principles and Purposes is not a creed, it says so right in the opening words: "We covenant to affirm and promote. . . ."

So it may come as a surprise to many that the seven Principles are not a Unitarian Universalist covenant: There is a covenant in the Statement, but it's not the seven Principles. We hold the seven Principles close to our hearts because they compose our vision of a world made better;

the Principles name our dream of the Beloved Community (what in orthodox language is called the Kingdom of God). This is the picture of the world that we affirm and promote (and the six Sources continue to shape this vision).

There is a path to this Unitarian Universalist vision of the Promised Land, the Beloved Community; there is a map that tells us how to get there. This is our mission. It is also found in the Statement, but many never read far enough to get there:

The Unitarian Universalist Association shall devote its resources to and exercise its corporate powers for religious, educational, and humanitarian purposes. The primary purpose of the Association is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen Unitarian Universalist institutions, *and implement its principles.*

Mission is implementation—how we will realize our vision. Our mission and vision are both in the Statement. Our covenant is here too. Like the mission, it's buried but it's there, right after the Sources, where it states,

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations,

we enter into this covenant, *promising one another our mutual trust and support.*

This is the covenantal language that separates the Unitarian Universalist faith community from others. You see, covenants are about relationships. When we speak of Unitarian Universalism having a covenantal theology (rather than a creedal one), we can as easily say that ours is a relational theology. A *covenant*, then, speaks about the commitments and promises we make to each other about the journey (mission) we share on our way to the Beloved Community or Promised Land (our vision).

History

The idea of covenant is ancient. In our historical tradition, both cultural and religious, covenant dates back to God's promise to the Nation of Israel that they are a Chosen People. God's committed relationship with them permeates Hebrew scripture. In *Myths America Lives By*, Richard T. Hughes tells the fascinating story of how this religious covenant made its way from the tribes of Israel to the shores of North America. Hughes names John Winthrop, Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as an instrumental figure in shaping our modern understanding. In 1630, before setting foot in New England, Winthrop explained to his shipmates what it meant to be in covenant with each other:

We must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, ... we must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work.

For Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams making such promises was simply the human thing to do. In "From Cage to Covenant," he writes,

Human beings, individually and collectively, become human by making commitments, by making promises. The human

being as *such*, as Martin Buber says, is the promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creature. The human being is the promise-maker, the commitment maker.

Uniting in the common bonds of relationship rather than in obedience to a religious dogma is a distinguishing feature of Unitarian Universalism. Most Unitarian Universalists have experienced and know about the level of theological diversity engendered from the absence of creed and dogma—it can be breathtaking. But theological diversity and the absence of dogma and creed are not to be understood as a philosophy of "anything goes." The gifts and blessings of free inquiry, skepticism, and seeking bring responsibility. Our fourth Principle speaks to this with clarity: "We affirm and promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Yet for some, theological free thinking, religious progressivism, and spiritual seeking are translated as acceptance, tolerance, or ignorance of behavior that can undermine, even harm, the religious and spiritual life of others and the well being of our institutions. While we can take pride in the theological differences that unite us, these differences aren't always the best foundation for building a strong institution; there must be something more.

It is unfortunate that Unitarian Universalism, like other faith communities, has suffered from alarming misbehavior on the part of its members and friends. Some violations in our congregations have been overlooked or tolerated under the guise of a creedless, relative faith that doesn't impose belief or behavior on its followers. When there are questions of professional misconduct, codes of professional practice and other guidelines are clear about how conduct unbecoming a professional should be addressed, and most of our church schools have safety policies that protect our children and youth and safeguard all participants. But when adult members, friends, and visitors act in ways that are inappropriate, disrespectful, or hurtful, what can we do? Most congregations have no clear context from which to respond to uncivil, inappropriate behavior or disagreements.

Church historian Conrad Wright understands this dilemma. In “Congregational Polity and the Covenant” he writes, “Covenant emphasizes that the church is a community of mutual obligation which involves a sense of commitment. Even the freest of free churches needs that much discipline if it is to last long enough to accomplish anything of value in this world.” In the absence of a shared and uniting religious creed, we commit with each other through the promises we make about how we will walk our mission toward creating the Beloved Community. The promises and commitments we make become a covenant. A covenant can provide the context from which we can take action; a covenant can support the creation of an accepting, safe congregation.

There are at least five ways that a covenant can support and facilitate clear expectations and deepening of relationships in a congregation. A covenant

- is a statement of agreement about how congregants choose to be in relationship with each other. When they live by these statements, they are modeling their Unitarian Universalist values for each other, their children, and the wider community.
- comprises promises, not rules. Unlike rules, promises are discussed, lived, broken, and renewed. Promises and commitments describe how we wish to live together as a faith community, knowing that if these promises don’t work, the congregation may choose to rewrite them.
- is a framework of expectations. Virtually every context we enter has behavior expectations. Our congregations should be no different; in fact, given the reason that we come together—to create a Beloved Community—clear expectations are vital.
- is about behavior, not personality. Behavior that encourages, nurtures, and supports our “free and responsible search for truth and meaning” is important to the life of the faith community, not the qualities that have shaped and show a person’s character.

- offers an opportunity to explore and deepen our spirituality. Promises made to others in a faith community and the relationships that can form from such a practice can strengthen and broaden commitment in deliberate, intentional, and disciplined ways.

Covenants grow out of and support any size of group. Following are several examples of covenants. Each was created using the process described in the two-hour workshop on page 110).

Safe Congregations Panel (8 members)

United by a shared mission, we covenant together to honor ourselves, our task, and each other by:

- being fully present and prepared—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually
- listening compassionately for and sharing generously of the wisdom and experience we bring
- maintaining confidentiality while not perpetuating secrecy
- holding each other accountable to our individual convictions and shared Unitarian Universalist Principles

Welcoming the cloud of witnesses who sit with us—listening especially for the voices of victims/survivors, we join our hearts, minds, and hands to this continuing work recognizing the magnitude of speaking truth to power, transforming hearts, and bringing hope.

Men’s Covenant Group (10 members)

We are a covenant group that follows a nurturing path in order to grow as individuals and as a group. So that the group can function effectively, we commit to attend on a regular basis and to start and end our meetings on time. We will “show up” mentally, physically, and emotionally and vow to keep personal items confidential (erring on the side of confidentiality). The group promises to be a safe environment where we as individuals are able to open our souls to one another and go beyond our normal comfort levels so that we can truly know one another and ourselves better. In order to

grow together we will practice aggressive listening. We will practice speech that is non-judgmental, open and heartfelt, compassionate, honest, and supportive. The group has permission to remind individuals when they go out of bounds; conversely, members have a responsibility to let the group know when they have been hurt by something that was said. We pledge to be there for one another in and out of the meetings. We pledge a commitment to the men's covenant group, the UUCA congregation, and the greater community.

Board of Trustees (10 members)

As members of the Board of Trustees, we covenant to keep the best interests of the congregation at heart and to carry out the trust placed in us as guardians of the Mission and Principles and as stewards of the resources of our church. We will embrace and share our experience, wisdom, and gifts in carrying out this work. We will celebrate our diversity by working to create an environment in which all are heard and respected. We will speak the truth in love. As we seek consensus, we will give and accept constructive feedback.

We will faithfully attend and be fully engaged in board meetings. We will show our commitment by being prompt, prepared, and focused. We will support the decisions and policies of the board.

We will be honest and realistic in our expectations and commitments, both individually and collectively. At the same time we will accept and forgive our failures. As part of a faith community, we will seek to minister to each other, sharing our joys, sorrows, successes, and struggles.

In this spirit, we covenant to further the mission of the congregation as we strive to make real the vision of Unitarian Universalism.

Safe Congregation (540 members)

This church is a place of safety and integrity for each person's mind, body, and spirit. We are a supportive and nurturing faith community, honoring and respecting the rich diversity of those gathered here. Recognizing that warmth, beauty, kindness, and passion will shape us as a congregation of

goodwill, generosity, and presence, we covenant to affirm and promote:

- honesty and authenticity in our relationships
- words that are supportive and caring, not belittling or demeaning
- a welcoming and non-judgmental attitude
- respect for each person's boundaries of mind, body, and spirit
- listening to one another
- refraining from displays of temper
- honoring the gifts and blessings of thought and deed

This is our covenant of right relationship.

After developing a congregational covenant, a board may choose to develop a policy that includes guidelines for responding to and processing instances when the covenant is broken. Such a policy could include a Safe Congregations Team, which would have a specific process to follow when called upon. There are many kinds of policies and processes available. Contact the Office of Ethics and Safety at (617) 948-6462 or www.uua.org/cde/ethics.

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal faith, created and sustained by relationships. We do not come together around religious dogma or creed, but we unite to walk together toward a vision of the Beloved Community as named in our Statement of Principles and Purposes as well as the vision that our local congregation has named. How we walk together, holding and honoring our congregation's diversity, is the challenge and the value of covenant.

Boundaries and Confidentiality

Rebecca Edmiston-Lange

Is everything a congregant tells a minister confidential? Is everything a congregant tells another congregant “in confidence” confidential? When is it okay to break a promise to “keep a secret”? When does confidentiality become secrecy and an abuse of power? Are all secrets bad? What is the difference between privacy and secrecy? What is the difference between anonymity and confidentiality? Is any gossip “good” gossip?

How members and staff of a congregation answer these questions has a great impact on whether or not a congregation can be deemed “safe.” Unfortunately there are no easy answers because there is an unavoidable tension in the appropriate handling of sensitive information. Our congregations should be places where individual privacy is respected, where individuals feel they can risk being vulnerable and can rely upon clergy and other congregants to treat personal communications with trust and discretion. On the other hand, especially in an association governed by congregational polity and an emphasis on democratic practices, our congregations should be places where leadership, both clergy and lay, is committed to a certain level of transparency in its operations, to truth telling, and to the sharing of information vital to the well-being of all.

Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in clergy sexual misconduct and child abuse cases. Too often in such cases we have seen how

a destructive cloak of secrecy can be confused with legitimate claims to privacy, how claims of confidentiality can be abused to shield injurious behavior, and how desires to avoid “unpleasantness” have led to silence, which compounds the betrayal and cripples a church’s effectiveness as a spiritual institution. As a consequence, we have recognized the need to “break the silence” about such matters, to cultivate openness in dealing with such violations of the public trust. But sometimes such an emphasis has led to further confusion. Any claim to confidentiality can be viewed as suspect and *secret* has almost become a dirty word.

Now more than ever, we need shared clarity about definitions and insight into how ethical distinctions should be made concerning these issues, not just for clergy-congregant relationships but also for members of our congregations involved in shared ministries or leadership positions. While there are no hard and fast rules and no substitutes for personal judgment and moral discernment, there are some problem-solving techniques that can help guide our way. Perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that not all secrets are bad. Some secrets can be delightful and strengthen relationships. But how do we tell the difference? As Evan Imber-Black writes in her book, *The Secret Life of Families*, “Enforced silence, selective telling, covert talking, and whispered

confidences all can be used to plan a surprise party or to shield a pedophile.” Imber-Black distinguishes four kinds of secrets. *Sweet secrets* are of short duration and kept for the purpose of fun and surprise, such as those involved in planning surprise gifts or parties. *Essential secrets* involve those areas of privacy that are central to a person’s or community’s identity and well-being. They help to promote necessary boundaries, define relationships, and preserve dignity. For example, details of one’s personal history or the intimate secrets that committed couples share are essential secrets. Essential secrets can also provide necessary protection, as in keeping secret the location of a battered women’s shelter.

Sweet and essential secrets are positive and beneficial. *Toxic and dangerous secrets*, on the other hand, are destructive and threatening to emotional and possibly physical safety. Toxic secrets, while not posing any immediate physical danger, poison relationships with others, disorient identity, and promote anxiety. Maintaining a toxic secret has a chronic negative effect on emotional well-being and energy, both for the person carrying the secret and for others in relation with that person. Toxic secrets create barriers between those who know and those who don’t. Living inside such a secret makes us question our perceptions and second guess others’ responses to us and cuts us off from vital resources. We wonder what others would think of us if they knew. Living outside a toxic secret creates confusion and disequilibrium and inhibits growth. We know something is amiss, but not knowing what it is, we begin to doubt our reality. A philandering spouse is an example of a toxic secret in a family system. Knowledge of clergy sexual misconduct is an example of a toxic secret in a congregational system.

Carrying a toxic secret feels like living inside a pressure cooker. The pressure to reveal the secret can build until the secret erupts in damaging ways, or it can leak out in subtle clues that force someone else to uncover it. Toxic secrets most often need to be revealed both for the health of the person carrying the secret and for the health of the relationship system, but because a

toxic secret does not involve immediate physical danger, its revelation can be planned carefully. Revealing toxic secrets is always painful and upsetting, sometimes shattering. Healing and the reshaping of relationships takes a long time and much therapeutic work. But such healing may take even longer if the toxic secret is revealed in a reckless or explosive fashion.

Dangerous secrets are those that put people in immediate physical jeopardy or debilitating emotional turmoil. In contrast to toxic secrets, which allow time to carefully consider the impact of revelation, dangerous secrets require immediate action to safeguard persons. Examples of such dangerous secrets are physical or sexual abuse of children, plans to commit suicide or homicide, or incapacitating substance abuse. In many jurisdictions, there is a “duty to warn” if one discovers such a secret; the need to protect outweighs any claims to confidentiality or promise not to tell.

Dangerous secrets often involve power dynamics, intimidation, and fear. The powerless person in a dangerous secret is often threatened physically or emotionally and led to believe that revealing the secret will result in even greater harm to themselves or someone they care about. The powerful person in a dangerous secret often invokes a false notion of privacy, saying, “This is no one else’s business but ours.” By their very nature, dangerous secrets must be disclosed.

Understanding the different kinds of secrets helps to distinguish between truly private matters and unhealthy secrecy. The same information, depending upon the context, may be either. For example, not telling my neighbors about my positive HIV status might be maintaining an appropriate level of privacy. Not telling my fiancé the same information is keeping a dangerous secret.

The distinctions among different kinds of secrets are also helpful in defining the limits of confidentiality and a “promise not to tell” within a congregation, both for professional ministers and lay leaders. Most people assume that whatever they tell their minister in private is confidential—

and in the majority of cases that is a safe assumption. We expect ministers to respect individual privacy and autonomy and, indeed, they are bound by professional ethics to do so. Without the expectation of confidentiality, those who need pastoral help or spiritual counsel might never seek it. But clergy are not only responsible to individual congregants. They are also stewards of the overall spiritual and moral well-being of the congregation as a whole. In addition, clergy feel, and may be mandated by law to consider, an obligation to the good of society. At times these other considerations may outweigh an individual congregant's expectation of confidentiality.

Generally speaking, in both law and ethics, confidentiality is considered only a *prima facie* duty, meaning that it can be overridden by other more compelling duties in certain circumstances—to protect someone from harm to self or to protect an innocent third party, for example. Here we are dealing in the realm of dangerous secrets, and decisions regarding whether or not to divulge information may seem rather straightforward. If a congregant confesses to a minister that he abused a child in the church's Sunday school, the minister cannot keep that information secret. If an otherwise healthy adult reveals to a minister a plan to commit suicide, most ministers would not hesitate to break confidence in order to avert the suicide, whether or not they are legally obligated to do so. (Many jurisdictions do have laws imposing a "duty to warn" or a "duty to divulge" when clergy possess knowledge of child or elder abuse, potential homicides or suicides, or participation in criminal activity.)

But not all cases where a clergy person may feel the need to break confidentiality are that clear cut. Toxic secrets, because of the lack of immediate physical danger, may present more complex choices about how, what, and to whom to divulge them. A teenager confesses she is pregnant and intends to seek an abortion and wants to keep this secret from her parents. In many cases the minister will most likely try to assuage her fears regarding her parents' response and urge her to talk to them directly, even offering to accompany

her. But if the teenager refuses, is the minister obligated to tell the parents, to whom the minister also has an inherent, obligatory relationship of trust? A variety of factors might enter into the decision—the age and maturity of the girl, what the minister knows about the health of the family system, the stage of the pregnancy, and so forth.

It is important to note that the issue of clergy confidentiality is further complicated by the laws regarding whether or not clergy-congregant communications are deemed inadmissible as legal testimony. Further, states often have laws specifying who can waive confidentiality, the congregant or the clergy person or both. Such laws may vary from state to state or even from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. (Note: Generally speaking, courts consider four factors in deciding what is confidential—whether the information was disclosed in a setting where it might be overheard; whether the information conveyed implies harm to the discloser or to another person; whether the disclosure was made in the sacramental context of confession of sins; and whether the person receiving the disclosure is ordained professional clergy. (Read "Confidentiality in the Church: What the Pastor Knows and Tells" by D. Elizabeth Audette and *Confidentiality and Clergy: Churches, Ethics and the Law* by William W. Rankin for fuller discussion of these matters.) It behooves clergy to acquaint themselves with the relevant state and municipal laws, particularly those regarding the situations in which one has a "duty to warn" or "duty to divulge."

However situations can arise in which one's ethical judgment appears to be at odds with the law. One might, because of a higher duty to protect, feel the need to divulge confidential communications regarding a potential suicide even when there is no legal obligation to do. Alternately, one might consider a form of civil disobedience under certain circumstances in order to meet the demands of conscience and choose not to report, for example, a planned suicide by a mentally competent and terminally ill person. Under such circumstances, legal counsel should be sought so that the decision is not made without full

understanding of the legal consequences. It should not be the policy of a congregation to condone disobedience of existing laws.

Nevertheless, as Sissela Bok stresses, any decision to override confidentiality requires a rigorously derived justification. William Rankin, arguing from Bok, offers four guidelines to aid in the decision:

- Is the request for secrecy a fair request? In other words, could you reasonably make the same request of another if your roles were reversed?
- Is what is being asked of you in consonance with your deepest values?
- Is what is being requested of you something that you would regard as undesirable if anyone else did it?
- Does the request allow you to respond in ways compatible with your religious tradition?

Both Rankin and Bok caution that confidentiality issues in churches can become clouded by a tendency to treat some ethical problems as purely pastoral problems rather than as wrongs for which redress is needed. While this tendency may be motivated by a laudable compassion, it may just as likely be motivated by an overestimation of one's ability to change another's behavior. Honest reflection on Rankin's four questions mitigates these tendencies since they acknowledge both obligation to one's self as a promise-keeper and obligation to justice in community. Given that compelling reasons to break confidentiality can exist, perhaps it is always more honest to state one's intent as "I will try my best to keep confidential what you are about to disclose but if you reveal something illegal or that puts yourself or another person in danger, I may feel obligated to break your confidence to protect you or another person."

When confused about which course to follow, clergy should not hesitate to seek counsel from other colleagues or district executives. In many cases it is possible to talk about a situation without divulging identifying information.

Much of the discussion on clergy confidentiality is applicable to lay people in positions of leadership. While lay people do not possess any legal privilege concerning confidentiality, they are

often privy to sensitive information and are bound by their covenantal relationship with the church to take issues of confidentiality seriously. Lay leaders must also distinguish different kinds of secrets and may, at times, feel compelled to consider higher ethical considerations, such as whether to warn or to protect, when confronted with toxic or dangerous secrets. Lay leaders, like clergy, bear responsibility for the welfare of the church as a whole and will, at times, need to balance individual requests for secrecy with the community's need to know. Like clergy, lay leaders should feel predisposed to honor confidences, but if a rigorous moral justification to override a confidence exists, they should not feel they have betrayed another by divulging the information. Even when a "promise not to tell" has been exacted, confidence can and should be breached if secrecy would allow violence to be done to innocent persons or involve complicity in a crime. As Sissela Bok puts it in her book *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, "We can properly promise only what is ours to give or what is right for us to do," that having "made a promise" does not justify participation in wrong doing. Again, there is no substitute for personal discernment. There will be times when the right course involves potential conflict and pain. Such is the burden of leadership. But the guidelines offered for clergy can be helpful to lay people also. Like clergy, lay people should not hesitate to ask for advice, either from their minister or the district executive.

The positions of lay pastoral ministers and covenant group leaders warrant further discussion. Trainings for such lay pastoral ministries as the Befrienders Program or Stephen's Ministry explicitly address confidentiality issues, recognizing that congregants in those roles will need ongoing supervision to strengthen their ministry. When discussing a case, these programs suggest omitting names or disguising identifying characteristics to preserve the person's anonymity and the confidential nature of the information. Such an approach can be helpful in other situations as well; for example, when seeking advice from

another (one's minister, a colleague, or district executive) about whether or not to break a confidence. Furthermore, there will be times in congregational life, as in clergy misconduct cases or child abuse cases, when it is necessary to disclose facts and, at the same time, protect the vulnerable by preserving the anonymity of the victim.

Most covenant groups within our churches do not have an expectation of complete confidentiality. It is expected that members of covenant groups will have conversations among themselves outside the group meetings. It is also expected that members of a covenant group will want to share their experiences with non-members. Rev. Robert Hill recommends a "covenant of discretion and respect for privacy interests of members." Some groups have rules that members sharing particularly private information within the group should identify it as such or that one must ask permission to share another's identifying story. Discussion of confidentiality and privacy issues should be part of the covenant building process for such groups.

There should be ongoing conversations in our congregations about confidentiality and privacy issues. All members of the church need to understand the limits of confidentiality and recognize that blanket assurances of confidentiality, even from clergy, are neither possible nor wise. Furthermore, our congregations are covenantal communities of people responsible to and for each other. An appropriate sharing of information is necessary if we are to minister to one another through the trials and sorrows of life and if we all are to grow spiritually. By joining a covenantal community one has made a choice to be in relationship, to have others involved in our lives.

Certainly none of us wants to encourage malicious, intrusive, or even trivializing gossip, but a certain level of is probably inevitable and maybe even desirable in congregations. Writers like Sissela Bok have pointed out the many supportive uses of gossip: It allows us to learn life-lessons by observing others; it conveys information vital to a group's functioning; it spreads the word about who is sick or in need of help; and, it teaches through example how others navigate the trials

of life with grace. Phyllis Rose argues in *Parallel Lives, Five Victorian Marriages* that gossip is the beginning of moral inquiry, the low end of the ladder that leads to self understanding. In *Dakota*, Kathleen Norris coins the phrase "holy gossip" to describe gossip that strengthens communal bonds. She points out that gossip is derived from the words for *God* and *sibling* and thus means those who are spiritually related.

Whether or not we want to reclaim a positive definition of gossip, we need to share information about one another if we are to truly minister to one another. If we err too far in the direction of an unqualified right to privacy, our communal life will be stifled. On the other hand, we need to be respectful of personal autonomy. Whenever we talk about someone who isn't present we need to ask ourselves if we are talking out of genuine concern for the other person or whether we are talking out of a need to feed our own ego—to feel superior, to seem important or "in the know." In this, as in so much, there is need for discernment and judgment.

And that is why we need to talk about how we talk. For it is through congregational conversation, which honors our commitments to one another, that we will best find the ways to live creatively with the tension between openness and privacy, truth telling and confidence keeping.

Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care

Fredric Muir

During the check-in time at a clergy meeting several years ago, a colleague stood up and announced,

I've decided to leave the church, that is, the ministry. I've concluded that I can't be a parish minister and a father and husband; I can't do ministry and have a life. I think the Catholics may be on to something: Ministry is a full-time and a lifetime commitment. At this time in my life, I'm unwilling to make that commitment.

He and I were about the same age, both married and fathers of small children. His words sent me wondering: Was it possible to do both ministry and family? What kind of a husband, father, friend, brother, and son was I with all the stresses and challenges of my calling? Maybe I too should be reconsidering and leaving the ministry? Yet there were examples from my childhood and youth of ministers and other religious professionals who had balanced the demands of work and personal life. And what about all my collegial peers and mentors who had seemingly survived and often thrived? Was their success what it appeared to be?

Though these questions and issues, and the challenges they pose, could be regularly asked by clergy and other religious professionals, any religious leader—for example, pastoral and worship

assistants, officers, and teachers—might ponder them during their tenure. All religious leaders can have a unique relationship with congregants (and other leaders) due to the supportive and serving nature of their work. All religious leaders can and will be faced or confronted with a version of the challenges raised by my colleague's announcement.

One response to these questions has to do with self-care. Self-care is about keeping in balance the stresses, demands, and expectations of religious leadership and the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. When these are balanced, a healthy and wholesome career, leadership role, and life can follow. An important part of self-care is boundaries. A boundary is a guideline that determines the appropriateness of certain behavior in a particular context. Boundary guidelines can be written or unwritten. A Unitarian Universalist congregation could have a safe congregation covenant (a behavior covenant that spells out specific ways members and friends will be in relationship with each other). There are also written codes of behavior and guidelines for religious professionals (see the UUMA and LREDA guidelines). Usually written boundaries provide clarity, but unwritten boundaries can create confusion.

Boundaries in a faith community are a form of self-care because they provide the clarity, limits,

and opportunities that help leaders and congregants to make decisions free of misunderstanding, pressure, coercion, and misplaced expectations. Boundaries can provide and maintain balance in one's life and relationships. Recognizing and understanding self-care and boundaries is vital for all religious leaders. Self-care and boundaries are interrelated and reinforcing.

Danger Signs

It's so easy to get swept up in the pressures and demands of religious leadership. For example, it's not uncommon at religious professionals' or leaders' meetings to hear peers announce or discuss all the commonly accepted signs of success—how hard they are working, how their congregations are growing, how many awards they have won, how many volunteers are involved. It all sounds so perfect and could prompt one to ask: How can a congregation—one leader—appear to do everything and do it to everyone's satisfaction? A tongue-and-cheek article that appeared in several newsletters addresses these issues:

The result of a congregational questionnaire has determined the perfect minister for our congregation. She will preach exactly fifteen minutes. He condemns sin but never upsets anyone. She works from 8 A.M. to midnight and is also janitor. He makes \$300 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car, and gives \$300 a week to those in need. She is twenty-eight years of age and has been preaching thirty years. He has a burning desire to work with youth and spends all of his time with elders. Our new minister will smile all the time with a straight face because she has a sense of humor that keeps her seriously dedicated to her work. He makes fifteen calls daily on parish families, shut-ins, and hospitalized. She spends all her time evangelizing the unchurched and is always in her office when needed. If your pastor doesn't measure up, simply send this letter to six other congregations that are tired of their pastors too. Then bundle up your pastor and send him

to the church at the top of the list. In one week, you will receive 1,643 ministers and one of them should be perfect. Have faith in this letter. One church broke the chain and got its old pastor back in less than three months.

We laugh at the unrealistic expectations named in this chain letter. Yet how often some religious leaders have felt these demands; how often congregants think that changing leadership is the answer. While we know that our faith communities are flawed, as any institution is, we can't help wanting to create the best institution we can. When we hear others describing their work and successes, our image of an ideal gets reinforced and we strive to make it a part of our leadership vision. So we work all the harder to make our vision come true. We can even give ourselves over to this dream, which is admirable and altruistic, but it can bring with it difficulty and hardship.

Two danger signs that result from the lack of self-care—signs that could be precursors to questionable behavior and permeable boundaries—are stress and burnout. Though these two are often confused, Roy Oswald, author of *Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry*, does an excellent job of helping us understand the differences. Stress occurs with change, too many changes for a person to absorb in too little time. For example, you may be familiar with the kind of self-test seen in popular magazines and health journals. It lists significant changes in a person's life—illness, loss of family members, job change, a move, divorce, etc. If you've experienced the specified number of these in one year, the authors say, you suffer from too much stress, which might have ill effects on you.

Changes in your faith community can also contribute to stress—changes in membership, programs, finances, staff, the building, and many more. As a leader, responding to these changes will, in part, fall on your shoulders. Congregants will expect you to provide direction and leadership. Too much change leads to stress. The results can be physical and emotional exhaustion as well as a loss of discernment and judgment.

Burnout, on the other hand, is the result of feeling too much—too much compassion, empathy, passion—all the things that religious leaders are expected to provide and show. Burnout shows up as exhaustion and frustration and brings on hopelessness, cynicism, a loss of idealism, and negativism.

When religious leaders are heavily stressed or burned-out, they often abandon self-care just when they need it the most. In the absence of self-care, boundary lines can become permeable or even disappear.

Common Boundary Violations

The boundaries that religious leaders need to be aware of are many and the FaithTrust Institute does an excellent job of presenting these. Five possible boundary violations that they name have particular meaning and relevance due to their scope and applicability in Unitarian Universalist congregations.

All religious leaders should be aware of the potential for *misuse of power*. For clergy, this can be an especially easy boundary violation to fall into. The use of power can feel natural and expected. It's tempting to make an issue or agenda personal, not only for the religious professional but for any leader or teacher. Misusing one's authority to embarrass, belittle, or undermine a member, or to manipulate, ostracize, or demonize another is inappropriate and crosses a boundary. Congregations give their leaders fiduciary responsibility that must be safeguarded, now and for future generations.

Closely related is the need *to balance authority with congregational polity*. Unitarian Universalists have a mistrust of institutions and authority that originates in our history, which is filled with oppressive, faith-threatening acts against our movement. As a result, we are heirs to a deep-rooted skepticism toward institutional power and authority; these have shaped our radical congregational polity. But authority and power, per se, are not bad. In any faith community, power is part of institutional life. Whether leaders of institutions are called, elected, or appointed, they will inherit the appropriate amount of power that comes with

their office. Balancing the reality of this authority with a mistrust of it and balancing leadership vision with congregational polity can be a challenge for even the best religious leaders. Consequently, owning the authority that comes with an institutional position and not giving it away (often under the misguided pretense that "we're all equal here"), is important; abdicating one's position of leadership and its authority is irresponsible. But crossing the boundary of authority and violating congregational polity is also irresponsible, and in most Unitarian Universalist congregations it's foolhardy. Maintaining, balancing, and being aware of this demanding and difficult boundary are critical. Another common boundary violation is *dual relationships*. Simply stated in *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship*, "A dual relationship is one in which a person attempts to fulfill two roles with the same person—for example, to have a professional and a personal relationship with the same person."

The boundary of a dual relationship is especially easy to cross for those serving in small town churches. A personal story will make my point. The first congregation I served was in a rural village. Soon after I arrived, I was at a town meeting and noticed another church's minister on the other side of the hall. We had met briefly at a meeting, so I made my way over to him to renew our acquaintance. "So how is everything going?" he asked. "Just fine. We really love it here," I said: "And the people are great; everyone is so liberal and progressive." He smiled and said, "That's because you have them all." That is, all the liberals and progressives. For religious leaders, especially in small towns, the reality can be that those who you have the most in common with are members of the congregation you serve. Your members are the ones you might like to call your friends. They may also be your banker, doctor, dentist, your children's teacher, or a car dealer. Entering into a "secular" relationship while still wearing a "sacred" role can put a strain on both the religious leader and the member. This is a boundary to stay aware of and monitor carefully.

Self-esteem issues represent another boundary challenge. While serving a congregation as a religious leader can be an empowering, uplifting, grace-filled, heady, and deepening experience, a leader's role is to serve the community. To be very direct, it's not about you; it's about the members and friends of your congregation. If you find yourself becoming increasingly invested in issues, relationships, a particular vision—*your* vision—of the church's future or you find a need to be informed of or to attend most meetings and events, then it's time to step back and assess your role. Three valuable questions to ask yourself are:

- Who benefits from my relationship and actions? Whose needs are being met?
- What is the impact of my involvement on the congregation (and its mission)?
- What is the impact on the person(s), their family and friends?

Every person needs and wants respect, nurturing, support, caring, and love. Meeting these desires through a position of leadership is crossing a boundary; when self-esteem needs are met in this way, the congregation is not served and trouble and stress are likely to follow.

Finally, some religious leaders are attracted to others in the congregation. Meeting the *need for intimacy* in a faith context can create challenges for any religious leader. For religious professionals, this is a clear boundary violation and comes with potential issues and problems that can destroy careers, relationships, and congregations. It's simply best if the need for intimacy is never met in the congregation.

But attractions do occur; they're normal. How you handle an attraction—an opportunity for intimacy—makes all the difference. (See "Sexual Attraction for the Religious Professional.")

Being clear about boundaries serves the needs of everyone—religious leaders and congregants. Boundaries are a form of self-care. Staying aware and intentional about boundaries will meet the best interests of all.

Self-Care Strategies

If you start by following through with one or two (and hopefully more) of these strategies for self-care, and attend to them deliberately and intentionally, you stand a much better chance of avoiding stress and burnout and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

First, you can meet your *intellectual needs* through:

- ◆ *Workshops.* Either through the Association and Unitarian Universalist religious professionals' events or with groups like the Alban Institute or FaithTrust Institute, religious leaders have the opportunity to meet with others who serve congregations and hear objective assessment, learn from challenging insights, or feel listened to by a peer or consultant. It's a great opportunity to reality-test, share your concerns and frustrations, and re-energize and renew your vision.
- ◆ *Congregations.* It's a great opportunity to reality-test, seek the counsel of a consultant, share your concerns and challenges, and re-energize.
- ◆ *Religious professionals' committee.* Each professional staff member (minister and/or director of religious education) needs to have a group they can discuss their vision, expectations, daily routine, and joys and stresses of the work with. For parish ministers, some congregations refer to this group as the Committee on Ministry or the Committee for Professional Ministry. There are excellent resources available to help with the formation of this committee. The Thomas Jefferson District Office, *Resource Reader for Committee on Ministry* is an excellent place to start. It can be found at <http://www.tjd.uua.org/comreader.html>
- ◆ *Peer groups.* Religious leaders, especially religious professionals, need to attend their peer group meetings and gatherings. Staying in touch with peers is a way to demonstrate your concern for them and it gives them opportunities to care for you.

Staying healthy by meeting your *physical needs* can help to sustain your energy and focus and provide an emotional outlet. For some it can even be a disciplined spiritual practice.

- ◆ *Exercise.* The kinds of physical activity available to anyone—from walking to rowing, aerobics to yoga, swimming to hiking, canoeing to Pilates—are astounding and can result in a positive attitude. Besides it's good for you!
- ◆ *Diet.* Like exercise, diet can make a significant difference in the way you feel. If this is a challenge, it might be worth consulting with a nutritionist.
- ◆ *Annual check-up.* I'm always astounded by the number of people who can't remember the last time they had a complete physical examination. Make one today and plan to make one annually.

Some basic strategies for emotional self-care are:

- ◆ *A mentor.* Ask a peer, someone you admire and trust and preferably (but not necessarily) someone who has worked in leadership longer than you, to be your mentor. Try to meet with this person on a regular basis for discussion and reflection.
- ◆ *Support group.* Many regional professional groups not only have monthly meetings for their membership but also additional small support groups. These groups offer an opportunity for honest and open talk (with feedback if you want it) about professional and personal concerns. Support groups are a wonderful way to share what's on your mind and in your heart and make close friends.
- ◆ *Therapy.* Traditional psychotherapy is always an excellent place to discuss leadership, self-care, and boundary challenges. Don't wait for a crisis to occur; make quarterly or semi-annual visits just to check-in.

Finally, *spiritual self-care*, as strange as this may sound, may not be possible in your congregational setting. As a religious leader, trying to lead, facilitate, and promote the spiritual depth of

those you are serving while also taking care of your own needs just won't always be possible and it's not fair to yourself or to the community you serve to split your attention. Try the following:

- ◆ *Spiritual practice.* Prayer, meditation, journaling, yoga, and tai chi are just a few of the ways that many people augment their spiritual life. Having a daily spiritual discipline can be as important to self-care as anything you do.
- ◆ *Retreats.* Whether it's simply an unstructured couple of days away or an organized, disciplined spiritual getaway, retreats can be a time for deepening reflection, re-kindling and re-energizing the soul, and calming the noise of everyday routines. Retreats are a chance to follow the un-American Zen maxim, which counsels, "Don't just do something. Sit there."
- ◆ *Spiritual director.* One sees a traditional psychotherapist for emotional support; one works with a spiritual director to become more attuned to the sacred, holy, or transcendent Presence in order to respond more fully to life.

Good self-care and staying aware of and observing boundaries allows religious leaders to stay fully engaged in life. While the calling to religious leadership is powerful, appealing, and difficult to refuse, the call to be a complete and whole human being is also powerful and must not be ignored. As religious leaders, our congregations expect us to model self-care and balance needs and demands with awareness. Modeling self-care is a religious practice, and like all such practices, it is a daily commitment and challenge. E. B. White spoke eloquently about balancing when he said, "If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

But plan we must. Plan to improve and enjoy, save and savor. This is our calling. Take care of yourself.

Sexual Attraction for the Religious Professional

William W. Finger and Debra W. Haffner

Unitarian Universalists affirm that sexuality is one of our most life-fulfilling and life-giving gifts. We recognize that our sexuality is central to our humanity and integral to our spirituality. Yet most religious professionals have little specialized training in human sexuality, and they may not be prepared to deal with the inevitable sexual attraction that arises in human relationships, particularly if they are attracted to a congregant.

The ethical and legal guidelines for Unitarian Universalist religious professionals are clear: Married or partnered religious professionals should not engage in sexual contact with congregants. Single religious professionals can do so only with extreme care, with the full knowledge of key lay leaders and transparency of the relationship. Sexual involvement with someone with whom one is involved in a counseling relationship should never occur during the counseling relationship, and after termination of the counseling process only if the religious professional can demonstrate that there is no exploitation inherent in the sexual relationship. This requires, at a minimum, that the professional consider the amount of time that has passed since the counseling relationship ended, the nature and duration of the counseling relationship, and the likelihood of adverse effects for the particular congregant. Under no circumstances should a religious professional terminate a counseling relationship in order to engage a congregant sexually.

Nevertheless, sexual attraction in professional relationships is common, and there are particular elements in professional religious work that may make it even more likely. Outside of the one-on-one caring and listening environment, a congregant may be attracted during sermons, adult education activities, and committee work, responding either to an attraction template or the power and charisma of the professional. (One's attraction template is a learned response to who we will find sexually attractive and arousing. Parts of an attraction template include height, weight, physique, which facial features are most important, ethnicity, and so on.)

Likewise, religious professionals may find themselves sexually attracted to congregants with whom they work closely on the board, committees, or activities. It is common for people to be attracted to certain people based on experiences in our past; we each are said to have a unique attraction template.

When a Religious Professional Is Attracted to a Congregant

Sexual behavior between a religious professional and a congregant typically begins with minor boundary violations. There are a number of warning signs that can help you recognize when you have stepped onto the slippery slope toward sexual misconduct with a congregant. If you are disclosing

unnecessary personal information to a congregant or seeking personal and sexual details from a congregant that are not relevant to pastoral care needs, you should take notice. "Dressing up" when you will see a particular congregant or becoming excited at the prospect of seeing a particular person at church may be warning signs that you are feeling an attraction. While touching congregants may be a normal part of your style, be aware of a change or increase in more intimate touch, such as hugs or kisses, especially if they are selectively offered to a particular congregant. Other signs include making additional time for a person, scheduling extra visits, arranging "chance" meetings, or frequent phone calls after hours, except for emergency purposes. While any of these behaviors may be benign, it is naïve to deny that they may be motivated by attraction. Objectively examining the motivations for these behaviors is the first step in avoiding sexual exploitation of a congregant. Better to "praise God that such vitality existed, and then let go of it," as Karen and Ronal Lebacqz quote one study respondent putting it in their book *Sex in the Parish*.

There are a number of appropriate responses to take if you become aware of sexual attraction to a congregant. First, acknowledge these feelings to yourself, but do not share these feelings with your congregant. Knowledge of the attraction will only put the congregant in an awkward and potentially vulnerable situation, and such a revelation will irreparably damage the professional relationship. If you need to discuss these feelings with someone, seek advice or consultation from a peer, supervisor, or your own spiritual director or therapist. Doing so may reduce the likelihood that you will act on the feelings. Second, do not act on feelings of sexual attraction. While this may seem obvious, most sexual transgressions are committed because time is not taken to explore the dynamics contributing to the attraction. While refraining from sexual contact, it is important to continue to express non-sexual caring for the congregant. It is not appropriate to withdraw from a congregant because of your sexual attraction, or to avoid them at coffee hour or social events. Religious professionals who do so leave the congregant feeling puzzled and rejected. Once you

are aware of sexual attraction, continue to monitor your verbal and physical behavior with the congregant, especially if pastoral care sessions are being provided. If you have recognized minor boundary violations, there may be others. Question your motives for asking about sexual behavior, self-disclosing personal information, moving closer to the congregant in a session, or dressing up for a session. Question your motivation for touching or giving hugs if this is not consistent with how you interact with other congregants.

It is inappropriate to ask the congregant to go elsewhere for their faith community because of your sexual attraction. However because we often refer to outside therapists and resources when an issue arises that exceeds our expertise, it may be appropriate and safer to refer the congregant to a community therapist. It is your responsibility to deal with these feelings; never refer a person so that you can pursue a personal romantic and/or sexual relationship with them.

When a Congregant Is Attracted to a Religious Professional

Although the majority of sexual contact in psychotherapeutic relationships is initiated by therapists, studies suggest that 15 to 25 percent of sexual contact in therapeutic relationships is initiated by clients. Although we do not know of a comparable study with religious professionals, we can assume that the percentages are similar. However it is no more appropriate to act in response to this attraction than it is to initiate the contact yourself. Congregants may act seductively because that is how they interact in their everyday relationships or because they seek nurture and attention. They may respond to your caring and concern, your pulpit presence, your power, or your charisma. They may fantasize that you are a person with special insight and aptitude for caring. They may view your love for your congregants as meaning that you love them personally and unconditionally. Others may use sexuality to restore the imbalance created by the relationship. Congregants with a history of sexual abuse or exploitative relationships may be

repeating this behavior or testing for safety. Regardless, responding to this seduction is unethical, anti-therapeutic, and damaging to the congregant.

A congregant's attraction may be overt or subtle. Congregants with an excessive interest in your private life, including your marital or dating status, may be interested in personalizing the relationship. Congregants may seek this information directly or indirectly through contacts with other congregation staff and congregants. Physical signs of attraction such as body position, revealing attire, seductive poses, self-grooming, and "accidental" touch may be indications of attraction. Verbal statements of attraction may be direct or may consist of flattery (of your professional skills or attractiveness), compliments, or unnecessary revelation of sexual exploits or unmet sexual needs in a pastoral care session. Attempts to modify the context of the relationship may also indicate ulterior motives. Gifts, frequent phone calls, "chance" meetings, or requests for more frequent or longer sessions or meetings outside of the congregation may indicate attraction.

The congregant may not be consciously aware of the attraction, or only vaguely aware of it, and may deny the attraction if confronted. If the congregant raises this issue directly in counseling, it is important that you state unambiguously that a sexual relationship cannot and will not occur. Express that commitment kindly but firmly: "Thank you, but because of my position, that cannot occur." Documentation of such expression by a congregant—or a persistent sense of such attraction—is critical and consultation is highly recommended. While sexual expression may be benign, congregants who feel rejected may be angry and eventually retaliate. Professionals are in a vulnerable position whenever sexual issues arise, and early and thorough documentation and informing a peer or supervisor can reduce potential liability. Contact the Good Officers person of your professional chapter and ask them to document the conversation. You may also want to talk with your support/relations committee and the chair of the Board of Trustees, although for privacy purposes,

you may not want to reveal the congregant's name.

Religious professionals may be flattered and even aroused by expressions of attraction, or they may feel threatened, uncomfortable, and offended. Regardless of the emotional reaction, the religious professional's response must remain professional. Acknowledging mutual attraction or responding sexually to the attraction are not options for the married religious professional or a professional who is counseling a congregant. A single religious professional who is not offering the person pastoral care sessions can do so only with strict safeguards.

When confronted with sexual attraction, what you don't do is as important as what you do. Don't ignore apparent feelings of attraction and don't criticize the congregant for expressing their feelings. Don't appear shocked or surprised. Don't shame the congregant and don't abandon the congregant by avoiding him or her in public gatherings. However, if the attraction continues, it may be appropriate to recommend that the congregant seek a professional therapist in the community for ongoing counseling, just as a religious professional would for other mental health issues beyond their expertise. A congregant who has expressed sexual interest in a religious professional in a social setting, has been told such a relationship cannot happen, and then asks for a private pastoral care session, should be told that a therapist in the community or other religious professional would better address their needs. In such a situation, if the congregant insists on a meeting, be sure to take appropriate measures, such as leaving the door ajar and notifying a Good Officers contact person or trusted peer in advance. If the congregation has more than one religious professional, refer the congregant to one of them for counseling.

The important point is that sexual attraction is common in religious professional relationships. The issue is not whether you are attracted to a congregant, but how you respond to it ethically and professionally. It's not enough to tell religious professionals "never" and expect that to be sufficient. Just like everyone else, religious professionals are sexual beings; we need to express our own sexuality with holiness and integrity.

Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community

Tera Little and Laurel Amabile

Helping someone learn how to say “yes” to life, despite the pains and travails each of us experiences, is one of the most important gifts our Unitarian Universalist congregations offer. This “yes” is at the core of our lifespan religious education programs and we convey it in many ways, through sermons, small group ministry, our discussions in committee meetings, and religious education classes. “Yes” flows through the heart of our faith, calling on us to stand up, dig deep within ourselves, and let effervescent life emerge.

Many of our religious leaders find that another way to announce their “yes” is by setting up clear limitations and expectations, responsibility, and accountability. More and more of our congregations recognize the need to create and maintain clear safety requirements in which we leave no room for doubt in our expectations of healthy relationships and boundaries between adults and children and between adults and adults. We can’t leave to chance our interactions with the children in our church, assuming that everything will be all right because we are all good Unitarian Universalists. These safety requirements help us live out our collective covenant espoused in our Unitarian Universalist Principles that we share in our communities of faith.

Our Principles call us toward justice and right relationship, and we must live out this value internally with the people in our pews and classrooms.

We place a high priority on including children and youth within our faith communities. Our religious education programs for children find myriad ways to help incorporate them and teach them about how our congregations work. Preschoolers go through the curriculum *Chalice Children*. Elementary school children learn about our UU Principles through curricula such as *We Believe*, and many of our middle school students complete a comprehensive Coming of Age program, where they learn in depth about our denomination, our rich history, and the colorful background and norms of their home congregation. This often culminates in the participant’s becoming a member of the congregation. The comprehensive lifespan sexuality education series *Our Whole Lives* offers excellent resources for five age levels—grades K–1, grades 4–6, grades 7–9, grades 10–12, and adult—on topics of body and gender awareness, healthy sexuality and relationships, respect for self and others, self-care, and abuse prevention.

Attention can also be given to promoting healthy and respectful relationships among children. Adults can model healthy interpersonal behaviors and educate children about peer issues like bullying and psychological and physical abuse. Sometimes this entails adult intervention when these hurtful behaviors occur in the faith community.

Our compelling programs for children and youth entail a high degree of responsibility for the adults working directly and peripherally with the young people. All of us in the congregation teach our children not just how to be Unitarian Universalists but perhaps more importantly, how to live in a Unitarian Universalist community, a community that gives to, cares for, critiques, affirms, questions, and blesses those within its fold.

Thus, for a people who expect their adults to be faith-keepers, trust-builders, and care-givers, it is easy to see why it is so important for us to be clear about how adults interact with children. Our responsibility to spiritually and emotionally nurture the children in our community is huge. With the stakes so high, we must not fail to guard them adequately against physical and emotional abuse. Will we safeguard against every perceivable abuse? This is not likely. However, we can significantly reduce the risk by creating and following preventative policies.

When we create explicit guidelines for appropriate behavior we define the values that are important to us as religious people. Our statements about safe relationships create a structure in which our religious community can thrive. Many congregations have already begun this important work. Perhaps you have done preliminary work in contacting your district office, the UUA, or your insurance company to look at sample safety policies and collect resources. Your congregation may have already completed such policies and working on revising and updating them. Wherever you are on this journey, we commend you. You are doing important work.

As a religious leader in your congregation, whether paid or volunteer, you are called to seek the truth and to speak the truth in love. Talking about appropriate behavior between adults and children, between youth and youth, and between adults and adults may feel difficult, especially when you have long-term volunteers and everyone knows everyone. You may feel as if people will view this as accusatory or trouble making. It is important to be aware that by creating and following through on such policies, you are generating a

culture shift within your congregation. Do not ignore the power of this. Even by just beginning the process, you are fomenting a new way of doing things and elevating the level of professionalism, faith, and trust in the congregation.

Prevention

What do we mean when we say we want to create a safe religious education program for all ages? At the outset, this notion may feel overwhelming and you may not know exactly where to start. Many congregations have codified their safety policies and procedures. Samples from various congregations are included in the UUA Safety/ Abuse Clearinghouse Resource Packet (available through the UUA Lifespan Faith Development Department and the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety). Many UUA districts now have district safety policies. These are excellent places to begin. Reading through these policies provides a good overview of what types of issues need to be covered. In addition, there are many places on the Internet where you can find in-depth information about creating a safe religious education environment. One example is Church Mutual Insurance Company, www.churchmutual.com, an insurer of many Unitarian Universalist congregations and districts.

We must keep our children and youth physically, emotionally, and sexually safe. Looking out for their physical safety means that we ensure that universal precautions are followed when handling bodily fluids (see the sample policy on the UUA web site), and that driver safety measures are in place for all field trip drivers. Reducing risk means that the playground equipment follows all state requirements and that regular emergency evacuation drills are routine. Reducing risk and ensuring safety requires an audit of the facilities to make certain there is nothing in the physical space that can cause harm.

Unitarian Universalist congregations often share their space with the community. In these instances we must be vigilant about safety in order to deter possible litigation due to negligence. In one congregation a community group arranged with the church office to rent the

religious education program space for an evening program. After they had used the space, a member of the group contacted the religious educator and informed her that her child fell from the playground equipment. The child was not seriously injured, but in researching the new recommended standards for public playgrounds, the caller informed the religious educator that the church playground did not meet those standards.

The religious educator handled the situation immediately, which is important in responding to any safety issue. She first discovered that the playground had been built before the current playground standards had been changed; because the playground did not meet the standards it was a potential liability issue. The religious educator immediately reported the problem to the minister, staff, and nursery school staff, who quickly started work to bring the playground up to current standards.

Fortunately there was no legal action involved in this incident, but the congregation learned several important lessons. When a community group or anyone else who is not familiar uses the playground and an accident happens, the congregation must be responsive to the situation and follow up with all necessary calls and procedures, documenting how the incident is handled. The leaders learned that rental groups need to be informed about all playground safety rules and those rules need to be posted in a visible space and verbally discussed with the rental group. The church needs to know in advance that rental groups who have children's activities will also procure adequate supervision. The congregation handled this situation well by being responsive and proactive.

Congregation leaders can be proactive with accident prevention by conducting a thorough facilities safety inspection and assessment process. A number of resources are available for this purpose, including an online playground safety booklet available on the Church Mutual website and safety and inspection checklists that you can buy from the Christian Ministries Resources Webstore at www.gospelcom.net/cgicmr/webstoreweb_store.cgi.

Creating a space that is emotionally and sexually safe for children and youth is more complex. There are personnel issues about who is appropriate to work with children and youth; decisions about how the workers are screened; what is reportable; and who communicates with outside authorities when necessary.

Volunteers

As a religious professional, elected official, or volunteer staff in a congregation, it falls to you to ensure that all children and youth in your congregation are adequately protected against potential harm. Too often in our churches we are hungry for volunteers to work with children and youth, and when an enthusiastic person presents herself, we rush to get her involved in the program, glad to have filled another volunteer slot. While there is no failsafe way to ensure you will have appropriate volunteers, there are several steps you can take to maximize your chances of finding the best people possible.

To reduce the risk of abuse; protect children, youth, and adults; and promote health and safety in your congregation, follow these basic guidelines:

- Recruit religious education volunteers who have been members of your congregation for at least six months. This allows individuals and families to gain an understanding of Unitarian Universalism and integrate themselves into the life of the Congregation.
- Orient and train all religious education volunteers in the religious education program, policies, and procedures by providing a packet of materials that includes a yearly calendar, child and faith development information, suggestions for religious education teachers, education and support opportunities, and religious education safety policies and procedures.
- Have all church staff and volunteers working with children and youth review and sign a copy of the UUA Code of Ethics for Adults Working with Children and Youth (every year) and keep signed copies on file.

- Codify and make official (by governing board sanction or vote) any policies and procedures in place related to safety.
- Institute Universal Precautions for infectious diseases, handling of bodily fluids, etc. (especially nursery and toddler caregivers).
- Establish an emergency evacuation procedure (schedule practice drills at least once a year).
- Clearly define behavior and safety expectations for children, youth, and adults, both inside and outside of the church building (such as playground safety procedures).
- Ask parents to sign a medical release form for all off-site field trips or church-sponsored activities and provide copies to assigned drivers or chaperones.
- Require written applications and conduct personal reference checks for mentors of youth or volunteers who work with children or youth in a congregation-sponsored role outside of the church, such as Coming of Age mentors.
- Review your congregation's legal responsibilities regarding equipment, property, and personal safety.
- Inspect your insurance policy to determine who empowers all non-ordained staff and/or volunteers in their scopes of responsibility. Does the governing board?
- Know how claims are handled in the event of a playground accident or a car accident involving a staff or volunteer driver.
- Consult with a lawyer and your congregation's insurance representative for further clarification and recommendations.
- Contact your state officials about the existence of "Good Samaritan" provisions that may protect volunteers during their service to your organization.
- Document incidents or reports of injuries or accidents and keep them on file.

The following primary screening procedure should be used in the recruiting/ screening/ hiring process for all applicants and congregation

workers, full-time or part-time, compensated or volunteer, including professional religious leaders (ministers, religious educators, and music directors):

- Give the applicant a full job description
- Keep application forms on file. These forms must include information such as personal history, church history, educational background, and work and volunteer experience.
- Require two or three references from each applicant and check them, preferably by phone but email is acceptable.
- Create forms summarizing the personal interview with the applicant.
- Require each applicant to complete a consent form for a criminal background check.
- Obtain confirmation that the criminal background check is complete.
- Keep all of these records in a confidential file once you have made the hire.

A secondary screening procedure may be used for occasional volunteer workers who are church members for at least six months. Ask applicants to complete an application and voluntary disclosure statement, conduct a personal interview, and institute and enforce a clear church policy that at least two adults will be present with children and youth at all times.

It is time for us to take the role of volunteering with children and youth and adults seriously and to send a message that we no longer have an open door policy for volunteer positions. We want the absolute best people working with the entire population in our congregations. Many other organizations have professionalized the process of hiring volunteers. Our congregations must do this as well.

Many abusers look for situations in which they are isolated and able to prey more easily on their victims. Precautions can include ensuring that classroom doors have windows to increase visibility. A policy that at least two adults will always be in the room with children also reduces the risk

of possible abuse and claims of negligence. This practice also protects the adult volunteers against false allegations made by a child or youth.

Application forms, personal reference forms, and background checks help to weed out undesirable applicants. Congregations may wince at this idea because recruiting volunteers is a monumental task already and asking for more information may discourage potential volunteers. But congregations that go to these extra lengths do not encounter massive resistance; rather they find that potential volunteers are thankful that the congregation is taking its role seriously and are happy to provide the information. When your congregation institutes these screening procedures, it is essential to state clearly how the information is to be filed, who has access to the files and information, and how and with whom it will be shared. These policies should be shared with all prospective volunteers. See the UUA web site at www.uua.org/cde/responsiblestaffing for sample policies; an application for paid or volunteer employment; a screening authorization form, including disclosures and disclaimers; authorization and release forms, and a reference check form.

Criminal background checks may be a contentious issue for some members of the congregation who are concerned about civil liberties issues. It is important to remind people that a criminal record check and perhaps a driving record check is necessary if the volunteer will be driving minors during church events. Remind them that the checks are for the safety of the children. Many insurance companies contend that background checks are an expected part of any risk management plan and should not be ignored.

Some people cite cost as another reason for not using background checks. There is a wide range of fees for screening services—ranging from \$3.50 to over \$150.00 for the most comprehensive. Searches limited to one state are less expensive than national searches. Many services allow you to determine the depth and breadth of the search. Some people suggest limiting a background check to the state level if a potential volunteer has lived in the state for ten or more

years. Other congregations mandate national searches for all paid staff, regardless of their time living in the state. Your state may have its own background check requirements for organizations that recruit people to work with children and youth. Make sure your congregation is in compliance. Check with a local attorney, your church's insurance agent, and local law enforcement officials to help you understand what information you need to procure.

Even with all the compelling evidence for why your congregation should institute background checks, leadership may decide that they are not ready to take that step. One precaution you might consider is the use of voluntary disclosure forms, which also act as a protection for the church and its members. These forms do not protect against liability or negligence claims like background screening, but voluntary disclosure forms offer a degree of assurance that a potential volunteer does not have red flags in his or her background. The American Camping Association, a national organization committed to excellence and safety in camp experiences, offers these forms through their online bookstore at www.acacamps.org.

Once you have the appropriate screening system in place, you still need to make sure you have written procedures for how to handle reporting abuse, whether the abuse happens within or outside the congregation. It is not a question of if, but when you will need this information. Paid and volunteer staff need to be prepared and trained to deal with a disclosure immediately and effectively and in a way that puts the least strain possible on both the person making the disclosure and the person receiving it. Responsible and careful attention to the situation is an extremely important ministry in the congregation.

Responding to a Disclosure of Abuse

When you become aware of an abusive situation, review your state's requirements on reporting suspected or known incidents of abuse to local police or child protective services and create a plan for complying with the legal reporting requirements

and making statements to the media, congregation, or other officials. The reporting policy should provide clear instructions for congregation workers on how to recognize indicators of abuse or violations of established safety guidelines. Congregation workers must know who to go to within the organization when making a report, so that appropriate follow-up takes place.

Deciding these things in advance of a potentially harmful situation is crucial. Take for example the following situation: The religious educator receives a report from a congregant that he saw the mother of a young child in the preschool room handle her child roughly and with what seemed to him extreme frustration and anger. The young mother was serving as one of the youth advisors and the observer had a son in the youth group and was also a caseworker for the state's child protection services. The congregant was shocked at the intensity of behavior and grew fearful for the child's well-being and resolved to report the incident. The congregant who observed the situation informs the religious educator that she has reported the incident to the county Department of Social Services.

After consulting with the senior minister, the religious educator calls the mother to let her know that she is aware of the report. She also calls the county caseworker and identifies herself as the leader of the congregation where the incident was observed and says that she is in contact with the family. The religious educator also makes contact with the children's father in an effort to keep that relationship open. Eventually the mother pulls herself out of the church but the father and children remained involved. There are some procedures and policies that were put in place prior to the incident, but they are not comprehensive. Along the way the religious educator writes up incident reports, keeps files of what transpires, and maintains close communication with the senior minister.

Every volunteer or staff person in your church needs to know who is considered a mandated reporter in the instance of suspected abuse. Every state has slightly different variations and you need to verify the requirements. The U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services keeps this information up to date. Once you know who the mandated reporters are, it is vital to clearly communicate this information at every volunteer and staff training.

In addition, you need to create a comprehensive plan for how the reports are filed and by whom. Again, each state differs on how the reporting must be done. It is the role of church leadership to ensure the proper procedures are made readily available to the volunteers and staff.

As your congregation begins working on these policies, some may ask, "What do we mean by child abuse?" The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides federal guidelines that states must incorporate into their statutory definitions of *child abuse* and *neglect*. As applied to reporting statutes, these definitions describe the acts and conditions that determine the grounds for state intervention in the protection of a child's well-being. Many states provide separate definitions for *physical abuse*, *neglect*, *sexual abuse*, and *emotional maltreatment*. Your staff and volunteers must be aware of current state definitions. A local attorney or your insurance company is a good resource for current definitions.

It is imperative to create a comprehensive plan for screening workers, supervising workers, and reporting suspected abuse that is easy to understand. Our response and involvement in these situations must be intentional. Part of the responsibility of a paid staff is to ensure that every volunteer with children and youth is adequately educated and trained in the expected procedures. This should happen annually because the state definitions or expectations may change and you need to ensure that every volunteer and paid staff person fully understands his or her responsibilities in suspected abuse situations. It behooves congregations to also educate the parents of children and youth and any other interested congregants. All church workers must be fully informed about their responsibilities in order to avoid legal action or criminal penalties for failing to submit reports properly.

In many congregations the *Our Whole Lives* program is taught to one or many age levels. These

comprehensive sexuality education curricula for children and youth address issues of sexual abuse. This proactive prevention education gives children and youth information about how to recognize, avoid, and report abuse. *Our Whole Lives* teachers, youth advisors, and professional religious leaders need to be aware of the potential for disclosures from children and youth during *Our Whole Lives* classes or youth group activities. Reporting procedures within the congregation, and if necessary outside the congregation, need to be understood and followed by all religious education workers.

In the Pacific Southwest District, a large part of programming involves six camps for young people in grades two through twelve. A growing part of the district's commitment to excellence in these programs has been to create safety requirements that mandate screening and reporting procedures. Inevitably a young person will disclose an incident of domestic abuse during the camping season. This disclosure is almost always given to a youth or young adult cabin counselor. Campers become close to the counselors and feel safe in confiding this type of information to them. Having a protocol in place for making reports has been a blessing because it enables the camp program to continue uninterrupted while the designated senior staff person makes the necessary reports. The chaplain and the cabin counselor are able to work with the victim, reassuring them that they will be okay and letting them know what to expect next.

What if an incident of abuse occurs in your congregation, facility, or site? First, treat all allegations seriously, with care and respect for the privacy and rights of the individuals involved. Implement your response plan, which should include contact with the congregation's insurance carrier, consultation with your attorney, full cooperation with civil authorities, documentation and prepared position statement about your congregation's awareness of the problems of child abuse, your concern for victims, and the risk reduction and safety measures your congregation has in place to protect children.

Time and experience have taught us the importance of ministering to those who receive

information from the victim. The reactions can range from disbelief, horror, sadness, anger, and a loss of faith when they realize that even Unitarian Universalists sometimes treat each other without respecting the inherent worth and dignity of each individual.

As your congregation goes through the process of creating safety policies, it is important to think about how it will respond to all those affected by abuse. While it is crucial that all appropriate reporting to state or county agencies is carried out, it is also important to ensure that the spiritual and emotional needs of all involved are taken care of in a loving, respectful, and healing way. One way to do this is to develop a team that is responsible for ministering to people affected by the disclosure of abuse. This team, ideally including a counselor or therapist, works closely with the religious educator and the minister to facilitate a group session, allowing everyone to share their feelings constructively. These people need to know they are supported in a compassionate way by the congregation's leadership.

In some circumstances, charged or convicted child sex offenders are active members of congregations and may pose a risk to children or youth. These are challenging situations to deal with, requiring a great deal of thoughtful consideration on the part of professional and lay leaders. In some cases, if a known child sex offender enters or chooses to remain a part of the congregation, clear boundaries are established for that person to take part in congregation life while maintaining the protection of children and youth. These boundaries, terms, and restrictions are outlined in writing and often referred to as *limited access agreements*.¹ (See sample agreements on the UUA web site at www.uua.org/cde/ethics/resources.) The congregation's professional and/or lay leaders should review these documents with the offender and carefully implement and enforce them if the offender agrees to abide by them.

As your congregation delves more into how to sustain families and others in your faith community in instances of abuse, you can consider implementing educational ministries on the topic,

such as how to comfort families affected by abuse, ways children and youth can protect themselves, and the wide array of community resources for victims and survivors. Programs such as these can be carried out through adult religious education programs, special forums, district or cluster workshops, or other venues.

The minister and religious educator will most likely be directly involved with working with the family of the victim. In many instances, the congregation's policy is to inform the family when a report of abuse has been given to the authorities. This opens the door of honest and direct communication, allowing the religious educator to be in contact with the family so he or she can offer assistance and guidance in finding help or other resources.

Equipping and training program staff, volunteers, and participants with information and resources on creating safe congregations, risk management, and abuse prevention is essential. Ongoing efforts to inform, train, and model safe practices and ethical behavior may include giving paid and volunteer religious education staff, parents, and congregational leaders the following information or documents:

- basic information on safety, risk management, and abuse potential
- procedures to document and report incidents or suspicion of abuse by volunteers and paid staff
- issues and limits of confidentiality when dealing with minors
- suggestions for professional staff strategies and procedures for handling incidents or suspicion of abuse
- disclosures of reported abuse, including the process for how families of victims are handled and ministered to
- process for handling and ministering to the accused, including drafting limited access agreements for those who offend or pose a risk to others in the context of the congregation

Love is a central tenant of our faith. In our quest to make our religious homes safe and healthy, we must remember this is ministry. As congregational leaders we must remember our responsibility to minister to the needs of those present in our faith communities, those vulnerable to injury or abuse, those who are injured or abused and their family members, those who respond to or report suspected abuse, those serving as volunteers with children and youth, and yes, even those who may abuse or cause harm to others. Our faith calls us to love and care for one another in creating safe congregations.

A Sex Offender in Church

Patricia Timmino

In 1996 a parishioner invited a known sex offender to First Unitarian Universalist Society in Middleboro, Massachusetts, because he felt the man (let's call him Dan) was trying hard to make a fresh start and could use the support of a church family. The minister was informed and met with Dan and welcomed him. Dan agreed to have a "buddy," who could be with him while he was in church. The purpose of the buddy was both to assure the safety of parishioners and to protect Dan against accusations as well.

A few months later, news of Dan's background leaked out. Many people were angry. Some parents with young children were particularly angry because they had unknowingly invited this man into their home. The minister supported Dan's right to be in the church.

For his part, Dan didn't hide his past. Most people were genuinely moved by how hard he was working to heal himself through therapy and twelve-step programs. Some kept their children away from him as a precaution, but challenges over his right to attend church subsided over time.

Eventually Dan entered into a loving relationship with a woman and left First UU to attend church some fifteen miles away. First UU had changed ministers by this time. The new minister knew Dan and would sometimes bump into him in the supermarket. Dan credited his ability to

have this relationship directly to growth that he had experienced as a result of being accepted by people at the church.

The new minister invited Dan to do a "moment of fellowship" at the church. It was a proud day for both Dan and the church when he returned, stepped into the pulpit, and thanked the congregation for accepting him, helping him to grow, and making a new life possible. He received a warm ovation.

Two years later, a church member came to the minister because he heard that a newcomer was a convicted sex offender. The minister made an appointment with the man. From the outset, the minister felt that Ron was very different from Dan. The minister regretted that no policy had been developed the first time around. Ron agreed to have a buddy, and to allow the minister to inform the leadership, including the religious education director, of his presence. He also agreed to the minister's exploratory request to inform the congregation in due time, once an appropriate, low-key way to do it could be devised.

The minister then asked the Parish Committee to develop a plan for the church to create a policy regarding the participation of sex offenders in church life.

Shortly thereafter, Ron disappeared from church. It turned out that Ron had been arrested

and charged (and would subsequently be convicted) of a new sex-related offense. The first offense had been with a woman; this time it was with a young man.

Emotions flew when the congregation learned that another sex offender had been among them. The minister immediately invited everyone with a strong view to form a Safety Committee to develop a policy. Out of the 110 members, 17 people in a church of 110 agreed to serve. Some, mostly parents, argued that because our children assume that any adult they see at church is safe, there should be zero tolerance of sex offenders. Social justice advocates argued that UUs should minister to this population because no one else will; if they've served their time, we should not continue to punish them through ostracism.

The committee members educated themselves, listened to experts, and argued to the point of exhaustion. They produced an interim policy that was accepted by the congregation at the annual meeting. This policy was crude and contained harsh language, and yet it represented the best work the committee was capable of at that time. It put something in place while the committee continued its work.

Experience had taught that every situation would be unique, so the committee sought to create a policy that could deal with offenders as different as Dan and Ron. The final guidelines called for a trained standing Safety Committee to make decisions on a case-by-case basis. It offered a process for reporting concerns and a flexible checklist that would allow anything from total access to very limited participation.

The church is now considerably more sophisticated about safety and sexual ethics because they have struggled with it so openly. In the end, the value of the safety policy is not nearly as great as the educational process to which the committee and church is dedicated. We now accept that no church can ever be a totally safe place because it is part of society at large. Our true measure of safety stems not from a policy but from our level of education on the issue and our continued willingness to talk openly.

With this in mind, we teach our children two safety classes a year and offer one to adults. The safety policy is published for all to see. The process is ongoing.

Balancing Compassion and Protection

Debra W. Haffner

There have always been people who are sexually attracted to children in congregations. In every congregation, there are abusers, victims, survivors, and bystanders of childhood sexual abuse. The recent crisis in the U.S. Catholic Church dramatically illustrates that people we love and admire may turn out to be sex offenders, causing irreparable damage to people's lives. Unitarian Universalists are not immune. We also know that most sexual abuse occurs among family members, and we may not be aware of the abuse that is currently occurring among families in our congregations. Many of our children and youth who have participated in the *Our Whole Lives* program are speaking up as a result of receiving education about child sexual abuse.

The Unitarian Universalist Association commissioned me to develop a manual for how to welcome a person with a history of sex offenses into our congregations while assuring that our children, youth, and vulnerable adults are safe from abuse and exploitation. I interviewed more than a dozen congregations that had struggled with this issue, consulted with experts in sexual child abuse and sex offender treatment, did an extensive review of the public health literature, and convened an expert advisory board for the publication. The complete handbook was published as an online publication, "Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe from Congregations" at

www.uua.org/cde/ethics/balancing/introduction.html. This essay is excerpted from that. The Unitarian Universalist Association is the first denomination in the United States to publish a resource on this difficult issue.

As a result of a 1996 federal law, every state now has a notification law for sex offenders who have served prison time and are back in the community. The federal law required states to pass laws mandating that convicted sex offenders register with local law enforcement after release and to make these registries available to the general public. Over time, each state has adopted statutes modeled after the federal legislation, referred to as Megan's Law in memory of Megan Kanka, a seven-year-old girl raped and murdered by a neighbor who, unknown to her family, was a convicted sex offender. In 2000, the Supreme Court found the laws constitutional.

People who are required to register have committed a wide range of offenses from child molestation, to rape, to exhibitionism and voyeurism. Even a nineteen-year-old who has had sexual intercourse with a fifteen-year-old boyfriend or girlfriend and been turned in by irate parents is subject to this law. It is estimated that as many as half a million people may be listed on these registries; the State of California alone has more than 75,000 people listed. To find out how to obtain the local registry, contact your local police department or

sheriff's office. The KlaasKids Foundation has an updated list of state laws based on Megan's Law at www.klaaskids.org (click on the button for "legislation" to be directed to your state's law and registry).

Despite the shockingly high number of registered sex offenders, the vast majority (88 percent) of sex offenses continue to go unreported. The vast majority of people who commit sex offenses do not serve time in prison or receive mandated treatment. Even with registries, there is no way we can know for sure who may abuse children.

Yet we have an obligation and a commitment to keep our children safe—from the person who is known to have a history of molesting children and from the person whose sexual attraction to children is unknown to anyone but themselves.

As Unitarian Universalists we believe in the dignity and worth of every person, and that includes the person who has abused children, no matter how morally repugnant that person's past behavior is. We believe in justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, qualities that we must bring to thinking about this difficult issue. We affirm the use of the democratic process in our congregations, which means we must honor that this is hard work that we must do together in community. We say we are challenged to "confront the powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love" and we must "heed the guidance of reason and the results of science." The Restorative Justice for All Report (www.uua.org/cde/ethics) states it this way: "We place a high value on creating a culture of sanctuary within our congregations. Anyone should be able to enter our houses of worship without fear of being exploited in any way."

Three tenets underlie our efforts to balance the protection of children with our Principles:

- We have a responsibility to assure that children will be safe in our congregations from sexual abuse, sexual assault, and harassment *even* or perhaps *especially* when we do not know if there is an offender in our congregation. Indeed, we have a responsibility to see that our congregations are sexually healthy and free of sexual harassment, abuse, and

exploitation for all of our members—children, adults, visitors, and staff.

- We have a responsibility to treat every person with worth and dignity and to provide a congregational home to all who seek one, while honoring that in the case of an individual with a history of sex offenses, there must be limitations to congregational involvement. That commitment means that only in rare cases will a person be denied access to ministry and fellowship. In the words of one congregation's policy, we must provide "compassion, support, affirmation, and protection against further harm."
- We have a responsibility to educate ourselves about child sexual abuse and healthy childhood sexuality as well as background on sexual offenders and to develop a process that will help us make good decisions about the actions that we are called to take. We must be willing to listen, to use a democratic process, and to be humble about our own certitudes in creating these policies.

We hope that by raising the issues around sexual abuse and sex offenders, congregations can institute policies before there is a crisis. Some UU congregations may want to think, "These issues don't affect us. After all, no one in our congregation would do these terrible things." Unfortunately even the "nicest people" may do these things. One estimate is that between 7 and 10 percent of the population may have a sexual attraction that involves children. And although many of these people will never act on their feelings, some will. With the advent of sex offender registries, we will often know when a convicted sex offender enters our community.

If the congregation does not address these issues before they occur, there is likely to be panic and a sense of crisis when a sex offender starts attending activities at the congregation; someone in the congregation is accused of abuse; or the minister, religious educator, or a member finds out that a congregant has a history of abusing children or youth. If you are in the midst of one of

these situations and do not have policies in place, you may want to first go to the “During a Crisis” section of the online manual “Balancing Acts” at www.uua.org/cde/ethics/balancing.

The full manual provides background information on child sexual abuse, sexual abuse prevention, and pedophiles and others who abuse children.

There are three important facts to keep in mind that counter prevalent myths about child sexual abuse. First, it’s a myth that the greatest threats to children are known sex offenders or strangers. The fact is that in 90 percent of cases of child sexual abuse, the abuser is an adult whom the child knows and trusts. No policy for dealing with a convicted sex offender will assure that the children in your congregation are safe unless there are also safe congregation policies in place.

It’s also a myth that nearly all sex offenders will re-offend. The research tells us that many sex offenders who have completed treatment and made a commitment to never abuse another child can resume healthy lives in the community without committing other offenses.

Finally, it is not true that sexual abuse happens to “other people.” The fact is that a significant minority of adults have survived histories of child sexual abuse.

There are minimum policies that every congregation should consider in order to keep children and youth safe and to build the foundation for dealing with a convicted sex offender. Here’s a quick self-assessment. Does your congregation:

- have a safe congregations committee or a sexual misconduct and abuse response team with primary responsibilities for these issues?
- have insurance coverage in the event that a claim of misconduct or abuse occurs?
- have a written policy about safety practices and procedures?
- have reporting procedures in place for a suspected incident of abuse?
- make sure that the minister, the religious educator, and the board chairperson know the state laws for reporting concerns about abuse

to children? Do all volunteers in the religious education program receive annual training on what to do if they suspect child abuse or child sexual abuse?

- have a screening form for all employees, regardless of position, and all volunteers who work with children and youth, asking them directly about possible histories of sexual offenses?
- have each staff person and each volunteer who works with children and youth sign a code of ethics annually?
- have a draft of a limited access agreement or checklist for convicted or accused sex offenders?
- teach *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education in the religious education program, including sessions about child sexual abuse prevention at least twice at the elementary school age level, once at the middle school age level, and once at the high school age level?
- hold an annual adult education program on sexual abuse prevention for parents and families as well as one for religious education teachers?
- have two adults present in each class or program for children and youth as well as in cars transporting young people to activities?
- have a referral list of community organizations and therapists who specialize in sex abuse prevention and treatment in case you need them?
- have support groups or counseling available to those who have survived child sexual abuse?

A congregation with a serious commitment to child sexual abuse prevention will answer yes to each of these questions.

Responding to Sex Offenders

There are those who believe that a convicted sex offender never belongs in one of our communities.

This essay takes another view, based on a review of the literature on sex offenders, interviews with congregations that have successfully integrated a convicted sex offender within adult worship and education, and a theological commitment to the

dignity and worth of all people, even those who have committed morally repugnant acts. The peer-reviewed literature clearly demonstrates that the vast majority of treated sex offenders do not repeat their offenses. As religious communities, we can provide compassion, support, and reconciliation to those who indicated that they have truly changed and have taken responsibility for their actions. We believe in the healing power of involvement in a spiritual home, and in the words of one affirmation heard in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, we commit “to seek the truth in love and help one another.” We must remember that sex offenders who have completed prison sentences and mandated treatment and registered with the state have complied with their punishments according to the court system. As faith-based communities, we can provide support and compassion with awareness and vigilance so that all are safe. (See the case study after this essay.)

In many ways, the person with a history of sex offenses has the same needs for a faith community as the rest of us. But the sex offender needs more to assure that his involvement doesn't pose a risk to the congregation and protect him against false allegations and suspicions. As the Methodist Church of the United Kingdom states,

Such involvement needs to include helping him manage his behavior and not get into situations which in the past led to offences . . . an offender who truly wishes to participate in the life of the church, who realizes the extent of his crime and the difficulty his presence may cause to survivors, and who is truly committed to a new life will understand and accept the need for the imposition of restrictions.”

The fact is that a person with a history of sexual offense against children should never be allowed to work with children and youth or socialize with children of the congregation. No person who has been convicted of or accused of (until all charges have been dismissed)—any sexual misconduct can be permitted to participate in any religious education or youth group activities.

The core response of the congregation to a convicted or accused sex offender is a Limited Access Agreement. The message to the sex offender should be that he is welcome to participate in adult worship and adult social and education activities, but he must covenant with the congregation to avoid all contact with children and youth. A draft Limited Access Agreement that can be adapted is on the UUA web site at www.uua.org/cde/ethics (click on Resources and then click on Sample Policies.)

Many congregations already have policies on how to deal with disruptive individuals. These policies have been developed for:

- perceived threats to the safety of other members
- disruption of church activities
- diminishment of the appeal of the church to its current and potential members

In general, these policies first require the minister to meet with the offending individual to address the concern. If the behavior continues, the offending individual may be asked to leave the congregation for a period of time, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear. Individuals are generally not excluded from the congregation completely except by agreement of the board of trustees and the minister, who communicate the decision to the individual.

In the words of one policy, we strive

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 disruption compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as a people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.

A policy about disruptive individuals can be amended to include a section on sex offenders as most of the same conditions apply. It is good practice for a congregation to develop a draft of a

Limited Access Agreement or checklist that can serve as a template should the need arise.

There are a few ways in which the presence of a convicted sex offender generally becomes known in a congregation. In an ideal world, a person with this background would come to the minister before he started coming to the congregation to discuss limits on participation. Sex offender treatment specialists often encourage their clients to do just that. One community facing this issue wrote, "The board's response to this situation would have been made easier if, before becoming so deeply involved in church activities, the individual had approached our church, explained his situation, asked whether there was some arrangement under which he could participate, and then awaited our response."

This scenario doesn't usually happen. In some cases, people reveal their backgrounds to the ministers. In other circumstances, one congregant may discover that another congregant has a history of sexual offenses. Congregants should know that they should make their concern known to the minister. No matter how the situation is revealed, the congregation should respond quickly by taking the following steps:

- The minister should meet privately with the individual as soon as possible to discuss the concerns that have been raised. The minister may want to check the local sex offender registry before meeting with the person.
- If the minister determines that the concern is justified, the person should then be asked to meet with the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team, which ideally would have been established beforehand.
- The individual should be asked to sign a release so that the minister can contact their sex offender treatment provider and current therapist. If not, at minimum they should be licensed or approved by the state to do work with sex offenders. If the therapist does not have this background, it would be wise to ask them more about their experiences in assessing sex offenders. If you are concerned that it is

not adequate, arrange for the person to be seen for an assessment with an ATSA member at your expense. The therapist and the parole officer should be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood that the individual will re-offend and whether additional restrictions beyond the standard Limited Access Agreement need to be placed on the person's participation.

- If the assessment indicates that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the next step is to develop a Limited Access Agreement. If the professional assessment warns that the person is at high risk for re-offending, it is appropriate to deny that person involvement in the faith community until treatment is successful at reducing the risk. Meeting with the other support people in the offender's life, such as their family, therapist, and probation members, can powerfully demonstrate the faith community's desire to support the person and hold them accountable. If the person has a partner in the community, that person should be involved with developing the Limited Access Agreement as well. All persons with past histories of sexual offenses should be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement or checklist, upon entry into the congregation. Depending on the circumstances, the person may be asked to sign one annually. If the offender refuses to do so, it is then appropriate to deny the person access to congregation functions and church property. An offender who refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement should know that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked to leave by a member of the Response Team or the Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, the local police will be called for assistance.
- The Response Team should meet at least quarterly with any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangement and address any concerns. If

the minister, religious educator, or chair of the Board of Trustees changes, it is important that the departing person inform the new person of this situation to ensure continuity of awareness and continuing pastoral support for the offender. It is important for the Response Team to decide who needs to know about an individual's history of sexual offense. Clearly key people, including the minister, the religious educator, the board chairperson, and the Response Team need to know that the person is attending church, that he or she has agreed not to have contact with children and has signed a Limited Access Agreement or checklist, and that he or she should never be alone with children and adolescents. Some congregations have chosen to tell the entire congregation that a person with a history of sex offenses has joined the church and that there is a Limited Access Agreement in place. In some cases, the identity of the person is withheld to protect their privacy. In other cases, the person's name is revealed.

Reasons for excluding a person with a history of sex offense from all congregation activities include:

- refusal to give permission for the minister to contact the treatment provider and parole officer
- refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist
- report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high a risk for recidivism
- refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement
- refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement

If an individual later decides that they can comply with the conditions for participation in congregational life, the process of assessment should begin again.

If we are to honor our commitments to providing a safe place for all to worship, learn, and socialize, the complex and difficult issues surrounding people with a history of sexual offense must be addressed seriously and with integrity.

We can keep our children and youth safe from sexual abuse *and* we can offer ministry and a congregation home to people who have been treated successfully for sexual offenses. We can honor our most basic Principle that every person has inherent dignity and worth and balance justice, compassion, accountability, and safety.

Creating Policies with Youth Groups

Sarah Gibb

When congregations have healthy, viable, active programs for youth (ages fourteen to twenty), both the young people and the congregations receive incredible benefits. Some of these youth, now young adults, have written about their experiences. Elizabeth Martin of the Fourth Universalist Society in New York City writes,

In YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists), I learned to get along with others. Youth and adults, together. We worshipped, played games, cooked, ate, talked, and sang. I discovered myself. . . I have built friendships I hope to keep for years to come. Most importantly, my memories of YRUU continue to make me feel loved and safe. During the moments when I was in YRUU, I was safe.

And in a *Washington Post* article from a few years ago, Ashley Wilson of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland, speaks of her experience:

One thing I appreciate is that my church believes in full education so individuals can make their own educated and informed decisions. . . . I love my church because it is so supportive of youth . . . this religion has given me a better way to live my life, exposed me to many wonderful people, educated and supported me.

With youth ministry, as with any type of ministry a congregation might undertake, there are risks involved. Some of these risks, like the risk of abuse, are risks in all of a congregation's programs. Others, like the risk of underage drinking, are more particular to this age group. Some universal risks need to be emphasized more with youth than with adults. Anyone in a church can break furniture, but youth are more likely than adults to think of using a couch as a trampoline.

Unitarian Universalist youth are at a crucial phase in their religious and social development; they are simultaneously empowered and vulnerable. They've been raised to think for themselves and by their capacities for independence of thought and action are increasing; yet they are vulnerable due to cultural sexualization and a lack of legal power. Youth in Unitarian Universalist congregations need a safe environment in which they can share themselves in a genuine way and develop as leaders.

Unfortunately well-intentioned adult leaders can actually diminish youth safety by creating and enforcing rules in a *disempowering* way. Our religious movement has too many examples of youth programs being damaged or dismantled because adults in leadership positions forget that youth can be their allies in creating safety. Some examples include church boards barring *all* youth from district conferences because *one* youth was found

smoking marijuana or religious education committees disallowing youth group overnights because someone broke a classroom window.

But our movement also has many positive examples of youth and adults working together to create safety. When a pair of youth playing tag at one youth conference, youth and adult leaders convened to determine who should fix the window and helped identify constructive ways for the hyper youth to channel their energy.

Youth sometimes rebel against rules and structures imposed from the outside. It can be alienating for a youth group to be told, "This is how things are going to be." On the other hand, a lack of rules and structure can be equally alienating for youth, resulting in chaos and compromising their safety.

There must be a balance. Youth, like adults, have a strong interest in safety in youth groups and at youth events. They can work as allies rather than adversaries. In "The Sunday-School: Discourse Pronounced before the Sunday-School Society," William Ellery Channing writes that the goal in religious education with young people is "not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, which rest on no foundation but our own word and will, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment, so that they may discern and approve for themselves what is everlastingly right and good." Discussions about youth group safety are an ideal place to awaken the consciences and moral decision-making skills of youth. This is a chance to see UU values and Principles in action.

Our congregations often take great care to offer well-balanced religious education curricula for children from preschool to eighth grade. We teach children that ours is a religion of diversity, respect, and acceptance. We teach children to honor and uphold the "inherent worth and dignity of every person," and "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." Although many of our congregations do not use formal curricula with high-school aged youth, noted religious educator Maria Harris, author of *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, reminds us that these youth are absorbing a curriculum

nonetheless. The circumstances of the life of the church form what she calls an "implicit curriculum." This implicit curriculum is conveyed to youth in the way the church and its representatives relate to them. Though the explicit curriculum of a church school may be to uphold the seven Principles, an implicit curriculum of conflict and interpersonal power struggle could undermine what the church is attempting to teach. For youth, the implicit messages communicated in the creation of guidelines and policies can have just as a profound effect upon their faith development as the explicit messages about honoring our UU Principles. When the implicit curriculum is in line with the explicit curriculum, a congregation is more likely to foster youth commitment to Unitarian Universalism.

Creating policy well is an essential aspect of doing our job as congregations. Therefore as congregations set out to discuss, develop, or revise safety policies that concern youth programs, including youth in the process is very important. Maybe a group of adults would arrive at the same policy that a group of youth and adults would, but creating different policies, or different rules, is not even half of the point of youth inclusion. Primarily, as Angus MacLean taught, "the method is the message." Inclusion of youth communicates that their congregation honors them and respects their experiences and ideas. Further, when youth have a role in creating policy, they are more likely to feel responsible to and abide by it. On both practical and philosophical levels, youth safety is enhanced when policy is created in a context of youth empowerment in our congregations and conferences. Congregations should consider the following elements as youth and adults assemble to create policies together.

Youth Group Staff

Who are the adults who advise the youth group? Are they volunteer members of the congregation? Are they paid advisors? Are they on the staff of the church? The answers to these questions can help to determine the *accountability* of adults who work with youth in your congregation.

Questions surrounding accountability include: Who selects advisors? If there is trouble who can fire an advisor? Who supervises adult advisors, and how? Who reviews their performance on a regular basis and offers feedback?

When establishing a structure of accountability for adults who work with youth, it's advisable to include youth input in the hiring and selection processes as well as feedback and performance review. Anonymous feedback can also bring up issues that youth are afraid to talk about in person. The Youth Office publishes a helpful guide for this process, "Seven Steps to Hiring a Youth Advisor," available at www.uua.org/YRUU.

Adults working with the youth group must sign a code of ethics under "Resources" on the above. It is also recommended that youth advisors consent to a criminal background check or at least a sex offender background check. Church Mutual, an insurance carrier used by many congregations, offers background screening for employees and volunteers (see www.churchmutual.com).

In staffing a youth group, many congregations often find themselves without many willing adults to choose from. Therefore if an adult with little or no background in youth work wants to be an advisor, advisor training can be very valuable. For more seasoned advisors, YRUU now offers a level two advisor training (see www.uua.org/YRUU to locate a training location near you). Training covers such issues as ethical behavior and safety as well as more basic items like how to lead youth group activities.

Congregations can also set policies concerning the ratio of youth to adults in the youth program. Typical ratios are ten youth to one adult and seven youth to one adult. At Con Con, an annual continental YRUU conference, a ratio of ten youth to one adult is in place. Such ratios are established not because adults need to supervise youth or run all their activities but because youth community is enriched by the positive participation of adults. The Search Institute's research, published in "Forty Developmental Assets," indicates that support from "three or more nonparent adults" is one of the building blocks that

enable youth to develop in healthy, caring, and responsible ways.

In order to staff youth groups responsibly, adults working with youth must acknowledge that they are different from youth and behave accordingly. Adults help youth the most not by acting like youth but by acting like adults and setting a good example. They must also acknowledge that certain boundaries between youth and adults are necessary to create and uphold a healthy youth group.

Just like in the church school, it is advisable to have more than one adult with youth at all times. This helps to protect youth from abusive or manipulative situations as two adults can "check" each others' behavior. The presence of more than one youth can serve the same purpose. In some cases, youth may want to meet privately with an advisor for a variety of reasons. In such situations, it's advisable to meet in a public place, such as a mall or a coffee shop, or at the church with others nearby.

For many Unitarian Universalist youth, the opportunity to give and receive hugs and affection at youth group is vital. Touch is so sexualized in other contexts that it can be a real joy to have friends in YRUU whom they can caress and snuggle with without it being "a sexual thing." Adults who work with youth may crave this kind of casual affection too. However the power differential between youth and adults makes it impossible for adults to participate in hugs or backrub circles as "just one of the gang." Even well intentioned adults can get themselves in trouble in this area because youth can feel violated by an adult's hug even though they might feel comfortable with similar hugs from other youth.

"Jack," an advisor who saw himself as loving and kind would walk up to female youth in coffee hour, put his arm around their waists, and stroke their hair as he chatted with them and their friends. The girls probably wouldn't have minded the same behavior by another youth. But the girls in this youth group felt, understandably, extremely uncomfortable with the advisor's behavior. He was twenty years older than they were. "It just

felt icky,” one of the girls said. That “icky” gut feeling indicated that something was wrong. It was inappropriate for the advisor to initiate this kind of physical contact with the young women in his group.

Adults working with youth are responsible for maintaining boundaries. It’s important, therefore, that they understand that physical affection is not theirs to initiate. Adults also have the responsibility to resist certain kinds of physical affection initiated by young people. While youth should understand appropriate boundaries of youth-adult touch, adults are ultimately responsible for enforcing these limits.

What kind of physical affection is appropriate then? Here is a checklist of guidelines that can help any adult working with youth:

- The touch is initiated by the youth.
- The touch is clearly not intended as a sexual advance.
- The adult does not experience the touch as a sexual advance.
- The touch is taking place in an open setting with other people around.
- The touch is clearly socially acceptable within the terms of the adult’s advisory relationship to the particular youth, i.e., a handshake, a pat on the back, a moderate hug.
- The touch is something both the youth and adult can stop easily if it becomes uncomfortable.

Finally, the receiver of the touch determines whether a touch is appropriate, inappropriate, or confusing. For this reason, no matter what the advisor’s intentions, it is best to err on the side of too little touch than too much.

Advisors are sometimes invited to participate in youth group activities that involve touch, such as back rubs or games like “Ha,” “Wink,” and “Honey, if you love me.” Such touch-oriented games are risky for advisors to participate in because they could involve youth group members sitting on the advisor’s lap and vice versa (“Honey if you love me”), the advisor holding the ankles of

youth and kissing them on the cheek (“Wink”), or the advisor’s head resting on a youth’s belly and a youth’s head resting on the advisor’s belly (“Ha”). Advisors are strongly discouraged from getting involved in such group games and activities.

“Check-in,” a popular element of youth group meetings, involves sharing things that are going on in the lives of youth in the group. Adult advisors also participate in check-in. Two safety issues arise from this situation; one involves the advisor’s level of sharing and the other involves the limits of confidentiality.

As with touch, advisors are reminded not to use the youth group to meet their own needs. An advisor using check-in as a place to unload emotional baggage on the youth group is inappropriate. It changes the dynamic of a youth group so that youth find themselves caring for the advisor rather than the other way around. Sharing details of your love life, tales of last night’s drinking escapade, or sexual fantasies is totally inappropriate. Beyond clearly inappropriate topics, however, there is a grayer zone. Advisors are well-advised to think in advance about bringing up personal topics close to their hearts that would dominate the youth group’s attention and care-taking—topics such as a break-up or pending divorce, a friend’s illness, or a family member’s death. Advisors can address these issues during check-in in appropriate ways that let the group know what’s going on. For example, saying, “Please keep me in your thoughts and prayers as I head down to Florida for the funeral” lets the youth group know that you are sad and that you’re dealing with the death of a loved one. The advisor must not lean on the youth group too heavily for emotional support. Advisors are well-advised to have adult friends whom they can lean on and sources of emotional support beyond the youth group.

Confidentiality is a principle that is basic to most congregations’ youth groups. It is understood that sensitive personal information stays in the room. There are, however, limits to the confidentiality a youth group can and should offer. First, state law may designate youth advisors as mandated reporters of abuse. Certainly religious

education directors are mandated to report abuse. Adults working with youth should make it clear at the outset that there are cases in which information shared in the group, or privately, must be shared with others. Advisors ought to be able to discuss confidential youth issues with their supervisors on the congregation's staff. Regular supervisory meetings between advisors and ministerial staff allow advisors to openly process their experiences and keep the ministerial staff informed of youth program activities. It is important that advisors have the freedom to be totally candid about their youth program experiences in these supervisory meetings. Therefore when discussing confidentiality, advisors can clarify that they reserve the right to discuss what comes up in youth group with their supervisors, who are also sworn to confidentiality.

The UUA's *Youth Advisors Handbook* sums it up nicely:

It may sometimes be difficult to stay in your "adult" role as advisor. The youth in your group are looking for a friend and advisor, but they want you to be an adult one. If you think becoming an advisor is a chance to relive your youth, think again. This doesn't mean that you can't play games or participate with your group. It does mean that you should keep a certain distance or boundary between you and the youth. *They will not be comfortable with you at the same level of intimacy that they share with each other.*

Creating Rules Together

Aside from rules and policies set by committees charged to do so, youth groups traditionally play a role in setting up their own ground rules, or covenants. Some typical rules for youth group activities include:

- Personal information is confidential.
- Everyone has the right not to share personal information.
- Listen when others are speaking.
- Don't interrupt.

- Respect people's differences.
- Use "I" statements when talking about opinions.
- Speak for yourself.
- Alcohol and drugs are prohibited.
- Sex and "hooking up" are prohibited within the youth group.
- Weapons are forbidden.
- Turn off cell phones.

Youth groups often develop lists of rules by brainstorming and then coming to consensus on the rules they will abide by. This gives the members of the group the opportunity to own the rules—to feel that they can both abide by and help enforce them. Adults working with the youth group are expected to abide by the same rules at youth group events. (See *Creating Rules in UU Youth Communities* at www.uua.org/YRUU/resources.)

An adult's primary role in a youth group is that of advisor, not supervisor. Youth and adults work together to ensure the safety of the group. This partnership must be clearly communicated because both youth and adults can assume that the adults are the only ones in charge. A revolutionary aspect of YRUU is that rule infractions are dealt with by the whole group, not just adults. For example, if a young man is found to be drinking alcohol at a conference, the Spirit Committee—a group of youth and adult leaders—will convene to deal with the problem. However, in cases of imminent bodily danger, such as fire or oncoming traffic, a collaborative approach is not necessary. Youth or adults are encouraged in such cases to do whatever it takes to get people out of harm's way. Advisors are strongly encouraged to become familiar with their congregation's safety policies and reporting procedures.

At overnights and conferences, it is not the adult's job to patrol from room to room and sleeping bag to sleeping bag to make sure that no rules are broken. At most conferences and overnights, at least one adult is awake and available at all times that youth are awake. This adult can even go from room to room, checking in on people. But the goal is to relate to youth. If adults (or youth)

see rule infractions it is their responsibility to handle these concerns through the appropriate channels. These channels are often defined in advance of the overnight and include both youth and adult leaders (like the Spirit Committee).

Fire safety policies and procedures as well as parental permission procedures must be followed with youth groups in the same way that they are with children in the church school. Please see “Healthy Religious Education Community” for guidelines in this area.

Education plays a role both in preventing unsafe situations and helping people know how to respond if one does arise. The *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education curricula can help young people recognize and respond to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Congregations must recognize, however, that even the best sexuality education program does not inoculate a person from being a victim or a victimizer in the case of sexual assault and harassment. Teaching the curriculum is not enough. Education must be partnered with clear codes of ethics, expectations, and policies.

Clearly stating expectations and policies at the outset of events serves both to educate and to prevent. If the “no drugs” rule is written in the registration materials and announced at the beginning of a conference, youth are far less likely to use drugs because the expectation that they will not is clear.

Youth Safety at Programs Beyond the Congregation

Most Unitarian Universalist youth groups engage in activities beyond the walls of their own church. These outings may be related to subjects they are studying in their religious education programs or they may involve participation in denominational activities at the regional or national level. In either case, taking field trips and attending conferences with young people requires sound planning and firm safety rules. The essential safety elements of field trip planning are five-fold. They involve safety on the trip itself, emergency contact information, parental permission, communication with the congregation, and liability issues.

To make the trip as safe as possible, the first step is to assess the risk level of the planned activities. For instance, a field trip to a Buddhist temple will clearly involve a different level of risk than a three-day wilderness backpacking trip. Assessing the risk in advance can help the trip’s leadership plan appropriately.

Some safety elements to consider when planning a field trip include:

- written permission from parents or guardians (see the sample permission form included at the end of this book). For trips involving physical challenge, include a clause indicating parental understanding of the risk and releasing the congregation from liability in case of injury or death.
- emergency medical information for each participant that includes signed parental consent for emergency medical treatment, emergency contact information, and health insurance policy information. Keep a binder with this information on hand at all times during the trip and leave additional copies in the church office.
- signed code of ethics forms for all adults accompanying youth on the trip.
- drivers’ names, license information, insurance information, and license plates on file with the church office

Further, congregations may want to set:

- a required adult-to-youth ratio for off-site trips
- a minimum age requirement for drivers (may be required by congregation’s insurance policy)
- a requirement that trip leaders carry first aid supplies, and that at least one participant is certified in first aid and CPR

Youth conferences, gatherings of Unitarian Universalist youth from multiple congregations, are typically held under the auspices of a sponsoring organization such as a district youth steering committee or continental Young Religious Unitarian Universalists. These organizations all have their own safety policies and guidelines for behavior. Sometimes the conference site has its own policies

and guidelines, depending on whether the site is a church building or a privately owned camp. It is the responsibility of the conference's planning committee to negotiate the differences and similarities in the sponsoring organization's and hosting site's policies, creating a unified set of policies, procedures, and guidelines for behavior.

Most youth conferences have trained youth and/or adult YRUU chaplains. These chaplains are caring, understanding, and compassionate listeners who offer personal care—emotional and spiritual—and attention to members of the conference community. Chaplains serve the conference community with active listening, responsive awareness of ethical behavior, and their ability to refer members to certified professionals when appropriate.

Congregations can set policies concerning transportation to conferences. Because some youth will be old enough to drive themselves and others will be too young, the possibility of youth driving is an issue to consider. Additionally, congregations have an interest in establishing the safety and insurance coverage of drivers and vehicles transporting youth, regardless of age.

University Unitarian Church in Seattle, Washington, requires drivers to hold automobile liability coverage for a minimum of \$100,000 per person and \$300,000 per accident. Further, drivers are asked to sign an understanding that their own insurance will provide primary coverage in case of an accident and that the congregation will not compensate them for the use of their vehicle. Drivers are then required to fill out a form with the following information, which is then verified by the director of religious education:

- driver's name and address
- driver's children's names (if enrolled in church school)
- driver's license number, state of issue, and expiration date
- auto insurance carrier and policy number
- whether the driver has been convicted of a moving violation within the past three years
- description of the vehicle: make, model, year,

registered owner's name and address, license plate number and state registered, number of seat belts, whether there is a passenger-side airbag, and whether an insurance card is kept in the vehicle

This information is kept on file with the church office for the duration of the trip. Some congregations (and some district youth steering committees) have created policies requiring youth drivers to be eighteen years of age or older and/or stating that youth can drive themselves but not other youth. The policy that works well for one congregation or one district may not meet the needs of another. It is advisable to consider the length of the trip and the type of driving involved in attending conferences. The ten hours of mountain driving required to bring youth to some conferences in the Mountain Desert District is different from the thirty minutes of interstate and city driving required to bring youth to a typical conference in eastern Massachusetts. Both types of driving have their dangers—your congregation can take these factors into consideration when drafting a policy. Congregations may want to look into what coverage, if any, is offered by their congregational insurance policy for volunteer drivers traveling on church business.

Like all adults working with youth, congregations are well advised to ask adults who drive youth to sign a code of ethics. Congregations that do not permit youth-adult one-to-one time in regular contexts need to consider whether they will permit one youth and one adult to travel together to a conference. Some congregations find this situation acceptable as long as the adult signs the code of ethics. Others would seek travel alternatives.

Youth conference safety begins long before arrival at a conference, or even registration. Safety at youth conferences requires careful planning. First, registration materials must include parental permission forms with emergency contact information, health information, insurance policy details, and a signed release authorizing emergency medical attention. Second, registration materials need to be up front in presenting a code

of ethics for adults (and youth in leadership positions like the conference dean or the worship coordinator). The signed parental permission forms and codes of ethics must be prerequisite for participation in the youth conference. It is important for the conference registrar to make sure that these materials are obtained from all participants.

The book *How to Be a Con Artist: Youth Conference Planning Handbook for Unitarian Universalists* gives more suggestions and details about the conference planning process and is available online at www.uua.org/YRUU/resources/conartist/index.html. This resource shares the following wisdom on creating guidelines for behavior at conferences:

One of the most important tasks for a conference staff is the creation of a safe, nurturing environment in which the community can flourish. The creation of a safe environment requires the creation of rules. Keeping in mind the age and needs of the conferees, brainstorm a list of rules that will allow them to feel safe and cared for. Some districts have established rules for youth conferences. Looking at your list, ask yourselves if the conferees, both youth and adult, are likely to agree to these rules.

- The rules should be stated clearly and concisely on the conference flyer and listed and explained at orientation. Many conference registration forms ask participants to sign an agreement to abide by the rules, listing the consequences of violating rules (being sent home, for example).
- Sometimes an Energy Committee or Rules Committee is formed at the conference (composed of one person from each touch group, the chaplain, and another adult or two). This committee should meet regularly to touch base, to share their perceptions of how the conference is going, and to deal with any rule infractions that come up.
- Clarify among the staff how you will handle rule violations before they occur. Who will be responsible? What will be the

process for decision-making? Where will you meet? If you decide these things when you are cool, calm, and collected, in the frenzy of a conference you can easily follow your established procedure.

- A sense of responsibility to the community and to individuals and a willingness to make compromises to maintain peace in the community are essential to conference unity.
- As a committee, decide what rules and policies will be necessary to hold your conference successfully, peacefully, and with unity. Whatever you decide, the rules must be wholeheartedly supported by the planning committee.
- Part of the Planning Committee's role is to have a good relationship with participants, let them know what's going on, listen to their concerns, and be involved in the community as regular conferees as much as possible.
- The key to gaining support for behavior guidelines is for the community to have a sense of ownership of them. If conferees feel responsible for their own rules and policies, they will be more likely to uphold them rather than if they feel they must live under oppressive rules handed down from a faceless source. The process of creating behavior codes is one of the most crucial aspects of allowing conferees to feel a part of the community.

Further, *How to be a Con Artist* suggests firm enforcement coupled with creativity to address rule infractions:

When conference rules include consequences such as being removed from the conference community, "safe houses" are sometimes established. These are homes where the offenders can stay for the remainder of the conference, removed from the community but without the hassle of arranging transportation home. Creative thinking often can solve difficult problems,

and keeping minds and hearts open to alternatives can produce amazing results.

Youth safety and youth empowerment can co-exist in an environment that nurtures religious and moral growth. When congregations and conference communities uphold the notion that *everything* we do is religious education, the opportunity to create and enforce safety policies is an opportunity to strengthen Unitarian Universalism.

Just Relations in a Faith Context

Fredric Muir

Unitarian Universalists are generally eager to share their faith journeys and I, like many others, have had the opportunity to listen to many of them. Especially among new members, I've heard that being "comfortable" is an important reason for membership in a local Unitarian Universalist community: It used to bother me when I heard newcomers speak of being comfortable; I wanted people who came to church because they were challenged, inspired, healed, and energized, not comfortable. I now understand that *comfortable* doesn't mean lax, stuck in political or social opinions, or stagnant; members mean that the church is a place where they feel safe to question belief, risk speaking out, exploring who they are, or imagining the Holy, Divine, or Transcendent in ways they thought unimaginable in a former faith context. Both new members and long-time members want sanctuary, a religious community where they can be at ease going about a life of pilgrimage—discovering, affirming, and celebrating.

Together we share our faith and order our lives aware of the differences that unite us. We look to our seven Unitarian Universalist Principles as a point of common reference. The first and last Principles are theological statements about what we believe; they derive from and affirm our Unitarian (seventh Principle) and Universalist (first Principle) heritages. The vision we share, our vision of the Beloved Community, is found in the

second, third, fifth, and sixth Principles. The character of our time together and shared journey is described in Principle four, "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Our Principles give substance and depth to the comfort and safety that congregants feel in our faith communities; they shape contexts that encourage risk-taking, authenticity, and vulnerability and support honest religious journeying. (For a good presentation on the UU Principles, see *Articulating Your UU Faith: A Five-Session Course* by Barbara Wells and Jaco B. ten Hove).

In her book *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*, Marie Fortune names seven elements of justice-making in a congregational setting that parallel our Unitarian Universalist Principles. When scripture is added as a third reference, these attributes and characteristics compose a paradigm for just relations in a UU faith context that is not only provocative but gives any UU group a way to look at being a safe congregation. Looking at our Principles, Fortune's wisdom and experience, and scripture together provides an opportunity for every congregation to create a more vibrant and caring community.

The first of Marie Fortune's seven elements of justice-making is *acknowledgment*, which allows a person to feel heard and affirmed in their worth. Our parallel UU Principle is "The inherent worth and dignity of every person," and the scriptural passage is Genesis 1:27.

Many make the assumption about life in a religious context that all people should be treated with “inherent worth and dignity” because they are “in the image of the divine.” Many ask, “If you can’t be safe in church, then where?” But the qualities of inherent worth and dignity do not protect people exempt from abuse; we have learned that not all faith communities are safe places. Reports and investigations of unsafe congregations, abusive clergy, and staff with reputations for boundary violations have unfortunately become common news stories.

Our Universalist heritage guarantees that God loves all people equally: Universal salvation—the theological idea from which the Universalist church took its name—promised that people are not divided into the elect and the damned. All are equal before the Divine; all are created equally with sacred and unique gifts; all are holy creatures of the universe. To divide, abuse, or mislead God’s creatures is sacrilegious; it’s a sin. “Give them not hell, but hope and courage; preach the kindness and everlasting love of God,” early American Universalist John Murray told his followers. Another way to say it is “Affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” To be a Unitarian Universalist is to hold this first Principle close to your heart. This Principle and the seventh, affirming the interdependent web, are the uniting and sustaining theological affirmations that bind us together.

In a safe congregation, in a congregation committed to just relations, acting on this Principle means ensuring that congregants feel heard and making sure they know they are valued just as they are. Two Unitarian Universalist programs in particular encourage congregations to live out the first Principle. The Welcoming Congregation program assists UU communities who want to address the challenge of homophobia. In a similar way, participation in the Journey Toward Wholeness program is an important way to welcome and value all people. “Journey Toward Wholeness” is the name for the UUA’s entire anti-oppression, anti-racism, multicultural initiative. There are several paths on this journey—the paths to dismantle

racism, eradicate heterosexism, abolish ableism, and combat economic injustice. The Journey Toward Wholeness reflects a common, overarching process grounding our transformation and includes all of the programs, resources, strategies, committees, resolutions, and alliances that make up Unitarian Universalism’s anti-oppression efforts. These two programs assist congregations in welcoming, hearing, and affirming those whom society has traditionally marginalized, whose dignity and worth have been questioned or denied.

Welcoming people into our Unitarian Universalist safe communities—whoever they are and whatever their past—requires vigilance and perseverance.

Fortune’s second element, *restitution*, is the renewing of right relations and the patching of broken wholeness. Unitarian Universalists describe this as “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” in our seventh Principle, and Proverbs 25:28 affirms that a person “without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

Unitarians were ostracized, imprisoned, and martyred for their theological belief that Sacred Reality (God) could not be divided but must be experienced and known in its holiness and wholeness. Reductionism is a common way to view almost everything including religion, but Unitarianism has always affirmed the theological belief that “God is One.” Reality is an interdependent web that cannot be broken down into pieces. Moreover, breaking the web is destructive to all living things, including human beings and our congregations.

Unitarian Universalist congregations are covenantal religious communities, not creedal ones. Our communities are built on the promises we make about the way we want to be in relationship with each other. (Often, these promises are implicit. “Writing a Covenant” in this book will assist your congregation in making your promises and relationships explicit.) The interdependent web of relationships that comprises a congregation does sometimes break; it’s guaranteed that promises will be broken. But as the line from Proverbs

suggests, without structure and a strong congregational web, renewal won't happen. Creating just, safe congregations is essential to a UU vision of the interdependent web: When our covenant of right relationships is broken, when relations are not honored and respected, then restitution and restoration are necessary. Restorative justice is a model of healing that has wide appeal and great potential because its focus is on forgiveness and healing relationships (see the Safe Congregations Panel report, "Restorative Justice For All: Unitarian Universalists Responding to Clergy Sexual Misconduct" at www.uua.org/cde/csm.html).

Center County Unitarian Universalist Church had an experience with restitution that is illuminating. They had written a covenant several years ago. It appeared in their newsletter and Sunday order of service bulletin. It was a public document in which they took great pride. A year after they had written the covenant, a member of their professional staff had an affair with a church member. Clearly the covenant was broken (as was the staff member's professional code). This crisis was compounded when the church's leadership chose to handle the matter secretly. The staff member resigned and leadership (and others who knew about it) chose to say nothing. Two years later, with rumors and accusations growing, demands for explanations reached a point at which something had to be done. Leadership feared the worst. District staff was invited to strategize with a leadership team. Two important pieces of the plan involved restitution: *listening to* and *affirming* the hurt and anger of those who felt excluded, betrayed, and confused and *renewing* the covenant and *mending* the web of relationships. Members wrote a new covenant together. This was authentic and bold action, which is what living the interdependent web requires.

Restitution—living right relations and patching the broken wholeness—means committing to live as a Unitarian Universalist, making the interdependent web of life essential and central to one's being and doing. In a congregation, creating a context for restitution means creating a faith community where just relations are a priority.

Marie Fortune's third element, *truth-telling*, involves looking at all of the circumstances and dimensions of a particular problem or incident. This closely parallels our fourth UU Principle affirming "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning." and the related scriptural passage is Daniel 13:1–16. His relentless commitment to justice and fairness saved Susanna's life and brought intergity to his community.

After a crisis hit the Center County congregation, their leadership thought, as others have, that handling the issue in secrecy was the right way to proceed; they weren't sure why the congregation had to know or be involved (see "A Systems View of Congregational Life" and "Boundaries and Confidentiality" for more background and depth on these issues). A free and responsible search for truth and meaning often involves a delicate and wise balance. Indeed, the fourth Principle is the centerpiece of not just the UU Principles but of a just relations paradigm.

When the president of the board at River's Edge UU Congregation received a letter from a professional staff member detailing emotional and sexual harassment by a member of the church, the steps the congregation followed highlighted at least three common challenges that leadership teams can address in their efforts to find the truth in a responsible way.

First, a congregation can rarely keep secrets effectively. If the leadership team feels that privacy is needed, then confidentiality and anonymity may be called for, but secrecy rarely works. It can lead to rumors, attacks, and misinformation that hurt and anger members. River's Edge tried to keep the harassment charges a secret among the fifteen members of the board and other staff. In a couple of weeks the entire church knew some version of the story.

Be deliberate and intentional; don't rush. Often a congregation yearns to get back to normal. Doing the hard work means involving all who need to take part, hearing them out. The River's Edge leadership team began meeting immediately, setting up interviews with everyone involved; the team had little time to reflect on

what had happened and where they were going. As a result, some team members became angry or depressed, and several even left the church.

Lastly, don't try to go it alone. UUA staff have walked with other congregations during similarly tumultuous times: Congregational leadership must call on UUA expertise for support. River's Edge leadership and members were embarrassed by what had happened; they thought that they could handle their crisis with the help of church members who were social service professionals, and some lobbied against going outside the church. As a result, the leadership and congregants lost valuable time and eventually the trust of members.

Compassion is another key element of justice making, the ability to feel the suffering of another person. Our second UU Principle is "Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations," and the scripture is from the *Dhammapada*, "Thousands": 1: "Better than a thousand empty words is one beneficial word, hearing which, one becomes at peace."

Compassion isn't about taking someone's side or defending them; it is simply being present with them. In a faith context, *compassion* means sharing a walk with, supporting, affirming, standing with a person who is hurt, oppressed, confused, or frightened. This is hard work. Eventually you may gain greater clarity about a person's circumstances, but this is not the goal of compassion.

The religious leaders of one congregation were stunned when they learned that a member was the primary suspect in a brutal sex crime perpetrated against another church member. Without getting in the way of the police investigation, which was very intense, the congregation's ministry team supported each member, showing compassion and equity and offering spiritual support, counseling, and ongoing contact as well as the congregation's best wishes and encouragement. Eventually a tip led the police to arrest a man—a neighbor of the victim—who later confessed. Justice, equity, and compassion were the congregation's goals for both of its members, not choosing sides.

Sometimes passive acknowledgements can demonstrate compassion. For example, when a church or fellowship posts its community's Safe Congregation Covenant or Welcoming Congregation certificate in a conspicuous location—whether in its building or on its web site—it communicates to visitors that the setting is one where justice, equity, and compassion are integral to the life of its members.

Protection is the fifth element of justice-making, the acknowledgment and acceptance of what has occurred and the action taken. Protection is inherent in our third UU affirming "acceptance of one another." As Deuteronomy 10:19 says, "You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

When a well-liked but relatively new member of one church confessed to his minister that he had served a prison sentence for child molestation, the minister explained that he could not keep this a secret. He would have to talk with his director of religious education and members of the church's board. This was not information that could stay between the minister and the member. The religious professionals, board president, and an outside state-appointed social worker (who was already assigned to the member as part of his transition from prison) met with the member and wrote an agreement that everyone signed, stipulating clear, uncompromising boundaries and rules of behavior for the member. Violation would result in his immediately being asked to leave the church. This parish minister was protecting his congregation from potential abuse by a member with appropriate, fair, and timely safeguards. The member was also being protected from himself since the agreement gave him clarity about boundaries and expected behavior.

Acceptance of others—protecting the stranger or vulnerable one—doesn't mean an absence of guidelines and rules; rules and guidelines are ways of showing acceptance and protection since they communicate clarity. For example, knowing your state's child protection laws and implementing a religious education safety policy that includes teacher background checks shows parents that

church school leadership cares enough about its children to create a safe environment for them.

When a congregation takes adult misbehavior seriously, members and friends will report their concerns, which was the case with Bo, a lonely, intensely gregarious, middle-aged single man. On Sunday mornings and at other church events, Bo would seek out others and often monopolize them in conversation. During a morning discussion group, Bo met Adam, who was visiting. Bo took an instant liking to Adam and began calling him, writing him notes, stopping by his place of work to say hello, and leaving messages when Adam wouldn't return Bo's calls. Soon Adam said that he couldn't come back to church because of Bo's excessive attention. Marie, the parish minister, took the initiative and called Bo. After verifying everything that Adam had reported, Marie told Bo that he had to "back off" and allow people their space; he was turning people away from him rather than welcoming them into friendship and the congregation.

As the passage from Deuteronomy suggests, we all know what it feels like to be a stranger; it can help to know what the expectations are in a new setting. We can protect, welcome, and accept others when we create and work within community structures that are clear, identifiable, and beneficial to all.

Element six of justice making is *vindication*, freeing ourselves and others from blame and making things right. Our parallel UU Principle is "the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all," and the scriptural passage is from *Dhammapada*, "Happiness": 9. We will never know all the hurt, pain, abuse, and neglect that congregants have had to endure and carry with them. Yet *vindication*, from the Latin root meaning "to set free," can come in unexpected ways with simple but authentic expressions of compassion and thoughtfulness.

"Simple Solutions," an article in *Christian Century*, tells the story of John Salveson, who was sexually abused by his parish priest for seven years. When he entered the University of Notre Dame his abuser followed him there, first as a vis-

itor and later as a graduate student and employee of the university. Salveson had ended the inappropriate relationship with his priest earlier, but it wasn't until he met his future wife that he realized he wasn't at fault. He started what became a nine-year battle with church authorities to have the priest removed from active ministry. One day he bumped into Father Theodore Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame, on a train and told him about the abuse. Hesburgh responded by saying that he wished Salveson had come to him when he was a student as he would have removed the priest. When Hesburgh got to his stop on the train, he walked half way down the aisle to get off, then came back and said to Salveson, "If no one has said it to you, I apologize for what happened to you." No one had apologized before. Abuse victims, says Salveson, want three simple, inexpensive things from the church: acknowledgement of the abuse, an apology, and some help paying for resources to get their lives back together.

Similarly, when Unitarian Universalist Association vice-president Kay Montgomery boldly and compassionately apologized to delegates at the 2000 General Assembly for the inaction and lack of vindication in response to victims and survivors of UU clergy sexual misconduct, her words were welcomed as a step toward peace, liberty, and justice. Montgomery said,

Let me say this as simply and unequivocally as I know how: The Association has largely failed the people most hurt by sexual misconduct—the victims and survivors. These brave and bruised people have, more often than not I suspect, been left lonely, confused, afraid, angry, and betrayed—un-ministered to. What I feel about this is great sorrow and regret. I am profoundly sorry. And I pledge that this gap, this failure, will be remedied. We will change and learn and in this untended area, we will bend toward justice.

"Bending toward justice" is just that—bending, leaning, and moving in the right direction. While we cannot always feel another's turmoil, agony, or anger, we can be present with them, offering

empathy and acknowledging their experience by naming their offender's acts of abuse as wrong. There can be a sweetness of peace and tranquility in this bending. The freedom that comes from the peace, liberty, and justice associated with vindication can be powerful and transforming.

Fortune's final element of justice-making is *accountability*, the acceptance of responsibility and the willingness to explain one's actions. Accountability is crucial to our affirmation of "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations," and the parallel scriptural passage is Exodus 18:18b: "For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."

A distinguishing and unique attribute of Unitarian Universalism is congregational polity. Our commitment to polity is reflected in the UU Principle that "affirms and promotes the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process." This Principle recognizes the wisdom in Jethro's comment to Moses: "You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." When one person carries too much authority, when there is confusion over who is responsible, when leadership acts in relative isolation, the congregation is not sharing the work of its faith.

Institutional accountability is a key factor in creating a context for just relations. When a congregation integrates measures that acknowledge shared power and accountability, a system is in place that all can see and to which all can refer. Several aspects of congregational process and leadership are important in the creation of organizational safeguards and accountability:

- *Institute term limits for all positions of leadership.* From board and committee positions, to religious education teachers and advisors, to representatives who serve the church in community and UU organizations, a regular and predictable rotation of leadership is important. Some version of term limits prevents a sense of "turf." Rotation encourages fresh thinking and new leadership shares the joys and challenges of membership and faith.

- *Control access to buildings and records.* Power comes in different forms. Whether it's a key to the building or the password to a computer, when one person or a small group keeps control of these symbols of power a subtle erosion of the democratic process becomes likely. It's advisable to monitor and control access to these important tools of congregational life.
- *Consider carefully whether partners should serve at the same time.* Depending on the nature of the leadership positions, partners may want to turn down roles that would put them in conflict; neither their relationship nor the community needs this potential tension. If both partners wish to be involved in serving their congregation, roles can be found in which they can avoid conflict. When in doubt, ask one to wait until the other has completed their term.
- *Fill paid staff positions with non-members.* When members serve in paid positions, accountability can be difficult to maintain. The tensions from the dual relationship—relating to the congregation both as a member and as a paid employee—can be overwhelming for the employee and church leadership. When a church chooses to employ a member (and sometimes this is the only possibility or it makes the most sense), careful and direct consideration needs to be paid to how the relationship will change.
- *Be clear about who's in charge.* There are many models that can help a congregation address issues of accountability, responsibility, assessment, evaluation, and staffing. The model that a congregation chooses should reflect its membership and staff size, programs, and history. The point here is not to recommend one model over another but to strongly encourage church leaders to provide clarity so staff, members, and friends understand who is responsible for maintaining a faith context that promotes just relations.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process are characteristics of our Unitarian Universalist congregations with which

few, if any, disagree. UUs take pride in our heritage and how we express it. Doing the essential work of living out this Principle can be challenging. In all congregations, especially in smaller ones, creating and sustaining organizational safeguards of accountability can be a big help. And they are necessary for shaping a context for just relationships.

People arrive at our faith communities wondering if they will be safe to imagine the Divine in unorthodox and meaningful ways; safe from physical, emotional, and spiritual stress or harm; safe to be in relationship with companions who share the religious quest; safe to be honest and authentic; and safe for partners, children, and families. Being attentive to what makes a congregation a place that values just relations can help to make it safe in all these ways. We should expect nothing less.

Working for Safety and to End Oppression

*Tracey Robinson-Harris with Taquiena Boston,
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Work on congregational safety is linked to work to end oppression. A welcoming and safe congregation is one that encourages all of us to bring our whole selves into religious community. A congregation that practices right relations is one that respects and values the whole person and understands the blessings of differences for our life together.

We are often confronted with stories in which issues of oppression, such as stereotypical attitudes, discriminatory behaviors, and prejudicial values, overlap with issues of safety such as harassment, abuse, and sexual exploitation. So often these stories are tragic.

In our congregations, collisions between safety and oppression may be less traumatic than the stories that make the pages of our newspapers or the nightly news. Even so, they are always harmful to those individuals who experience them and to our collective well-being as Unitarian Universalist congregations. We struggle with ways to be hospitable to new families who may be different from the core membership of the past twenty-five to fifty years. These new families may be gay, lesbian, and transgender families; families of color; or multiracial/multicultural, transracial, or interfaith families. How we welcome the newcomer who is different is an opportunity to live out our UU Principles. How we develop inclusive attitudes and expressions,

practices, and structures to include these newcomers in congregational life—worship, religious education programming, social service and social action, governance, fellowship, and care-giving—is evidence of our attention to health, safety, and wholeness.

Understanding where safety and oppression collide in the lives of our congregations is an essential first step toward shaping an intentionally supportive system where safety and anti-oppression work complement and balance each other. It requires at least two things: experience and information from the standpoint of persons who are part of historically marginalized groups in U.S. culture (and too often in our congregations) and understanding that the experience of safety for Unitarian Universalists who enjoy the privileges of status (as straight, white, able bodied, or male, for example) is mediated by that individual and collective status. Those of us with such privileges face the difficult necessity of discerning the difference between lack of safety and loss of comfort.

Our consultation, conversation, and commentary focused on four questions, which guide the rest of this essay. Thanks to those who contributed to this effort; their insights, observations, and reflections shape our comments and conclusions.

How can we develop a fine-tuned sense of the difference between safety and comfort? One of my consultation colleagues responded to this question

simply: If it feels uncomfortable move toward it. If it feels unsafe pay attention. When we confuse safety and comfort—saying we feel unsafe when what we really feel is uncomfortable—we undermine our efforts for change, too often slowing or diverting them until we regain some sense of ease with the way things are. For those of us with the privilege of status, we must learn to allow our lack of comfort to be a sign to pause and take stock: Is this discomfort a sign that we are practicing an unhealthy spiritual discipline that doesn't promote change and transformation?

Whatever the topic or issue in the work of creating safe congregations, asking questions about the links between safety and anti-oppression can help us view the work to which we are called—to create communities that are truly welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all those who want to call Unitarian Universalism home. Asking the question does not imply a quest for or the need for “the perfect” congregation, nor for any of us to have it all figured out. Seeking answers to how safety and anti-oppression serve our vision of the Beloved Community implies a desire to understand the things that matter most, those things that cannot be traded off by persons from historically marginalized communities who are or want to be Unitarian Universalists.

How can we create safe congregations that allow everyone to bring their whole selves to their communal religious life with respect and dignity? What parts of identity do we expect folks to check at the door so they can come in and be like us? What parts of our identities do we protect by ensuring their centrality in the life of the congregation? And at what cost? What parts do we project onto the congregations? And do we lose by doing so? How can we shift from assumptions about “being like us” to understanding what it can mean to “be us”? For ours to be a diverse and inclusive religious community we must attend to the institutional work of how “my identity” is reflected in “our identity” and how we value the blessings of our differences for our life together.

- For some newcomers to a Unitarian Universalist congregation, certain trade-offs may be

requested or implied. Consider these from the perspective of persons from historically marginalized communities:

- I will not trade off around worship. Worship leaders and ministers must deal with issues that affect my life and my community.
- I will not trade off musical style in worship.
- I will not trade off for a church that feels like it belongs to “them” and is not mine or ours.
- I will not trade off for a leadership role in which I am type-cast.
- I will not trade off for a church where my children are treated as show pieces because they are “different” or where youth who are “different” are feared as dangerous.
- I will not trade off common ground for the lowest common denominator.
- I will not trade off doing spiritual work in religious community for trying to do spiritual work in a colorblind religious community.

Our hospitality must go far beyond the friendly greeting at the door; it must be the hospitality of a congregation that is safe enough to enter, safe enough to remain a part of, and safe enough for the diverse and sometimes complex and painful spiritual journeys we bring with us and share. The welcome extended at the door can be dissolved or dismantled by the experiences inside. Safety in an anti-oppressive context can become meaningless and a welcoming invitation can become cold as soon as a visitor moves beyond the front door and past the welcome table.

Consider these two examples, which are repeated in the multiple ways we address anti-oppressive issues, initiatives, and projects. A member from an historically marginalized group brings to the attention of the congregation's governing board a request to host a congregational welcoming meeting for families of color, multicultural families, and transracial adoptive families. The proposal includes a request for an educational program to help these families address identity and multiple identity issues as well as family relationship dynamics. The board

listens to this member's request and proposal and votes to accept it with the mandate that the member implement it. What are the challenges and pitfalls of this approach—a member from a marginalized group charged to develop their own inclusion, education, and leadership program? Then consider the strategy used in many congregations of forming identity or affinity groups based on cultural, gender, age, sexual orientation, or religious background to work on identity issues. Stories abound of the various ways these identity groups become separatist groups with no cohesion to one another or to the well-being of the whole congregation.

Being a safe and anti-oppressive faith community is not easy. But if we are to welcome the blessings of difference into our congregations, we must be open and prepared for the challenges and tensions that will come with our vision of right relations.

What does safety look and feel like to persons in our congregations who are from historically marginalized communities? What does safety mean to one of our eldest elders? Someone with a physical disability? What does safety mean to a gay or lesbian person? An African American? A multi-racial person?

Colleagues in the consultation asked themselves questions like these: Do I want to fight to make myself comfortable enough to stay?

- Now what do I do? I thought it was safe and welcoming for me here and I've invested a lot. Now I don't feel safe but rather like some "exotic prize."
- Do I find enough of me reflected here so that I can truly become a part of this community?
- Is this congregation connected to my life, my identity, and my struggles in substantial ways? (For example, one of our congregations had the courage to deal with its own past in connection with the transatlantic slave trade and publicly acknowledge that history.)
- Is this rush to greet me about me or about making them feel better about themselves because I am here?

- Will people simply step out of my way because I use this wheel chair? And if they step aside will they speak to me?

What are the structures of cultural and institutional oppression, as well as the experiences of personal bias that undermine safety? The list of cultural and institutional issues is long:

- Our ability to be inclusive is challenged by identities that are not readily apparent. We assume we know more than we do and treat persons in ways that are inappropriate or harmful.
- We schedule meetings assuming that everyone has ready access to transportation and a reasonable commute.
- We do not offer childcare but encourage families to take part in events and committees.
- We do not offer alternatives to financial pledging, not acknowledging that some of us may be unable to make a monetary commitment. Service as an alternative may not work for our eldest elders.
- Congregational leaders are randomly selected and not given appropriate training in leadership skills. Often our decision-making processes exclude many potentially excellent leaders.
- Often our worship is inaccessible in terms of hearing, speaking, and representing human experience. We need to pay attention to the real lives of persons from historically marginalized communities.

Learning from Our Experience

How are acts of oppression a violation of ethics and safety? What can we take from our considerable knowledge of how sexism and sexual harassment work and their effects that can help us see the links between different forms of oppression, understand them, and transform them? What can we take from our considerable experience with work for civil rights for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender persons? What have we learned in our advocacy and witness work for same-gender marriage rights?

Our experience teaches us that oppression is normative in our culture and in our congregations. Engagement in that norm, which may be unconscious, serves a maintenance function by allowing oppression to continue. Raising our awareness of our own complicity in those norms can create discomfort for those of us with the privilege of status. For example, consider this UU “norm”: There is a definition of the Unitarian Universalist “we” that assumes there are no persons of color in Unitarian Universalism, even when persons of color are in the room where this norm is being articulated. Our Principles and growing faith calls us to expand our understanding of justice and of who is included in Beloved Community.

Our culture—individual, family, congregational, and national—has not prepared us for the work of transformation. How can developing anti-oppression competency help us create safer congregations? One way to enter this conversation is to think about the experience of recent immigrants and how we can value, respect, and understand how they live and move in the world so that they might have the choice of seeing themselves as Unitarian Universalists. Another is to simply remember one of the now-standard guidelines offered to groups engaged in dialogue and reflection together: We each speak out of our own experience and listen to the experience of others without labeling or redefining it.

Let us dwell on these questions:

- What if we act as if Unitarian Universalism is for everyone and stop meeting newcomers by assessing whether they “fit” with us?
- What if we see ourselves as bridge builders rather than screeners, helping folks find a way in rather than screening them out?
- What if we see ourselves as “cultural guides,” offering to accompany guests and potential members on an immersion experience into Unitarian Universalism, connecting them to the best we have to offer?

All of these questions about safety, oppression, trust, and inclusion are lenses through which to

view the Unitarian Universalist community and the safety that those who move through our doors rightfully expect. Let us remember to reach out to one another and tip the justice scale with what poet Bonaro Overstreet calls “the stubborn ounces of our weight” toward respectful inclusion and responsibility in our faith communities.

Healing

Anna Belle Leiserson and Phil Thomason

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived to take up the position of minister at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville was that things seemed very much like they had in my previous experiences with UU congregations. People took a cautious approach to professional ministry. Congregational leadership was struggling with policy and structure. Some individuals felt they were on the outside of things. And hurt feelings rose to the surface at surprising times.

I learned over time that things were more complicated than I could at first discern. I knew the history of the congregation's experience of misconduct and the conflict that ensued. What I could not have known was how this experience affected the individuals involved and the congregation as a whole. I'm very grateful that many individuals helped me understand and share in this ministry to a broken community.

Every community is, of course, broken. And every individual in some way wounded. Yet when the wounding and the brokenness take on an institutional life—the process of healing can be very challenging.

In this ministry there have been moments of great frustration and exhaustion. Sometimes it feels the process will never end. And so it is with ministry. We do not ever make ourselves completely whole. And so our communities are never completely whole. The work of healing does not end. I cannot imagine work more important, though, than the work of rebuilding trust so that ministry is possible.

Each time my breathing would quicken with frustration or my sigh would reveal my exhaustion I would discover the possibility of ministry on the other side. It very rarely came from my own insight or creativity. Instead it would surface from the honest vulnerability of someone asking for help. Sometimes the plea was direct. Often it took time to translate. Every honest sharing was a gift that led to the possibility of ministry. Through years of deepening trust and openness, the possibility of ministry here has grown.

Because of the courage of individuals who spoke up for the importance of right relationships, this community has come a long way. Because of the honest and direct way the congregation has dealt with its experience, I believe it is better equipped than most to face woundedness and the need for healing. Because our members have learned about the importance of understanding power and boundaries in their relationships with each other and with their professional leadership, I believe they are better equipped than most to have healthy relationships.

I hope this story will offer some insight for other communities. I know that it is offered with courage and in a spirit of hope.

—Rev. Mary Katherine Morn

In February of 1993, at a hastily called congregational meeting, our minister confessed that he was “addicted to lust.” He went on to say that he

had had one affair while serving as our minister but that he had been “sober” for many years and was in an addiction treatment program. In the weeks following this confession, rumors of additional affairs surfaced along with other allegations of inappropriate counseling. A congregant filed a formal complaint with the UUA’s Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) and a petition was signed by dozens of church members asking for a full investigation by the MFC.

Our minister had served our church for over ten years and was much beloved and respected by many congregants. Over the next several months the congregation began to split into several factions. One felt the minister should be forgiven for any past transgressions and provided him support, while another group wanted an investigation to go forward. Some members attempted to stay neutral while others simply stopped attending church.

Antagonism in the church community mounted and hostility was open at the annual meeting where, for the first time in the church’s history, an alternate slate was nominated from the floor. During the summer, representatives of the MFC conducted an inquiry into the complaints against our minister. In September, the MFC issued a letter concluding that our minister was “guilty of conduct unbecoming a minister.” This letter also revealed our minister’s admission to multiple affairs during his ministry. The board circulated this letter throughout the congregation and it left many with a sense of betrayal and sadness. Those who felt that the bond with the minister had been irretrievably broken prepared a petition to the board requesting a congregational meeting to decide whether to retain or dismiss our minister. Others organized an effort to protect the minister. “The Board from Hell,” as it dubbed itself, was split, hammered by negativity from all sides and haggard from too much work. Realizing that a congregational vote on this issue was inevitable, the board scheduled a meeting for early December. Prior to the meeting the minister voluntarily resigned. The minister’s supporters tried to force a recall of the board, but in another rancorous congregational meeting the board was retained by a two-to-one margin.

In the months following the minister’s resignation, the various factions within the church attempted reconciliation. Outside counselors worked with congregants to try to find middle ground and consensus on how to move forward. However, our differences were so great that one of the counselors stated that ours was “the worst conflict he had ever experienced.” After months of contentious meetings and workshops, approximately fifty members who had supported the minister left the church and formed a new congregation.

When the church split, it was the culmination of over a year filled with anger, bitterness, and despair, likened by some to a Greek tragedy. Trust was shattered and many congregants, particularly those who had questioned the minister’s behavior, felt marginalized or worse. Old friendships were sundered and the social fabric of the church unraveled. Attendance plummeted, financial resources were drained, and there was a sense of collective exhaustion in those who remained.

Ten years later, we are a vibrant, strong, loving, and growing community—anything but a Greek tragedy. While some in the congregation still question whether or not we have healed, nearly all agree that in most ways we have. We have many new and long-time members (including some of those most hurt in the crisis), a first-rate staff, an exceptionally strong lay leadership, and an incredible variety of activities happening every week. The question is: How did we do this?

The reality is that we were trail-blazers and made many mistakes, particularly early on. To quote one congregant, “It was our misfortune to be the leading edge.” However, it is our hope that in sharing our experiences, we reduce the likelihood that others will repeat them or that we will put ourselves in a situation where this would happen again. While we had never heard the term *restorative justice*, much less its specifics, nonetheless we blindly found our way to many of the same answers.

Looking back, the key ingredients were:

- acknowledging the abuse of power and breach of trust
- developing lay leadership

- taking care in hiring the next minister
- working intentionally
- restructuring and developing new policy
- emphasizing compassion, respect, honesty, and apology
- accepting that we are not fully healed

Acknowledging Misconduct

It is an astonishing but consistent truth that even in churches where misconduct is clear and egregious, the response is typically to minimize or deny its significance. The stories of clergy misconduct that we read in the newspapers are typically reflections of religious leaderships that are unable or unwilling to acknowledge that there have been abuses of power or that such abuses have damaging consequences. Without this acknowledgment, religious organizations become stuck and healing is impossible.

Judith Lewis Herman articulates this pattern most clearly in her work, *Trauma and Recovery*:

When traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides.

It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement and remembering.

Even to this day, our church must cope with the tendency to “speak no evil,” to conveniently pretend that what happened was not so bad, that it was someone else’s issue, that it is time to move on. “Move on” can be a code phrase for “Be quiet and don’t bother me with this ugliness.” But looking at it another way, moving on is what healing is all about and we can only do that by seeking the truth. Once a congregation can embrace the fact that it has experienced misconduct, understanding

has begun and the community has started on the path to healing.

The experiences of various members of our congregation were, of course, vastly different, as were their understandings. Yet through the persistent, even stubborn, work of individuals and the leadership widespread understanding has grown. Two pivotal points for our congregation helped that understanding grow. The first was when the Ministerial Fellowship Committee sent its finding of conduct unbecoming a minister to the board. The second was when the board sent a copy of this finding to all members of the congregation. Without these two acts, it is unlikely that healing would ever have happened.

Developing Lay Leadership

Once we understood the misconduct, it became apparent that power within the congregation was skewed and lay leadership had withered. Over the years, more and more of the operations of the church were handled by the minister. We had lost our foundation of community. A significant aspect of healing was the work of finding that foundation again.

Some of the key people, in particular members of the board, looked at why they were part of this community and began to develop their own vision for the congregation, finding new ways to lead the church. During such a crisis, the person who has the best chance of making a difference is the board president. Our board president for 1993–1994 set the tone and under extremely difficult circumstances, quickly developed strategies that made enormous differences in the long term. In particular she found techniques to help us listen to each other better. With the board itself, she made sure that every member talked during a meeting, often going around in a circle. With the congregation, she encouraged members and friends to write their thoughts to the board, resulting in a flood of mail. In general, she modeled a new style of leadership and improved communication.

While no longer “from hell,” the next three boards continued to work under fire and to retool models of leadership. They opened avenues of

communication even more and made a series of tough decisions. For example, the 1994–1995 board decided to implement a formal “Listening Process” for the entire congregation. It was a controversial move, but in the end it was clear that the board had made the right decision.

At a more insidious level, many congregants felt that the same few people were always in power positions. In particular, the Nominating Committee was structured in such a way that it could have abused its power. In theory, it was possible for one person to be the nominating chair for life. To address this, we began with a partial revision of that section of the bylaws. While the new language and process were both labored, the changes addressed this problem for the interim until we completely rewrote the bylaws a few years later.

In two other areas, worship and publicity, the unexpected loss of our minister forced lay members to take leadership roles. The Worship Committee had to arrange services for a mid-sized congregation without a minister for eight months, and did so admirably. The Publicity Committee established a newsletter policy and routinely produced excellent information. To this day these remain lay functions, and in general the council and program committees have assumed more responsibility for the everyday operations of the congregation.

Hiring the Next Minister

We took great care in calling our next settled minister, waiting three and a half years. This deliberate plan of action was developed by the board and affirmed with a congregational vote. Following eight months without a minister, we had three years with five interim ministers, which the UUA made a special effort to help us find.

While not all agree, most people in the congregation think having so many interims was helpful. It showed us what different kinds of healthy ministry look like, which was a revelation to many of us. All of the interims brought something to the table and helped move us along in different ways.

Meanwhile, the Search Committee had plenty of time to do its work, figuring out what we most

needed and the right person. Some of the characteristics they emphasized were integrity, listening skills, a solid understanding of boundaries, and knowledge of our history and who we were.

Today when congregants talk about our healing, they typically mention the minister first. People who suffered through the worst of the crisis say that her presence is very healing and that she won’t let congregants mistreat each other in the ways they did in the past. She did not push us too hard too fast and she makes a constant effort to be fair to everyone. But perhaps her greatest gift to us is that she loves us. By the time she came, we felt we had a terrible reputation in the UUA. While some of it was probably deserved, much of it was not, and she saw us for who we were—our gifts and our foibles—and made it clear she wanted to be with us.

Intentionality and Process

In addition to the minister, congregants who went through the crisis frequently credit the leadership’s many different ways of working on these issues for the community’s healing. While quite a number of the efforts were not that helpful, the gestures themselves meant a lot and they bought us time until we found the right approach. The silence was broken and we were developing a culture of openness. Overall the church leadership worked intentionally and deliberately for as many years as we needed, offering everyone opportunities to talk and process what happened.

Many of us attended the Mountain School for Congregational Leadership and the lessons we learned there undergird our efforts at healing. The school placed a great emphasis on process. For the last ten years we have been concentrating on just that—process, process, process—at a congregational level, within the board, in the council, in certain committees (such as the Ministerial Search Committee), at staff meetings, in lay ministry training, and at individual and small group levels.

In the early stages of our crisis, when we were severely fractured, we eventually learned (through trial and painful error) to divide those hurt into as many groups as needed and to minister to each

accordingly. The major groups, with overlap among them, were:

- the lay leadership
- the staff
- the victims (a term we struggled to accept as accurate for our situation)
- the “messengers” (those “shot” when they tried to challenge the minister’s behavior)
- long-time members
- newcomers
- people who temporarily withdrew or were otherwise unaware of the situation
- those who continued to support the former minister

The last group (supporters of the minister) formally named themselves the Phoenix Group and consumed much of the leadership’s time and attention in 1993-1994, while other groups, particularly the victims and messengers, remained marginalized during this early period.

Ultimately this group resolved to “exit with dignity” and formed another congregation in town. While the fractures between the two churches are still felt and make it difficult to have a cohesive local UU presence to this day, most agree that the split was necessary to make healing possible.

Our congregation made three major programming efforts to support the healing process and a number of smaller ones as well. The smaller efforts included things like one-day workshops and a group of congregants training with Marie Fortune, a consultant on the issue of clergy sexual abuse. The first major effort took place early on, in January of 1994, when money given by the UUA was spent on a consultant trained by the Alban Institute. He worked primarily with the board and the Phoenix Group, focusing on the conflict but not the misconduct.

A year later we did a formal “Listening Process,” funded by the remaining money from the UUA and a grant from the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program. This was another pivotal point in our healing. We hired three grief counselors, who lis-

tened to anyone who wished to talk to them over the course of several months. The very fact that their specialty was grief was a revelation for some of us—precipitating awareness that grief and loss accounted for much of what we were experiencing. The counselors listened to both individuals and small groups, letting us decide how best to work with them. At the end of the process, they issued a formal report, presenting it orally and in writing at a congregational meeting. While not everyone found this process personally helpful, many did. It was by far the best opportunity to talk, assimilate, and heal that we had experienced as a congregation up to that point. It was particularly helpful for the victims and messengers, giving them their first real venue for personal expression about the experience.

The third major program effort took place in early 2001, when the church was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. During the previous four months we had celebrated the first four decades of the church. But then we were faced with our troubled years—the 1990s. It was difficult for us to see anything to celebrate, largely because the damage was so profound that the first things we thought of were usually the pain and the mistakes and not the many things that we did right. But the minister used this opportunity to air what had happened with the help of the lay ministers, small discussion groups, and a sermon. Some of those most involved in the church during the crisis said that even though so much time had passed, this opportunity to communicate and listen filled in critical gaps in their understanding. The gift of time detoxifies some of the issues, so it can be particularly helpful to revisit what happened much later.

Restructuring and Policy Development

Many of our efforts at recovering from what had happened took place at the congregational level and were focused on looking into the community. But we were not alone, and we could not have accomplished what we did without the association and its structure.

Of course, this too was an area fraught with challenges. In particular, misconduct in a UU

congregation throws the inherent tension between congregational polity and our covenant with the association into high relief. Our church was typical in that its leadership knew almost nothing about misconduct but bore the responsibility for addressing it. Whether or not associational leadership knew or cared much about the situation, they were limited in what they could do. Victims were particularly lost in both the power struggle and the gaps created by this dynamic. In part because of experiences with our congregation, the association is working to improve this area.

The UUA also encouraged us to rework our core documents and gave us samples to work with. In the past ten years, we have either written or rewritten our vision and mission statements, our covenant, and our bylaws. We have also written a child abuse policy. In general, we have restructured church operations from the top down, with an eye toward instituting appropriate checks and balances of power and emphasizing why we are together.

Compassion, Respect, Honesty and Apology

While process helps congregational healing and structure strengthens associational ties, it is critical for individuals to experience healing as well. A congregation that has experienced misconduct cannot heal without work at all three levels (associational, congregational, and individual). As our current board president observes, "Healing is very personal. Until everyone is healed to a certain point, the group can't heal."

A number of the formal processes, particularly the Listening Process, set the stage for individual healing. The restructuring cultivated a different behavioral ethic. For example, we now have leadership that models what being in right relation looks like and is willing to help us individually work toward that goal with each other, no matter how long it takes.

In 1993 and 1994 people in our congregation said awful things about each other—some true and some not—or they didn't talk at all. We suffered from an extremely toxic mixture of painful

truths, hurtful misunderstandings, manipulative behaviors, and silence. We had to sift through all of this in order to heal.

But we did just that in many different ways. To quote a congregant, "It was the little things. I felt barriers because of what people had said about others. When someone reaches out, it's like starting again." Individual apologies, while they can't be documented, were among the most central pieces of our healing. Typically they meant a lot to both to those receiving the apology and to those apologizing. For the former, it acknowledged their pain, affirmed their value, and built a bridge back into community, while the latter often experienced a sense of relief because they were freed to let go of a burden of guilt or shame.

Individual healing also happened when individuals got involved in different ways. Some congregants who had never participated in religious education, for example, chose to work with our director of religious education and teach during those difficult years. For them it felt healthy and maintained a good connection with the community. In general, our religious education program and our music program provided arenas for involvement that were removed from the most intense areas of difficulty. We were fortunate to have a steady and compassionate director of religious education and music director during this period.

Accepting That We Are Not Fully Healed

Healing is an ongoing process that requires us to be proactive and conscious about what has happened and ensure for now and as far into the future as possible that we are truly a safe congregation. It is unlikely that we would be as strong a church as we are today without this very difficult experience. We have lost that youthful naiveté that bad things can never happen to us, and yet we have solid community, faith, and hope. A critical part of this is having struggled with exactly what healing means.

Healing from misconduct is not like healing from a cut on the arm or an illness. It does not mean returning to where we were before. Trust was

broken and we have had to both rebuild it and also establish a new kind of trust. For now, at least, we understand that we are all wounded by life and that's okay.

Hopefully we can retain this humility and never bow to the forces to "just move on." As a congregation, we made good decisions to be a healthy, functional, forward-looking institution, but part of that has been accepting that there will always be congregants who are permanently scarred and congregants who minimize or don't understand what happened. We continue to work with such people as we are able.

If We Could Do It Again

Looking back, things we would do differently and would advise other congregations to think about are:

- having good policies in place. While it's never easy to write such policies, it's much easier to do so before rather than after, much less during, a crisis.
- having professionals clarify what boundaries really are. *Boundary* is a loose term that people frequently misuse, but there are some very helpful concepts behind it that are core to a healthy congregation.
- spending more time finding ways to minister to those harmed by misconduct and the ensuing conflict.
- focusing less on the dynamics of conflict and more on the dynamics of abuse of power.
- finding good outside experts to help, particularly in the earliest stages. We hope the UUA develops a list of such experts and monitors their work.

Our Future

Although we have been working on this for ten years, the work is clearly not over. There are at least four things we still need to do as part of our healing. First, while we have a policy to protect children from abuse, we do not have policies to protect the staff and adult congregants. These need to be written. We also need to write a narrative of our conflict

and embrace it as part of our history. Work on this is underway but finding the right words is difficult. We need to recognize that the messengers among us spoke truth to power and were doing social justice work. Even now it feels too close and personal to have an institutional shift in this understanding. Finally, we hope one day to have some art (most likely stained glass) to commemorate what happened to us. We went through a trial that made us strong and validated that Unitarian Universalism stands for something. The art will represent that something. We are proud of what we have accomplished and of our faith but have little to show for it. Art has the potential to represent what we have gained.

As Judith Lewis Herman tells us, "*The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.*" If ever there was a demanding victim, it was me, Anna Belle Leiserson. After trying unsuccessfully to resolve issues directly with our former minister, I ended up writing a formal letter of complaint in April 1993. I knew when I wrote the letter that it would result in an arduous process, but I had no idea just how bad it would be. Ultimately it was much more difficult than the original incidents. I will never forget the hatred I experienced—congregants who would not talk to me or who openly questioned me but not the minister, the unfair labels applied to me (like "mentally unbalanced," "puppet," and "man-hater"), and mass mailings sent to most of the congregation that demeaned and misrepresented what I had done. I could cite multiple egregious violations of all of our Principles perpetrated in the name of Unitarian Universalism.

Most people in my situation leave and with very good cause. So why did I stay? There were two reasons. First, while I was deeply confused by many things, it was always clear to me that what we were experiencing was, simply put, wrong. Either Unitarian Universalism would live up to the test I was unintentionally putting it through or it wouldn't. Either it was a faith whose core values represented social justice and compassion or it was a hypocritical religious institution with a core of virtuous words that were in fact empty.

More importantly, I was always in touch with UUs who affirmed in many ways that what was happening was indeed wrong. They came from surprising places. The most important were my family and a few people in the congregation. The latter I had not known before all this happened, though now they are my dearest friends. But I think also of the person I met on the UU listserv who wrote to me as often as I needed; of a minister representing the Ministerial Fellowship Committee who believed me; of our director of religious education, who went out of his way to speak with me at a time when almost no one would; of the UUA staff member who helped me reach the president of the association because she thought he needed to hear what I had to say; and others. Their faith and many acts of kindness and compassion carried me through the difficult times and gave me hope that Unitarian Universalism was what I had thought it was.

From this foundation I have slowly reintegrated into our congregation and our faith, finding a depth and meaning to Unitarian Universalism I had never imagined. While perfect justice is not possible, the healing discussed in this essay has constituted more than adequate justice, and like most victims, that's all I really need. I am, in fact, very grateful for it all. I know I am extremely fortunate to be part of a community that would do so much. But there is more; my circle of friendships widens and deepens all the time. About a year ago a new friend who is bisexual shared with me her joy that she can be who she truly is in our congregation. As she said this, I felt that old familiar stab of pain but had new words for it. I still could not quite be who I really am at our church—almost, but not quite. Like a person who is gay or lesbian, I must choose whether to come out over and over and over again. Simply to have this understanding is one more unexpected step in the journey of healing, but to have it affirmed as a more universal experience and to find a kindred spirit is a gift. If this is redemption, and I believe it is, then redemption means being open to all of life's curve balls—doubt, sorrow, connection, joy, wonder, and community—with intention. We engaged first, then acted, and now we remember.

Toward a Vision of Sexually Healthy Faith Communities

Debra W. Haffner

This book is designed to help our congregation's lay and professional leadership specifically reflect on the issues of safety, health, conflict, comfort, and justice in the context of becoming a safe congregation. These are issues that affect our relationships on all levels of congregational life. It is no secret that some of our congregations, like the congregations of other religious denominations, have been roiled by cases of clergy misconduct, sexual abuse, harassment, and safety issues.

Unitarian Universalism was one of the first denominations in the country to address the issues and challenges of sexual abuse prevention, exploitation, and behavioral and safety issues. We published *Creating Safe Congregations* in 1997. We are proud of our strides in other areas of sexual health and justice as well. For the past forty years, the UUA has been a leader in sexual rights and sexual justice. As early as 1963, we passed a resolution supporting the legalization of abortion. In 1970, we passed a resolution to end discrimination against homosexual and bisexual people. Our Welcoming Congregation program is a model for other denominations. In the late 1960s, we developed the *About Your Sexuality* program; today's *Our Whole Lives* curriculum series is a model for comprehensive lifespan sexuality education in faith communities and in schools. We have been leaders in the marriage equality movement, with UU ministers on the front lines; the first same sex

marriage in the state of Massachusetts was performed at the headquarters of the UUA.

In the light of these inspiring accomplishments we are also called to ask: What else might our congregations do to address sexual health and justice issues? Can our congregations say that they are both safe and sexually healthy faith communities? Is there more to do than offer *Our Whole Lives* to middle school youth, become a welcoming congregation, and write and adopt a safe congregation covenant and policy? Let us begin by looking at the "Definition of Sexual Health" issued by U.S. surgeon general David Satcher in 2001:

We must understand that sexuality encompasses more than sexual behavior, that the many aspects of sexuality include not only the physical, but the mental and spiritual as well, and that sexuality is a core component of personality. . . . Sexual health is not limited to the absence of disease or dysfunction, nor is its importance confined to just the reproductive years. It includes the ability to understand and weigh the risks, responsibilities, outcomes, and impacts of sexual action and to practice abstinence when appropriate. It includes freedom from sexual abuse and discrimination and the ability of individuals to integrate their sexuality into their lives, derive pleasure from it, and to reproduce if they so choose.

I coined the term *sexually healthy faith community* to identify a faith community that is committed to fostering spiritual, sexual, and emotional health among the congregation and providing a safe environment where sexuality issues are addressed with respect, mutuality, and openness. A sexually healthy faith community promotes the integration of sexuality and spirituality in worship, preaching, pastoral care, youth and adult religious education, and social action programs. It makes a commitment to a sexual ethic that is not based on a double standard and understands that dealing with sexuality is an issue of spiritual wholeness. By addressing sexuality openly and holistically within the faith community, we model that sexuality and spirituality are inextricably connected.

A sexually healthy faith community is characterized by:

- religious leadership that has experience and training in worship, preaching, and counseling about sexuality issues
- sexuality education for children and youth and a variety of services and programs to support the sexuality needs of the adults in the community
- a commitment to welcoming and valuing all people and all types of families into the faith community as full participating members
- explicit policies against sexual exploitation or harassment of any kind within the faith community
- an active program working for sexual justice in the congregation, community, state, and nation

All faith-based communities are called to address the sexuality needs of their congregants. Every clergy person counsels parishioners who are struggling with sexual issues. Every faith community knows that the sacred gift of sexuality can be abused or exploited; congregants experience domestic violence, adolescent pregnancy, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, homophobia, and sexism. Many denominations have recognized the importance of sexuality education for teenagers; some, including the UUA, have made a commit-

ment to sexuality education, from kindergarten through the elderly years.

Some congregations have developed a steering committee on sexuality issues to conduct an overview assessment and develop a plan to improve the sexual health of the community. Groups of lay and professional staff can be trained in sexuality to become sexuality resource persons or sexuality task forces. These task forces can offer programs on religion and sexuality within their congregations, survey congregation members on their interest in and commitment to becoming a sexually healthy faith community, or choose a specific area, such as working on policies for sexual abuse prevention.

I suggest five building blocks both for a sexually healthy faith community and as part of a larger vision, a vision of a sexually healthy Unitarian Universalist community:

- sexually healthy religious professionals who can offer sexually healthy worship, preaching, and pastoral care
- administrative policies that support sexual health and justice
- lifespan sexuality education
- welcoming and affirming congregations
- social action for sexual justice

(For more in-depth discussion, see *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities*.)

Religious Professionals

One of the most important building blocks for a sexually healthy congregation is a staff of sexually healthy religious professionals. Sexually healthy religious professionals—clergy, religious educators, pastoral counselors—are comfortable with their own sexuality, have the skills to provide pastoral care and worship on sexuality issues, and are committed to sexual justice in the congregation and the society at large. Ideally, clergy and religious educators have formal graduate level coursework in human sexuality as part of their training, although unfortunately few seminaries offer such courses. At minimum, however, ministers and

religious educators should take graduate-level courses that include basic knowledge of human sexuality, an opportunity for students to increase their awareness of their own sexual attitudes, and basic counseling and education skills. Unitarian Universalist religious professionals need at least some familiarity with sacred texts on sexuality, Jewish and Christian teachings and history related to sexuality, the UUA's positions and policies on sexual issues, and opportunities to examine the impact of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia in their ministry.

Clergy and other pastoral counselors must also be skilled in handling the sexuality-related needs of their parishioners. This can include a wide range of issues, such as couples struggling with issues of sexual dysfunction, infidelity, or divorce; parishioners seeking support for the decision to come out as gay or lesbian; families dealing with teenage pregnancy or a gay child; and men and women trying to overcome a legacy of childhood physical and sexual abuse. Every clergyperson and chaplain can think of times that congregants have raised sexuality issues in their private offices. Ideally, clergy will have opportunities to take workshops on counseling congregants with sexual concerns. All clergy should have certified sex counselors and therapists in their referral networks (for a state listing of certified sexuality professionals, see www.aasect.org. A list of national hotlines that can help with referrals is on page xxx).

A sexually healthy religious professional also feels comfortable preaching and leading worship about sexuality issues. Talking about these issues from the pulpit can help congregants understand that sexuality is a sacred gift; that it can be talked about in a respectful and serious manner; that the clergy person is comfortable talking about sexuality issues (and therefore open to discussing these issues in pastoral counseling); and that there is a prophetic progressive voice on sexual justice.

Sexuality issues can be integrated into the worship life of the community. Congregations might offer candlelight services of remembrance for people with HIV/AIDS, people who have lost

pregnancies, and survivors of abuse. Sexuality issues can be addressed in newsletter columns, bulletins, and announcements. The congregation can offer celebrations of puberty; ceremonies for divorce, remarriage, and adoption; and services honoring those in middle age (some congregations have had "crone" services for women in menopause) or elders. Infant baptisms, namings, or dedications can provide an opportunity to celebrate new life, diverse families, and the commitment to all children in the congregation.

To begin the process of making your faith community sexually healthy, ask the following questions to help determine where changes might be made:

- Have the minister(s) and the religious educator(s) taken a graduate level course or intensive workshop on sexuality issues?
- Is there at least an annual worship service that focuses on a sexuality issue?
- Does the congregation take notice of opportunities to address a sexuality issue, such as Women's History Month (March), Child Abuse Awareness Month (April), National Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Month (May), Gay Pride Day/National Coming Out Day (June), and World AIDS Day (December)? Does the minister have certified sex counselors or therapists in their referral network, including someone to call on for consultation and supervision when needed?

Administrative Policies

There are a variety of policies and procedures in every congregation that give subtle messages about the community's commitment to sexual health. Most of our congregations have by-laws that state that they do not discriminate on the basis of sex, marital status, and sexual orientation. But many have not yet amended that list to include a commitment not to discriminate against people who are transgender. New member packets may mention that the church is a Welcoming Congregation without mentioning a commitment to serving and welcoming all families, including

those without children, single adults, single parents, grandparents raising children, same-sex couples, and those in alternative living arrangements. A review of the congregation's bylaws, newsletters, Sunday order of service, new member packet, and bulletin boards may give clues to the congregation's commitment to sexual health issues. Having pamphlets available from local Planned Parenthood, BGLT organizations, AIDS organizations, the domestic crisis center, and sexuality counseling services, as well as books about sexuality and religion in the library both provides resources for congregants and signals openness to engaging sexuality issues.

Informal sexuality education takes place in every congregation, and it is conveyed by the gender, age, family formation, and sexual orientation of the clergy person, religious educator, president of the board, members of the board of trustees, and religious education teachers. Is there gender diversity? Age diversity? Family diversity? Whether one gender, age, or marital status predominates in certain types of positions or there is diversity displays a subtle message about sexuality. Consider if there is a way the leadership of the congregation can become more inclusive and diverse. Assess your congregation's unofficial message about sexuality in light of the following questions:

- Do by-laws, hiring practices, and personnel policies address
 - nondiscrimination on sexual orientation?
 - nondiscrimination on gender identity?
 - gender equity?
 - sexual harassment?
 - inclusive language?
 - family diversity?
- Do the bulletin and membership packet include information about
 - nondiscrimination on sexual orientation?
 - nondiscrimination on gender identity?

- gender equity?
- sexual harassment?
- inclusive language?
- family diversity?

- Does the congregation's library include books on sexuality issues?
- Is there information about community referral sources on sexuality issues posted on the bulletin board?
- Are pamphlets on sexuality issues available in the social hall or vestibule?

Lifespan Sexuality Education

Since the late 1960s, UU congregations have been committed to sexuality education for our middle school youth. In the 1990s, we expanded that commitment to develop the sexuality education series *Our Whole Lives*, which includes curricula from kindergarten through adulthood. Indeed, our curricula (developed jointly with the United Church of Christ Board of Homeland Ministries) are a model not only for other denominations but also for many public and private schools across the country. And we provide short-term intensive training programs for the volunteers and educators who teach the program.

At the time of this writing, a majority of our congregations teach *Our Whole Lives* at either the middle school or high school level. However, fewer are teaching the elementary school curricula or the adult program. Many congregations have a long history of teen sexuality programs but few such programs for adults. Sexuality education is a lifelong process. Our needs for education and information about sexuality change throughout our lives. A single twenty-five-year-old has different sexuality needs than a fifty-year-old who is recently divorced and dating again. A couple who has been married or partnered for twenty-five years has different needs than a new couple considering a commitment ceremony. Seniors have needs for different information than those in midlife or those in young adulthood. People with

small children have different sexuality needs than those whose children have returned to live at home after college.

Current life situation is not the only factor affecting our adult sexuality experience. Many adults have experienced brokenness and suffering about their sexuality, often originating decades ago. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse carry issues into their adult lives. For example, 20 percent of women who have been forced to have sex report that they are depressed compared to 12 percent of women who have not. Many adults struggle with issues related to their sexual orientation or the orientation of their children and spouses. Many of our congregants experience sexual difficulty in their marriages; studies estimate that as many as four in ten couples experience sexual dysfunction and 4 percent of married couples are no longer having sexual relations. Unfortunately, most congregations are silent about these issues while people in the pews struggle alone without the support of their faith communities. Congregations can offer formalized sexuality education for adults as part of their adult education programs and host expert sexuality speakers, discussion groups around current movies or books with sexual themes, and courses for parents on how to provide sexuality education for their children.

Hosting support groups for adults on a variety of topics can be a helpful way to address the particular sexuality needs of congregants. A minister, social worker, or psychologist in the congregation can facilitate such a group. Lay groups, also known as self-help groups, can also be effective. These groups are co-facilitated by people in the group who share a particular issue in their lives. In the case of such a group, the minister or congregation coordinator identifies one or two people who are interested, helps to find a place and time, and announces the meeting in the newsletter or bulletin. The group then runs on its own. Small group ministry groups or covenant groups may also want to periodically select a sexuality topic as a theme for the group to discuss.

Support groups can include single adults or one representative from each age group (singles 25–35, 35–55, over 55); divorced people; widows

and widowers; survivors of sexual abuse; couples preparing for marriage; couples who want to enrich their marriage or relationship; people who are HIV positive; parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender children; and BGLT groups, to name some examples.

Consider what new programs your congregation might offer after answering the following questions:

- Is *Our Whole Lives* offered for
 - parents?
 - grades K–1?
 - grades 4–6?
 - middle school?
 - high school?
 - young adults?
 - adults?
 - elders?
- Are the *Our Whole Lives* instructors observed at least annually by a professional sexuality educator, and do they have access to a professional sexuality educator for supervision and consultation?
- Does the youth group develop guidelines for teen sexual and romantic interactions in the congregation each year and display them prominently?
- Do you offer support groups for adults with specific sexuality issues?

Welcoming Congregations

The UUA has been one of the leaders in the movement to welcome people of all sexual and gender orientations. We passed our first policy barring discrimination against gays and lesbians in 1970 and have led the religious community in ordaining BGLT clergy and performing same-sex unions and marriage ceremonies.

A sexually healthy faith community welcomes and includes the concerns of BGLT persons in worship, education, programming, social justice, and social events—indeed at every level of congregational life.

Many congregations consider themselves open and affirming of people of all sexual orientations and ask why they need to go through the eighteen-month process of formally becoming a Welcoming Congregation. There are at least three reasons. One is that it allows the congregation to be listed as a Welcoming Congregation on both its own and the UUA's web sites, directories, and other lists, thereby signaling to the community a commitment to these issues. The process also gives people a chance to examine their own homophobia and heterosexism in small safe groups, an opportunity rarely provided elsewhere, and encourages dialogue between BGLT persons and heterosexual members of the community in a way that may not have occurred previously. And finally, it is an opportunity for community building and renewed commitment to hospitality and inclusivity.

Many of our congregations that are committed to sexual orientation issues are less familiar with how to welcome people who are transgender. Indeed, many of us have not been educated about issues of gender identity and confuse it with sexual orientation. Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation or biological sex. *Sexual orientation* refers to who we are physically, emotionally, and romantically attracted to, whether we are homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual. *Gender identity* refers to our internal sense and external expression of our gender role, whether we are masculine, feminine, androgynous, or transgender. *Biological sex* refers to our physical anatomy and our chromosomes; we may be male, female, or intersex.

The word *transgender* covers a wide spectrum of people whose internal sense of their gender identity differs from the gender role society expects from someone of their biological sex. Transgender people include those who are intersex (formerly known as hermaphrodites), cross dressers (people who prefer to present in the clothes of the other gender, often as a way to express their internal sense of gender, to reduce anxiety, or for erotic reasons), transsexuals (including people who have had hormone treatment and/or surgery to change their bodies into the

other biological sex), and people who express their gender as a third gender, not identifiable as male or female. There may be transgender people in the congregation who have completed their transition and whose histories are unknown to the minister and congregants; other people may be beginning or in the midst of a transition or may vary their gender presentation from week to week.

Just as our congregations needed to educate themselves on sexual orientation, so we need to educate ourselves on gender identity and transgender issues. An adult education program or a sermon on this topic might be an important first step. A panel of transgender people telling their stories can be a very powerful education tool. Adding transgender people to congregational policies against discrimination and welcoming congregation policies is an important signal. Providing at least one bathroom on the premises that is unisex provides a comfortable way for a transgender person to use the facilities. Congregations can reach out to community organizations that serve transgender people to let them know the community is open and welcoming. (For more information, contact the UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns.)

There are many ways to demonstrate a commitment to being a sexually inclusive congregation. Use the assessment questions that follow to think about what your faith community can do toward this goal:

- Does worship include diverse family forms and orientations in its language and content? For example, are the words *spouses* and *life partners* used in place of *husbands and wives*? Do you say "marriages" or "marriages and committed relationships"?
- Do you provide commitment celebrations, same-sex union ceremonies or marriages, and memorial services for BGLT persons and their partners and families?
- Are same-sex couples welcomed to share their lives and stories during worship or programs for adults?

- Are BGLT persons welcomed and a commitment to sexual inclusivity explicitly mentioned in brochure and newsletters?
- Does the congregation have relationships with local BGLT organizations for referrals and member support?
- Does the congregation seek new members from the BGLT community through outreach, including notices in targeted media?

Social Action

Unitarian Universalist congregations have strong traditions of community service and involvement in social action. We are called to offer prophetic witness for sexual justice in the society as a whole, which can include advocating for sexuality education in schools and community agencies, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and an end to discrimination and violence against sexual minorities.

Involvement in social action on sexual justice issues can help the congregation

- demonstrate support for all people in the community, not just the people in the congregation
- make visible the congregation's commitment to sexual justice
- increase the congregation's visibility and influence in the community
- provide an opportunity to work with other faith communities
- engage individual member involvement in the community
- provide a forum for community-wide partnerships

Perhaps most importantly, involvement in social action on behalf of sexual justice provides a visible demonstration that there are many religious points of view on sexuality issues. Too often, only the viewpoints of the religious right are present in community controversies on sexuality issues. The media often only includes this point of view in discussions of such issues as the morality of abortion,

gay rights, and sexuality education, pitting a religious voice from the religious right against a secular voice from the mainstream. Active involvement by clergy who support sexual justice is essential to assure that all religious voices are heard and considered. So is the involvement of the laity in these issues. Many conservative faith communities have visible public roles when such issues as sexuality education, sexual rights for sexual minorities, and reproductive choice are debated, but mainstream and progressive congregation members are often not present in equal numbers.

UU congregations that have experience with teaching *Our Whole Lives* can play an important role in supporting comprehensive sexuality education in the community's public schools. Our experience in providing comprehensive sexuality education to the children and youth in our faith communities allows us to articulate the importance of such education and address the myths that arise. We can ask our individual members to support sexuality education for all of the community's children. We can hold school board forums during elections, post information about a local pro-sexuality education coalition in our newsletters and on our bulletin boards, and write letters to the editor. We can encourage our religious educators and ministers to become involved in community partnerships for comprehensive sexuality education, providing a religious voice at these meetings. In the case of a controversy over the type of sexuality education offered in our community schools, we can encourage our clergy and social action committees to actively support comprehensive sexuality education and resist abstinence-only education, providing a religious voice during school board meetings and community forums. (For more ideas on how a congregation can support sexuality education, see *A Time to Speak* by Debra Haffner and *The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health, and Justice: Resources for Communities of Faith*, edited by Sarah Gibb. For a theological framework that supports comprehensive sexuality education, see the "Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Sex Education" at www.religiousinstitute.org.)

Some congregations have voted to endorse the Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing as a sign of their commitment to sexual justice and health. The Religious Declaration is a clarion call to the nation's religious denominations, congregations, and clergy to support a positive vision of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. It urges religious leaders and faith communities to provide comprehensive sexuality education, advocate for sexual and reproductive rights, and promote the full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in congregational life, denominations, and society at large. The Religious Declaration has been endorsed by more than 2,300 clergy and theologians from more than 35 faith traditions.

Congregational endorsement of the Religious Declaration becomes the congregation's value statement on sexuality issues. Copies can be posted on bulletin boards, inserted into congregational handbooks, periodically run in the bulletin or newsletter, and given to new members. Posters of the Religious Declaration suitable for framing can be ordered from the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing (www.religioustinstitute.org).

The Social Action Committee can conduct a variety of activities in support of sexual justice. They can

- conduct letter writing campaigns on behalf of legislation that is pending at the local, state, or national level on these issues
- hold community forums on emerging sexual justice issues
- participate in school board meetings, state legislative hearings, community rallies, and other events on issues like comprehensive sexuality education, reproductive choice, and marriage equality.
- display a bulletin board on sexual justice issues in the foyer or meeting room
- encourage the clergy to appear in the electronic media, speaking on behalf of a progressive religious view on sexuality

- write opinion pieces for the local newspaper or cable station

Ask the following questions to help determine what changes you can make in your congregation to demonstrate your commitment to social action in support of sexual health:

- Are you familiar with the UUA's policies and resources on
 - reproductive choice?
 - sexuality education in schools?
 - HIV/AIDS?
 - sexual orientation?
 - gender identity?
- Are the congregation's positions on these issues periodically included in the newsletter or bulletin?
- Does the minister endorse the Religious Declaration and is a copy of the Religious Declaration prominently posted?
- Do you hold community forums on sexual justice issues? How often and on what issues?
- Do members of the congregation participate
 - in school board meetings?
 - state legislative hearings?
 - community rallies?

Becoming a sexually healthy faith community is a process. This program is designed to help us make real our commitment to being a community of right relations. Our faith is created and sustained by our relationships with each other. The authors and editors of this workbook hope that as you read the essays and work through the workshops that follow, your communities and relationships will be strengthened. We look forward to learning about your experiences with this program.

Our first Principle provides the foundation for our dedication to these issues. There is nothing more important than how we treat each other. A sexually healthy faith community respects every person's dignity and worth, affirms sexuality as a sacred part of life, and commits to fostering spiritual, sexual, and emotional health.

As Unitarian Universalist congregations and members of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we can be proud of our leadership in sexual health and sexual justice issues. Many of our congregations have done the hard work of becoming Welcoming Congregations, implementing life span sexuality education programs, and instituting comprehensive policies to keep congregants safe from sexual abuse and harassment. We have spoken out prophetically for sexual justice. Through our actions, we have demonstrated how to be a Beloved Community. We are a model for other faith communities struggling with sexuality issues.

But we can do more. We are called upon as people of faith to acknowledge the inherent goodness of sexuality as part of creation and to respond with diligence to abuses of this sacred gift. We can commit ourselves to creating not just a congregation but a world where every person can embrace their sexuality with holiness and integrity.

Ultimately a commitment to developing a sexually healthy faith community needs to permeate every aspect of the community. The clergy, religious educators, board members, key committee members, parents, and youth must all share the commitment to sexual and spiritual wholeness. Sexual health is not limited to the adult or youth education program or the clergyperson's willingness and ability to discuss sexuality issues. These are important, but they are not enough. We are called in community to promote sexual morality, justice, and healing.

Healthy and Safe Congregations

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Ministers
- Religious educators

Goals

- Explore current understandings of issues of abuse and interpersonal violence
- Learn the range of safety issues facing UU congregations and healthy models for responding to these issues
- Develop strategies to address issues of health, safety, and right relations in UU congregations

Materials

- Copies of “Healthy and Safe Congregations” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Healthy and Safe Congregations” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to “A Network of Mutuality” by Martin Luther King Jr., reading 584 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and invite everyone to read responsively with you.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 15 minutes

Read this passage by Qiyamah Rahman:

Our Principles, which reflect on the interconnectedness of life—the significance of social justice, democracy, equality, and our search for truth—reflect those values that so many of us yearn for and seek to live out in community. Efforts to identify and address factors that compromise the safety of our Beloved Community have given rise to new and challenging initiatives, such as safe congregations and right relations.

Invite participants to respond to this question: How do the UU Principles challenge us to make our congregations safer for all people?

Exploring 15 minutes

Rahman notes two topics that have motivated the UU discussion of safe congregations, child safety and clergy sexual abuse. Ask participants to discuss the following questions:

- Has the congregation treated these issues like they are important and worth engaging?
- How have they been addressed?

Closing 5 minutes

Invite participants to name one way the faith community is a safe sanctuary worthy of trust. Then sing together "Gathered Here," hymn 389 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Ministers
- Religious educators

Goals

- Explore current understandings of issues of abuse and interpersonal violence
- Learn the range of safety issues facing UU congregations and healthy models for responding to these issues
- Develop strategies to address issues of health, safety, and right relations in UU congregations

Materials

- Copies of "Healthy and Safe Congregations" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of the Table of Contents of *The Safe Congregation Handbook* for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Healthy and Safe Congregations" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to "A Network of Mutuality" by Martin Luther King Jr., reading 584 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and invite everyone to read responsively with you.

Focusing 15 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 65–75 minutes

Pass out copies of the Table of Contents of this book to all participants and ask them to consider the five sections of the book. Their task is to compose a list of the congregation's programs, events, processes, and policies and the personnel and volunteers who address these areas of

congregational work. They should include areas of accomplishment and success as well as areas of challenge and concern.

Depending on the number of participants, they can work as individuals or be divided into groups. For example, a group of twenty can be divided into five groups of four with each group assigned one of the five sections of the book. Ten people can split two groups of five, with both groups summarizing their lists regarding all five sections of the work. Other participants might be asked to reflect on the information and materials shared. Ask each group to record its responses on newsprint and report back to the whole group after 30 minutes. If participants work as individuals, engage the whole group in a discussion about their responses.

Integrating 15 minutes

Invite commentary and discussion on any of the five sections where challenges and concerns were named. Ask each participant to name two or three aspects of safety and risk management that the congregation needs to address and that they would be willing to work on over the next six months to one year.

Closing 10 minutes

Affirm the presence and participation of every person. Invite participants to name one way "our faith communities are sanctuaries of safety worthy of our trust." Then sing together "Gathered Here," hymn 389 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Ministers
- Religious educators
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Gain knowledge and understanding of the different forms and definitions of interpersonal violence
- Become comfortable communicating feelings, values, and UU beliefs in relation to abuse and interpersonal violence
- Identify prophetic and pastoral strategies for coping with interpersonal violence
- Develop educational strategies for your congregation to address interpersonal violence

Materials

- Copies of "Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice, three candles, and matches
- Your congregation's covenant and mission statement

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Toward and Understanding and Faithful Response" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 1 minute

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to "May the Light Around Us Guide Our Footsteps" by Kathleen McTigue, reading 706 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read it aloud together.

Focusing 10 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 10 minutes

Patricia Hoertdoerfer describes the culture of violence in American society and in faith communities. Ask participants to discuss how this description reflects the culture in your congregation and in the UU families in your community.

Exploring 15 minutes

Open a discussion on the “Ministry in Response” section of the essay (page 8). Ask participants:

- What policies and procedures are in place in your congregation to meet Marie Fortune’s three goals?
- What prevention education resources are available for children, youth, adults, and elders in your congregation? What are your next steps?

Closing 10 minutes

Place three candles in the center of the meeting table. Ask three participants to each light a candle when you give the signal during the closing ritual. Say something like:

When we gather we bring our whole selves to this place: our burdens and our joys, our scars and our triumphs, our fears and our hopes. At times we have caused harm to another; at times we have shed tears of grief remembering all that has been lost; at times we have shared laughter in celebration of life.

We remember that in the particular complexity of our individual lives, we carry the realities of our collective selves; the power and privilege of our ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, class, age, and able body or lack thereof.

Signal a participant to light the first candle and say something like:

Some of us, if we are able, acknowledge that we carry with us painful memories of harm done to us by another person. We bear scars or still open wounds of abuse, sexual exploitation, and interpersonal violence. We have found some justice and healing in the presence of those who have stood with us and given support.

Light the second candle and say something like:

Some of us, if we are willing to look honestly at ourselves, carry memories of harm that we have done to another when we have exploited the other’s weakness, when we have pretended to possess another,

when we have abused and victimized. We seek ways that we might be genuinely accountable for what we have done.

Light the third candle and say something like:

Most of us carry memories of times we have stood by while another was harmed. We have hesitated when we could have advocated. At other times, we have been able to advocate for another person, to step forward or step aside as needed. We have brought our resources to bear in the service of justice and healing. We go forth to do what we can when we can to transform ourselves and our congregation to be safe sanctuaries and faithful people. We have gathered here to empower and guide each other. For this we are grateful.

Extinguish the three candles and the chalice.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Ministers
- Religious educators
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Gain knowledge and understanding of the different forms and definitions of interpersonal violence
- Become comfortable communicating feelings, values, and UU beliefs related to abuse and interpersonal violence
- Identify prophetic and pastoral strategies for coping with interpersonal violence
- Develop educational strategies for your congregation to address interpersonal violence

Materials

- Copies of “Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response” for all participants

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice, three candles, and matches
- Copies of Handout 1, Wheel of Power and Control, and Handout 2, Wheel of Non-violence and Equality, for all participants
- Your congregation's covenant and mission statement
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute "Toward an Understanding and Faithful Response" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to "May the Light Around Us Guide Our Footsteps" by Kathleen McTigue, reading 706 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read it aloud together.

Focusing 15 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and

sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 65–75 minutes

Patricia Hoertdoerfer describes the culture of violence in American society and in faith communities. Ask participants to discuss how this description reflects the culture in your congregation and in the UU families in your community.

Distribute Handout 1, Wheel of Power and Control, and Handout 2, Wheel of Nonviolence and Equality, to the participants. Allow time for participants to read and reflect on them individually. Ask participants to form pairs and discuss examples of abuses of control and power from their perspectives and experiences inside and outside the congregation. Then ask participants to form small groups of three to four and discuss ways to nurture family nonviolence and ways to support congregational practices of equality and nonviolence. Finally, invite the whole group to regather and individuals to share insights from their discussions.

Integrating 15 minutes

Hoertdoerfer asks, "What does our faith require of us? Is a faithful response to interpersonal violence and abuse possible in our congregations? Can UU clergy and lay leaders speak prophetically and respond pastorally to all forms of interpersonal violence?" Invite each participant to name one insight he or she came to from the previous conversations and one next step for the congregation.

Closing 10 minutes

Invite participants to gather in a closing circle. Place three candles on the table in the center of the circle. Ask three participants to each light a candle when you give the signal during the closing ritual. Say,

When we gather we bring our whole selves to this place: our burdens and our joys,

our scars and our triumphs, our fears and our hopes. At times we have caused harm to another; at times we have shed tears of grief remembering all that has been lost; at times we have shared laughter in celebration of life.

We remember that in the particular complexity of our individual lives, we carry the realities of our collective selves; the power and privilege of our ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, class, age, and able body or lack thereof.

Light the first candle and say,

Some of us, if we are able, acknowledge that we carry with us painful memories of harm done to us by another person. We bear scars or still open wounds of abuse, sexual exploitation, and interpersonal violence. We have found some justice and healing in the presence of those who have stood with us and given support.

Light the second candle and say,

Some of us, if we are willing to look honestly at ourselves, carry memories of harm that we have done to another when we have exploited the other's weakness, when we have pretended to possess another, when we have abused and victimized. We seek ways that we might be genuinely accountable for what we have done.

Light the third candle and continue,

Most of us carry memories of times when we have stood by while another was harmed. We have hesitated when we could have advocated. At other times, we have been able to advocate for another person, to step forward or step aside as needed. We have brought our resources to bear in the service of justice and healing. We go forth to do what we can when we can to transform ourselves and our congregation into faithful people and

safe sanctuaries. We have gathered here together to empower and guide each other. For this we are grateful.

Extinguish the chalice and the three candles.

A Systems View of Congregational Life

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Ministers
- Religious educators

Goals

- Explore how systems thinking can guide leaders
- Learn how our position in a system can shape and determine our behavior
- Experience how our family of origin can shape our leadership role
- Discern how family of origin expectations and sibling rivalry may affect the dynamic of a leadership group

Materials

- Copies of "A Systems View of Congregational Life" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "A Systems View of Congregational Life" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.
- Draw an inverted triangle on newsprint. By the upper left corner, write "persecutor." By the upper right corner, write "rescuer." And at the bottom, write "victim."

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 2 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to "Prophets" by Clinton Lee Scott, reading 565 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and invite everyone to read responsively with you.

Focusing 2 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 10 minutes

Divide the group into three parts: firstborns, middlers (with at least one older and one younger sibling), and youngests.

Place the firstborns and youngests at opposite ends of the room; place middlers in the middle of the room. Ask only-child participants to join the firstborns.

Ask each group is asked to draw up a list of ten traits as follows:

- Firstborns: Write five things you admire and five things you dislike about your youngest sibling.
- Youngests: Write five things you admire and five things you dislike about your oldest sibling.
- Middlers: Write five things firstborns don't understand about youngests and five things youngests don't understand about firstborns.

Exploring 25 minutes

Ask firstborns to share their admiration list. Then ask the youngests to do likewise. Ask youngests to share their dislike list, followed by the firstborns. Next ask middlers to evaluate each list. Ask only what they learned about having an older sibling.

Ask the whole group to discuss the following questions:

- How do these traits play out at our group leadership meetings?
- How free is any one not to fulfill the expectations of their family position?
- What conflicts can we predict?
- Which group includes our most visionary leaders?
- Which group can see both/many sides of an issue?
- Which group includes take-charge leaders?
- Which group includes "get it done" leaders?
- Which group makes it all fun?

Closing 5 minutes

Read aloud and quietly ponder the following quotations:

Our siblings push buttons that cast us in roles we felt sure we had let go of long ago—the baby, the peacekeeper, the caretaker, the avoider. . . . It doesn't seem to matter how much time has elapsed or how far we've traveled.

—Jane Mersky Leder

Our siblings. They resemble us just enough to make all their differences confusing, and no matter what we choose to make of this, we are cast in relation to them our whole lives long.

—Susan Scarf Merrell

If we are not our brother's keeper, at least let us not be his executioner.

—Marlon Brando

Having a sister is like having a best friend you can't get rid of. You know whatever you do, they'll still be there.

—Amy Li

Big sisters are the crabgrass in the lawn of life.

—Charles M. Schultz

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Ministers
- Religious educators
- Safety and Response Team

Goals

- Experience the interconnectedness of relational systems
- Learn about triangles and how they work to allay anxiety
- Practice the art of differentiation

Materials

- Copies of "A Systems View of Congregational Life" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers

- Copies of Handout 3, The Seven Laws of an Emotional Triangle, and Handout 4, Letter to the Minister, for all participants
- Index cards

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute “A Systems View of Congregational Life” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.
- Print the following quotations on newsprint:

If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, perhaps you don't understand the seriousness of the situation.

—Anonymous

When in doubt, don't just do something, stand there.

— Murray Bowen

A sailor of uncertain destination cannot discern a good from an ill wind.

—Seneca

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to “Prophets” by Clinton Lee Scott, reading 565 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and invite everyone to read responsively with you.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share.

By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 65 minutes

Remind participants that the essay discusses the interlocking, mutually influencing dynamics of an “emotional field.” Tell them that as with a gravitational field, the characteristic dynamics of the field shape personal behavior far more than the inherent nature or traits of a given member. Their position in the field, more than their intention, will determine much of their action as a leader.

Explain that in this exercise, participants will have opportunity both to observe and to experience how the “togetherness force” of the relational field governs their actions and can be at odds with their “self force” ambitions.

Form a circle of seven to twelve people. Ensure that there are at least two observers remaining outside the circle. With larger groups, repeat the exercise as necessary so all can both participate and observe.

Ask the group to form a circle facing inward. Then ask each person to choose two others as partners without indicating who they have chosen. Each participant's goal is to move so that they create an equilateral triangle with their chosen two people.

Begin the game. For five minutes (or as an equilibrium has been established, which rarely happens), each participant should try to find their proper place in relation to their partners, taking care not to give signals as to whom they have chosen. The circle will move and break apart in unpredictable ways. Ask observers to speculate as to which three people constitute a partnership and to listen to others' comments as the group tries to work things out.

After equilibrium has been established or the time has run out, stop the game. Ask people to share aloud from wherever they end up. Pose the following questions to those in the circle:

- What did this experience feel like?
- Did you find yourself trying to encourage the group to balance? Did you move in such a way that the group could not find equilibrium?
- Did you try to rule that the triangle has to be equilateral? Were you successful?
- Could you predict what was going to happen next?

Ask observers outside the circle the following questions:

- What did you notice? What stood out for you?
- Had you not been told the rule, would you have been able to figure out why these people acted as they did?

Repeat the exercise for five minutes to allow observers a chance to be in the circle. The same rules apply. After the second round, ask these questions:

- How might this experience be different if the goal were to link up with four people?
- What would happen if the rule were to create unequal triangles?
- As a member of this group, if you had wanted to change the way the system worked, what might you have done?
- Can anyone suggest ways in which our congregation is controlled by similar emotional field rules?
- How do our congregation's norms define our emotional field? (You might want to ask for an example of a norm and lead a brief discussion of how it is enforced.)
- The U.S. Constitution specifically forbids the use of titles as honorific (earl, lord, baron, duke, etc.). Why is this and how does this define the American experience as different from the European experience, where such titles are commonplace?

- Remind the group that the essay argues that triangles create an emotional field involving three people so as to stabilize the tensions between the self force and the togetherness force within a dyad. They are automatic and inevitable, and inescapable. The art of managing a triangle is to know you're in one, modulate your own anxiety, take clear stands that define your psychic and ethical boundaries, and avoid taking on others' anxiety.

Form groups of three and distribute Handout 3, The Seven Laws of an Emotional Triangle, and Handout 4, Letter to the Minister. Have one member of each group read the letter aloud.

- Ask participants to imagine themselves in the minister's place and answer the following questions: As the congregation's minister, you have been very clear with the membership that you do not respond or reply to anonymous complaints. How do you handle this one?
- The following Sunday, you are talking to a parishioner. Over her shoulder you notice Methuselah and Persnickety engaged in conversation with much laughter. What thoughts cross your mind?
- You are mindful that some significantly powerful members are not pleased with your ministry; what do you wonder about the origin of this note?
- Do you feel a need to determine whether the accusation is true?
- While the church has a policy with regard to sexual behavior vis-à-vis adults and children, it has none with regard to adult and adult behavior. Do you think this is a reason to create one?
- Pondering what to do, you discuss the letter with a colleague, who insists that you immediately take it to the Committee on Ministry. Why is this a good or a bad idea?
- Your partner notices that something is troubling you and asks, "Honey, is there something going on at church again?" What do you say to them?

- Although the letter is unsigned, you have a pretty good idea who wrote it. Do you confront the suspected author? Why or why not?
- How does this letter reflect anxiety elsewhere in the congregational system?
- What, if anything, do the Laws of Triangles guide you to do?
- Who is the victim here? The persecutor? The rescuer?
- Who has been triangled in? Who has been triangled out?
- Systems theory suggests that this kind of thing is rarely an aberration in an emotional field. Assuming this tattling is not new, what keeps it going? How do tattling and other forms of gossip stabilize congregational tensions?

Open an unstructured conversation with these questions:

- In what ways do triangles appear in our congregation?
- Are there predictable patterns that reveal the emotional process?
- Present an example and suggest a “best” way to deal with it.

Integrating 35 minutes

The essay discusses how important it is for congregational leaders to have clear heads and to be well differentiated. It further argues that leadership is an emotional process by which leaders concentrate on self-regulation: “Leadership as self-differentiation suggests that the leader’s job is to be connected to but not defined by the emotional field of her family or congregation.”

Ask participants to count off by five. Separate them into smaller groups so that all of the ones are in one group, the twos in another, etc. Once organized, direct their attention to the quotations you have prepared on newsprint.

Ask group members to create a list of at least five ways that church leaders (such as the minister, chair of the board, board members, and president) can:

- set clear limits on what behavior is expected and proscribed in your congregation

- be present to anxiety in the congregation without getting upset themselves; that is, stay connected to the membership without taking on their worry
- support one another when all “are losing their heads”—how can a leadership team collectively serve as the “head” of the congregational body?
- take a stand with the congregation about living our words in our practice together.

Call the groups together and ask for one act of leader differentiation from each group. Ask the group to name common themes or trends and then to discuss this concluding question: How would a clearer mission or vision statement or covenant of right relations empower leaders?

Ask each person to write on an index card one thing they will practice from this workshop to strengthen their ability to be a congregational leader. Collect the cards, either to present all suggestions to the group at a future meeting or to mail back to each participant three months later.

Closing 10 minutes

Ask everyone to form a circle and join hands. Then say,

In this moment, we experience the self force in our unique inward and outward expression. We know also the togetherness force in our desire to be intimately connected. Like PushMePullYou, we are deeply connected. Our goal here has been to introduce some shared ways of thinking that will empower us to be better leaders. As you go on your way today, remember these words:

- Asking the right question is more important than giving the right answer.
- No decision is without uncertainty, ambiguity, and the potential for error. What makes a good decision is what you do after you’ve made it.
- Leadership is the art of hiding your panic.

Sing together “For All That Is Our Life,” hymn 128 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Leading a Community in Right Relations

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Explore transformational leadership in the congregational context
- Learn what makes for transformational leadership
- Discuss congregational leadership styles

Materials

- Copies of "Leading a Community in Right Relations" and "Leadership with Vision" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Copies of Handout 5, Assessment Questions for Effective Leadership, for all participants
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Paper and pens

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Leading a Community in Right Relations" and "Leadership with Vision" and ask everyone to read them before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 2 minutes

Light the candle or chalice. Turn to "We Arrive Out of Many Singular Rooms" by Kenneth L. Patton, reading 443 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and invite everyone to read responsively with you.

Focusing 2 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 10 minutes

Invite the group to silently review Handout 5, Assessment Questions for Effective Leadership, and the eight characteristics of the transformational leader described by Ken Brown and Angela Merkert on page 21 of "Leadership with Vision." Ask participants to take notes on what strikes them as particularly new, insightful, or challenging.

Exploring 30 minutes

For 15 minutes, ask each person in the group to name one highlight they noted. Write them on the newsprint and follow with discussion, making sure that everyone gets to name at least one highlight from their note-taking. In the second fifteen-minute discussion, look for

consensus about what makes for transformational leadership in your congregation. Post the newsprint where everyone can read it.

Closing 2 minutes

Turn to reading 434 in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it in unison.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Explore transformational leadership in the congregational context
- Learn what makes for transformational leadership
- Discuss styles of congregational leadership

Materials

- Copies of “Leading a Community in Right Relations” and “Leadership with Vision” for all participants
- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Paper and pens
- Index cards

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Leading a Community in Right Relations” and “Leadership with Vision” and ask everyone to read them before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 2 minutes

Light the candle or chalice. Turn to “We Arrive Out of Many Singular Rooms” by Kenneth L. Patton, reading 443 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read responsively.

Focusing 2 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 105 minutes

For 10 minutes, ask the group to silently review Handout 5, Assessment Questions for Effective Religious Leadership, and the eight characteristics of the transformational leader as named by Ken Brown and Angela Merkert on page 21. Ask them to note what strikes them as particularly new, insightful, or challenging. Go around the group for 15 minutes, asking each person to name one highlight they noted. Write them on the newsprint and follow with discussion, making sure that everyone gets to name at least one highlight from (if time allows, do a second round of sharing). In the second 15 minutes, see

if there is consensus about what makes for transformational leadership in your congregation. Post the newsprint where everyone can read it.

Explain to the group that they are now going to write a covenant for the group. The covenant should describe how they seek to be together when doing the work of the congregation as leaders. Ask them to keep in mind the work they have just completed about effective transformational leadership.

Pass out the index cards and pencils. Ask each participant to do the following for 5 minutes:

- On one side of the card, write three things that you promise to the group.
- On the other side, write three things that you want the group to promise to you.

Ask participants to form pairs and share their promises for 5 minutes and their expectations for another 5 minutes.

Ask each pair to spend 10 minutes writing a covenant based on promises and expectations. Encourage them to work for consensus.

Have two pairs merge into a foursome and share their two covenants for 10 minutes. Then, by consensus, write a covenant for the foursome for 10 minutes.

(If time permits and there are enough people to merge into groups of eight, continue.)

Ask participants to merge the statements together by consensus to create a group covenant. Work on this as long as possible. Then give it to a volunteer wordsmith to make the finishing touches and distribute it to the group for final approval.

Integrating 10 minutes

With everyone back together, ask each participant to name one insight they had during the exercise.

Closing 2 minutes

Turn to reading 434 in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it in unison.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Writing a Covenant

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious professionals
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Explore the value of a covenant
- Learn the difference between a creed and a covenant
- Learn how to write a covenant

Materials

- Copies of "Writing a Covenant" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of Handout 6, A Covenantal Faith, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Writing a Covenant" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 473 by James Vila Blake in *Singing the Living Tradition* and invite everyone to join you in reading this covenant, which is familiar to many Unitarian Universalists.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines

for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 15 minutes

Respond to and discuss Fredric Muir's analysis of the UUA's Statement of Principles and Purposes in "Writing a Covenant" on page 24.

Exploring 15 minutes

Ask the group to discuss the following questions:

- What are the implicit and explicit behavior expectations in your congregation?
- How would a covenant aid and support (or how has it aided and supported) the congregation and leadership in making the implicit explicit?

Closing 5 minutes

Do a brief checkout. Then ask participants to complete this sentence as concisely as possible: "For me, the value of a covenant is . . ."

Conclude by reading aloud together Handout 6, "A Covenantal Faith."

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious professionals
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Explore the value of a covenant.
- Learn the difference between a creed and a covenant.
- Learn how to write a covenant.

Materials

- Copies of "Writing a Covenant" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of Handout 6, A Covenantal Faith, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute "Writing a Covenant" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 473 by James Vila Blake in *Singing the Living Tradition* and invite everyone to join you in reading this covenant, which is familiar to many Unitarian Universalists.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share

what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 85 minutes

Ask the group to respond to and discuss Fred Muir's analysis of the UUA's Statement of Principles and Purposes on page 24 of "Writing a Covenant."

Explain to participants that they are going to write a covenant for the group. If this is a leadership group (a committee, task force, board, etc.), the covenant should describe how they seek to be together when they are doing the work of the congregation. If this is a random group without a particular purpose, ask that they complete the exercise as if they were a small group determining whether this process would be of value for the whole congregation.

Pass out the index cards and pencils. Ask each participant to do the following for five minutes:

- On one side of the card, write three things that you promise to the group.
- On the other side, write three things that you want the group to promise to you.

Ask participants to group themselves in pairs. Then have each person share their promises and expectations for 10 minutes.

Then ask each pair to spend 15 minutes writing a covenant based on their promises and expectations. Encourage them to work for consensus. If they need to, they may look for examples in "Writing a Covenant" that reflect their intentions.

When time is up, have pairs merge into foursomes to share their two covenants. Write a covenant for the foursome by consensus. Allow 30 minutes.

(If time permits and there are enough people to merge into groups of eight, continue.)

Have the small groups return to one group and merge the statements together for a group covenant by consensus. Work on this as long as possible. Then give it to a volunteer wordsmith to make the finishing touches and distribute it to the group for final approval.

Integrating 15 minutes

With everyone back together, ask each participant to name one or two insights they had during the exercise.

Closing 10 minutes

Do a brief checkout. Then ask participants to complete this sentence as concisely as possible: "For me, the value of a covenant is . . ."

Conclude by reading aloud together Handout 6, A Covenantal Faith.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Boundaries and Confidentiality

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Gain knowledge and understanding of various boundary issues
- Become comfortable talking about issues of power, privacy, confidentiality, and secrecy
- Gain knowledge and understanding of various boundary issues
- Develop educational strategies for your congregation to address issues of boundaries, power, and communication

Materials

- Copies of "Boundaries and Confidentiality" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of Handout 7, Three Case Studies, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute "Boundaries and Confidentiality" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 458 by Walter Royal Jones Jr. in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it aloud together. Review the

goals of the workshop and the workshop agenda with the participants.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 20 minutes

Invite participants to think about the information their committee is privy to in the course of its business and pose the following questions for discussion:

- Are there ways in which respect for the privacy of individual members and the need for transparency in conducting congregational affairs come into conflict? Can you identify possible conflicts and how they can be addressed?
- Do you find the typology for different kinds of secrets outlined in "Boundaries and Confidentiality" helpful? Can you think of either real or hypothetical examples of each

type of secret that might exist in a congregation or in your area of church business or activity?

- Do you think the four guidelines from William Rankin (page 31) are helpful in deciding whether or not to keep a confidence? Do they offer guidance about how to resolve the potential conflict areas identified in the first question?
- What do you think of the notion that some gossip can be “holy” and strengthen communal bonds?

Exploring 10 minutes

Ask your group to develop step-by-step guidelines for how it will handle sensitive information in your congregation. Record the steps on newsprint.

Closing 5 minutes

Express gratitude for the meaningful work that lies ahead and ask for mutual responsibility and shared guidance in this work in order that your actions do not bring harm to an already hurting world.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Gain knowledge and understanding of various boundary issues
- Become comfortable talking about issues of power and privacy, confidentiality, and secrecy
- Develop educational strategies for your congregation to address issues of boundaries, power, and communication

Materials

- Copies of “Boundaries and Confidentiality” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copies of Handout 7, Three Case Studies, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute “Boundaries and Confidentiality” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 20 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 458 by Walter Royal Jones Jr. in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it aloud together.

If you have time, play “Pass the Secret” as an inclusion exercise and ice breaker. To play, whisper into the first person’s ear a complex sentence starting with “Someone told me . . . (For example, “Someone told me that Joe doesn’t like the new pulpit cloth that Moe gave the church, and he wants it removed and replaced with a World Religions one.”) Each person whispers it, once only, to the next person until it has gone around the group. The last person shares what they heard. Compare the last sentence to the beginning sentence. Did the message change? What does this say about how information is shared?

Focusing 15 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share

what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 40 minutes

Have participants reflect upon the second paragraph of "Boundaries and Confidentiality." Do they think there is an inherent tension in your congregation regarding the handling of sensitive information? Why or why not?

If your group is large, divide into smaller groups of five to seven people; if it is small, act as one group. Have the group(s) discuss in turn each of the three case studies, answering all the questions. If you are working in small groups, have someone in each group take notes so they can report to the large group. Compare responses to each of the three case studies across groups.

Integrating 40 minutes

Ask the participants what the next step might be for initiating a congregation-wide conversation around the issues raised in this session. Record responses.

Closing 5 minutes

Ask for closing thoughts. End with a reading of Susan Manker-Seale's "Benediction" from *Awakened From the Forest*:

Much of ministry
is a benediction
A speaking well of
each other and the world.
A speaking well of what we value:

Honesty
Love
Forgiveness
Trust

A speaking well of our efforts
A speaking well of our dreams
This is how we celebrate life
Through speaking well of it
Living the benediction
And becoming the word
Well-spoken.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Ministers
- Religious educators
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Explore how religious leaders can take care of themselves
- Learn the difference between stress and burnout
- Learn about common boundary violations in a religious context

Materials

- Copies of “Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of Handout 8, The Difference Between Stress and Burnout, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 418, adapted from Israel Zangwill, in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it aloud together.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 15 minutes

Ask participants to read Handout 8, The Difference Between Stress and Burnout. Then respond to and discuss it and its application to church leaders.

Exploring 15 minutes

Discuss the common boundary violations described in “Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care” and how they might apply to you and your congregation.

Closing 5 minutes

Read aloud,

Good self-care and staying aware of and observing boundaries allows religious leaders to stay fully engaged in life. While

the calling to religious leadership is powerful, appealing, and difficult to refuse, the call to be a complete and whole human being is also powerful and must not be ignored. As religious leaders, our congregations expect us to model self-care and balance needs and demands with awareness. Modeling self-care is a religious practice, and like all such practices, is a daily commitment and challenge. E. B. White spoke eloquently about balancing when he said, "If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." But plan we must. Plan to improve and enjoy, save and savor. This is our calling. Take care of yourself.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Ministers
- Religious educators
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Explore how religious leaders can take care of themselves
- Learn the difference between stress and burnout
- Learn about common boundary violations in a religious context

Materials

- Copies of "Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care" and "Sexual Attraction for the Religious Professional" for all participants

- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of Handout 8, The Difference Between Stress and Burnout; Handout 9, A Self-Assessment Checklist; and Handout 10, Eleven Guidelines for Preserving Boundaries, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Self-Care" and "Sexual Attraction for the Religious Professional" and ask everyone to read them before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the candle or chalice. Turn to reading 418 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, adapted from Israel Zangwill, and read it aloud together.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 75 minutes

Ask participants to read Handout 8, *The Difference Between Stress and Burnout*. Then respond to and discuss it and its application to church leaders.

Using Handout 9, *A Self-Assessment Checklist*, invite participants to take 30 minutes to complete the checklist and talk with one other person about their responses. When time is up, ask them to silently read Handout 10, *Eleven Guidelines for Preserving Boundaries*. When they are finished, have them form groups of three in which each person names three guidelines that are the most challenging for them and how they could address them. Allow 30 minutes for this sharing.

In the same small groups, ask each person to share their responses to the following questions:

- If a religious professional who is single wants to date a particular congregant, what process should be in place?
- Does a religious professional need to talk about this with his/her support/relations committee? In not them, then whom?
- How can such a relationship be transparent?
- What about if and when that relationship comes to a close?

Integrating 30 minutes

Ask each group member to name one or two insights they had during the focusing time.

Closing 5 minutes

Read aloud,

Good self-care and staying aware of and observing boundaries allows religious leaders to stay fully engaged in life. While the calling to religious leadership is powerful, appealing, and difficult to refuse, the call to be a complete and whole human being is also powerful and must not be ignored. As religious leaders, our congregations expect us to model self-care and balance needs and demands with awareness. Modeling self-care is a religious

practice, and like all such practices, is a daily commitment and challenge. E. B. White spoke eloquently about balancing when he said, "If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." But plan we must. Plan to improve and enjoy, save and savor. This is our calling. Take care of yourself.

Sing "Spirit of Life," hymn 123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious educators
- Youth advisors

Note: This workshop should be conducted with both youth and adult leaders in the congregation. A one-to-one youth-to-adult ratio or a group with a majority of youth is preferred to a group with a majority of adults

Goals

- Consider the faith community's and leaders' responsibility for managing health and safety risk factors and promoting right relationships among adults, youth, and children
- Explore the components of safety guidelines for religious education programming
- Share ideas, experiences, and strategies for promoting safety, right relations, and prevention education for religious education staff and volunteers

Materials

- Copies of "Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copies of Handout 11, Needs Assessment Checklist for Congregations, for all participants
- Your congregation's safety policy, guidelines, and procedures

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 2 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 434 in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it aloud together.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 20 minutes

Invite participants to share a sentence or two about why your congregation needs to pay attention to matters of safety, health, and right relations in religious education. Ask them to name one critical characteristic of religious education leadership that the community needs to address these matters. Record these qualities on newsprint.

Read the following, adapted from a prayer by Rev. Thomas Mikelson:

Spirit of Life we acknowledge your presence. We know that here among us are those who have experienced the pains of abuse; that there are those who have caused others the pain of abuse; and that there are some who, by their silence, have been complicit in the harm of abuse. We lift our prayers for all of these.

Spirit of justice and mercy, we give thanks that wholeness and restoration are always possibilities. We seek a deeper understanding of our ministry and of our relations to those who look to us for healing and justice. We seek wisdom and courage to become healers and leaders of our community. We pray that the power of your presence will be with this circle of colleagues as we go forth to live out our calling in ministry and leadership. Amen.

Exploring 15 minutes

Using the essay's six guidelines to reduce the risk of abuse and Handout 11, Needs Assessment Checklist for Congregations, engage participants in a discussion of the components of a healthy, safe congregation and the opportunities for leadership and education that the religious education leadership will address in this meeting. Record responses on newsprint.

Closing 2 minutes

Say, "May we take with us into our meeting the principles of our faith, the knowledge of love, and a vision of hope."

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious educators
- Youth advisors

Goals

- Consider the faith community's and leaders' responsibility for managing health and safety risk factors and for promoting right relationships among adults and children.
- Explore a range of scenarios that could arise in congregations or occur in religious education programs.
- Consider ways that the faith community, professional and lay leaders, and religious education program staff and volunteers can respond effectively, respectfully, and compassionately when problem situations arise.
- Explore the components of congregational safety guidelines, the various resources available, and procedures for planning and implementation.
- Share ideas, experiences, and strategies for promoting safety and right relations and training and equipping religious education staff and volunteers.

Materials

- Copies of "Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community," "A Sex Offender in Church," and "Balancing Compassion and Protection" for all participants

- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Copies of Handout 11, Needs Assessment Checklist for Congregations, and Handout 12, Six Case Studies, for all participants
- Copies of your congregation's mission statement, religious education vision and goals, and long-range plan, as relevant to these issues
- Copies of your congregation's safety/abuse policies, guidelines, and procedures pertaining to volunteer recruitment, supervision, and reporting
- Safety/Abuse Clearinghouse packet and resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association, including those found on the Unitarian Universalist Association web site.
- Curricula, books, videos, and other resources listed in this book's resources section.

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community" and "A Sex Offender in Church" and ask everyone to read them before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 15 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to reading 434 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read it aloud together. Check in by inviting participants to share in a sentence or two why it is critical that our congregations attend to matters of safety, health, and right relations. Ask participants to name the essential characteristics or qualities of religious education leadership that are needed to address these matters in our communities.

Record the leadership characteristics and qualities generated by the group on newsprint and summarize the list items and their importance.

Review the outline for this session, and note any resources you are planning to refer to or use during the session. If this is the first gathering of participants for creating safe congregations work, establish group guidelines. Refer to the Introduction for the procedure.

Focusing 10 minutes

Read to the group the following, adapted from a prayer by Rev. Thomas Mikelson:

Spirit of Life, we acknowledge your presence. We know that here among us are those who have experienced the pains of abuse; that there are those who have caused others the pain of abuse; and that there are some who, by their silence, have been complicit in the harm of abuse. We lift our prayers for all of these.

Spirit of Justice and Mercy, we give thanks that wholeness and restoration are always possibilities. We seek a deeper understanding of our ministry and of our relations to those who look to us for healing and justice. We seek wisdom and courage, to become healers and leaders of our community. We pray that the power of your presence will be with this circle of colleagues as we go forth to live out our calling in ministry and leadership. Amen

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to review the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Distribute copies of Handout 11, Needs Assessment Checklist for Congregations. After each question is read, engage participants in their responses to it. Note policies, procedures, resources, and resource people in place to address the safety needs in your congregation.

Reflecting and Exploring 65 minutes

Use this meditation as a springboard for a group discussion about the concept of right relations, particularly in the context of a religious education program. Ask participants to share any points from “Upholding Trust in the Religious Education Community” that stood out for them or raised questions or concerns for them as congregational leaders. Discuss the opportunities for leadership, education, justice, and ethical action.

Take a 10-minute break.

When you return decide which of the following options, based on the size of the group, you will use to set up this exploration exercise:

- Divide the group into six groups of two to six people. Distribute copies of Handout 12, Six Case Studies, and assign each group one of the situations described. Ask each group to discuss the situation and ways that congregational leaders might respond. Ask the groups to record their responses and be ready to report to the whole group in 20 minutes. Tell them they may make use of or refer to any of the resources you have provided when formulating their responses.
- Pass out copies of Handout 12, Six Case Studies. Ask half of the participants to read and reflect on situations one through three and the other half to read and reflect on situations four through six. Invite them to each find a partner to share their thoughts on the ways congregational leaders might respond to each of the three situations. Ask the participants to be ready to gather for a group discussion in 20 minutes. Tell them they may make use of or refer to any of the resources you have provided when formulating their responses.
- Distribute copies of Handout 12, Six Case Studies, and ask the participants to take 10 minutes to read and reflect on each of the

six situations described, taking notes or formulating ideas about the ways congregation leaders might respond to these situations. Tell them they may make use of or refer to any of resources you have provided when formulating their responses. When time is up, ask the participants to briefly share their ideas for each of the six situations, allowing 5 minutes for each situation.

Integrating 15 minutes

Ask the participants to reflect on the information and ideas raised during this session and to offer any comments they may wish to share about the discussions and the process used for the session. Ask each participant to write down up to three aspects of safety and risk management that they will commit to work on in their congregation during the next six to twelve months.

Alternatively, ask participants to reflect on “Balancing Compassion and Protection” and “A Sex Offender in Church.” Engage them in a discussion about their responses to any of the following questions:

- Haffner articulates three myths that are prevalent about child sexual abuse. How has this essay increased your understanding of these complex issues?
- What policies and procedures has your congregation codified to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in your UU community? Do you have a Limited Access Agreement? What work still remains to make your congregation safe for all?
- What is the moral message from this case study for your congregation, lay leaders, and religious professionals?

Closing 5 minutes

Invite participants to share one or two words that describe a thought or feeling with which they will leave this session, allowing participants to

pass if they choose. Depending on the group size and meeting space, you may stand or sit in a circle and pass around a small chalice or candle. In closing, you might want to sing a song or read these closing words by V. Emil Gudmundson:

And, now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Creating Policies with Youth Groups

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Youth advisors
- Religious educators

Goals

- Foster dialogue between youth and adults in leadership positions
- Explore some of the safety concerns of youth groups in the congregation
- Encourage youth and adults to work in partnership to create safety policies and rules for youth activities (may include meetings, oversights, retreats, and conferences)
- Develop a plan of action for addressing safety concerns in youth groups

Materials

- Copies of "Creating Policies with Youth Groups" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Handout 13, Checklist for Developing Youth Group Safety Guidelines, for all participants
- The congregation's youth code of ethics and safety policies

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute "Creating Policies with Youth Groups" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 3 minutes

Light a chalice or candle and share the words of Albert Schweitzer, reading 447 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 15 minutes

Refer participants to the practical suggestions offered in "Creating Policies with Youth Groups." Invite participants to identify their areas of safety-related concerns, such as youth-advisor boundaries or drug use. Write down key words and phrases on newsprint. Ask for clarification and explanation when necessary.

Once you have created a list, ask participants to reflect silently on these areas of concern.

Distribute the index cards and invite participants to write down on their cards the two areas that concern them the most. Ask them to put a Y in the corner of the card if they are a youth or an A if they are an adult. Explain that these cards will be shared without names attached but will reveal whether the writer is a youth or an adult. Collect the cards and shuffle them.

Exploring 20 minutes

Redistribute the index cards to the group. Go around the circle and ask each participants to read the two concerns written on the card in their hand. Ask them to identify whether the writer is a youth or an adult.

As these concerns are read aloud, make a check mark next to the concern listed on the newsprint, using different colors for youth and adult concerns. Make one check mark per concern as it is read. If a concern is mentioned multiple times, it should have multiple check marks next to it.

Ask the group the following questions for discussion:

- What are the two or three top concerns of this group?
- What are the top concerns of youth?
- What are the top concerns of adults?
- Are the concerns the same?
Are there differences? Why?

Looking at each area of concern that received prioritization, ask the group to identify:

- those that are already addressed by policies and procedures
- those that are addressed by informal, unwritten policies and procedures
- those for which the congregation has no policies or procedures

In the cases where policies and procedures do exist, ask participants whether they need to be reviewed or rewritten in light of today's discussion and the essay.

If participants are ready, decide on a time and place for groups of youth and adults to work together to research and develop these policies and procedures.

Closing 2 minutes

Thank participants for their time, their commitment, and their cooperation. Share the closing words from reading 698 by Wayne Arnason in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Youth advisors
- Religious educators

Note: This workshop should be conducted with both youth and adult leaders in the congregation. A one-to-one youth-to-adult ratio or a group with a majority of youth is preferred to a group with a majority of adults

Goals

- Foster dialogue between youth and adults in leadership positions
- Explore some of the unique safety concerns of youth groups (ages fourteen to twenty)
- Encourage youth and adults to work in partnership to create safety policies and rules for youth activities, including meetings, oversights, retreats, and conferences
- Develop a plan of action for addressing safety concerns in youth groups

Materials

- Copies of "Creating Policies with Youth Groups" for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape

- Index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Handout 13, Checklist for Developing Youth Group Safety Guidelines, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s)
- Distribute “Creating Policies with Youth Groups” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.
- Put chairs in a circle or around a large table so that all participants can see each other.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Sharing 15 minutes

Light a chalice or candle and share the words of Albert Schweitzer in reading 447 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Invite each person to reflect on someone who has been a mentor or role model to them, someone who has “lighted the flame” within them. Then invite participants to talk briefly (one minute or less) about someone who has been a meaningful mentor or role model for them.

Say something like, “As a congregation, we seek to foster genuine connections between youth and adults, so that we may continue to spark the light inside of each of us. Together, we create a safe community whose light shines brightly, for all to be inspired by.”

Focusing 50 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always

okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session. Ask participants to describe a safe youth group. Ask: How do people feel in a safe youth group? What do they see and hear that can make them feel safe? Write down key words and phrases on newsprint as participants speak. Be sure to solicit input from both youth and adults.

After a number of participants have had a chance to respond, turn to a new sheet of newsprint and say, “When we talk about safety in youth groups, we also talk about issues of power.” Invite participants (youth and adult) to describe what they think about when they hear the word *power*. Write down key words from their responses on newsprint.

Then begin to discuss responses. Participants are likely to have many negative associations with the word *power*, and their responses are likely to include examples of “power over,” power in which one party controls the other party’s resources or behavior. If this is the case, point out this emphasis. “Power over” is the kind of power that unethical leaders can exploit over vulnerable youth. This is one of the reasons we encourage training and codes of ethics for adults who work with youth. We need to keep “power over” in mind when we write policies.

Invite participants to think of a different kind of power. “Power with” is shared power, in which those who are vulnerable by nature of status and age are able to have their voices heard, their experience honored, and their leadership cultivated.

Ask participants to share some examples of “power with” that they have seen, either in the

church or elsewhere. Some examples you could bring up include:

- a council in which all members have equal influence, regardless of status outside the council
- a family in which children and adults put their pocket change in a piggy bank and decide together which charity to donate it to
- a classroom in which students and teachers create a curriculum together

Remind the group that sharing power with youth involves respecting youth as active participants and leaders in the community. Read aloud this quotation from Meg Riley:

Youth will be ministered to by Unitarian Universalist congregations as they are respected as community members. We believe that, as youth are empowered to be full members of UU communities, both they and the communities will be strengthened. The phrase we use is Power Shared Is Power Multiplied. Youth empowerment does not mean that adults are disempowered. It is not either/or. Youth empowerment means that the more empowered youth are as youth, the more appropriately empowered adults will be as adults.

Invite responses to this quote, then explain,

Our task in today's workshop is to set the stage for youth and adults to work together, sharing and multiplying power. When power is shared and multiplied, safety can be shared and multiplied. Our goal today is to create safety with empowerment.

Reflecting and Exploring 20 minutes

Refer participants to the practical suggestions offered in the essay "Creating Policies with Youth Groups."

Invite participants to identify their areas of safety-related concerns, such as youth-advisor boundaries or drug use. Write down key words

and phrases on newsprint. Ask for clarification and explanation when necessary.

Once a list has been created, distribute the index cards and invite each participant to write down the three areas that concern them the most. Ask them to put a Y in the corner of the card if they are a youth, and an A if they are an adult. Explain that these cards will be shared without names attached but will reveal whether the writer is a youth or an adult. Collect the cards and shuffle them.

Redistribute the index cards to the group. Go around the circle and ask each participant to read the three concerns written on the card in their hand. Ask them to identify whether the writer is a youth or an adult.

As these concerns are read aloud, make a check mark next to the concern listed on the newsprint, using different colors for youth and for adult concerns. Make one check mark per concern as it is read. If a concern is mentioned multiple times, then it should have multiple check marks next to it.

Ask the group the following questions for discussion:

- What are the three top concerns of this group?
- What are the top concerns of youth?
- What are the top concerns of adults?
- Are the concerns the same? Are there differences? Why?

Integrating 20 minutes

Looking at each area of concern that was given priority, ask the group to identify:

- those that are already addressed by policies and procedures
- Those that are addressed by informal, unwritten policies and procedures
- Those for which no policies or procedures exist

In the cases where policies and procedures do exist, ask participants whether they need to be reviewed or rewritten in light of today's discussion.

If participants are ready they may begin to assign groups of youth and adults to work together on researching and developing these policies and procedures.

Closing 15 minutes

Invite participants to gather in a circle. Thank them for their time, commitment, and good ideas. Explain that safety and empowerment require time, patience, and trust. Affirm the good work that they have done today. Then invite each participant to share something they found meaningful in today's workshop and something they will do as a result.

Offer these closing words from Elizabeth Martin, a former youth from Fourth Universalist Society in New York City:

In YRUU, I learned how to get along with others. Youth and adults, together. We worshiped, played games, cooked, ate, talked, and sang. I discovered myself. . . . I have built friendships I hope to keep for years to come. Most importantly, my memories of YRUU continue to make me feel loved and safe. During the moments when I was in YRUU, I was safe.

Close with a blessing, such as "So may it be in our community, and beyond. Go in peace."

Just Relations in a Faith Context

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious professionals
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Achieve clarity about what makes a congregation safe
- Explore justice as a defining characteristic of right relations
- Look at organizational accountability as a justice issue

Materials

- Copies of “Just Relations in a Faith Context” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Handout 14, Just Relations Grid, for all participants
- Your congregation’s mission statement, Constitution, by-laws, and committee descriptions

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Just Relations in a Faith Context” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Ask all to turn to “Principles and Purposes for Us All,” reading 594 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read responsively.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 10 minutes

Remark that in the first two paragraphs of “Just Relations in a Faith Context,” Fredric Muir discusses some characteristics of a safe congregation. Ask the group to discuss what they think it means to be a “safe congregation”?

Exploring 20 minutes

Distribute copies of Handout 14, Just Relations Grid. Discuss Marie Fortune's seventh element of justice making, accountability. Responding to Fortune, Muir writes, "Institutional accountability—process and responsibility—is a key factor in creating a context for just relations." He then presents aspects of congregational process and leadership that can help create organizational safeguards. Ask the group to discuss the following questions:

- How do these work in your congregation?
- Have they been or could they be challenges?
- How might accountability help to create and sustain a safe and just context?

Closing 5 minutes

Read aloud to all,

People arrive at our faith communities wondering if they will be safe to imagine the Divine in unorthodox and meaningful ways; safe from physical, emotional and spiritual stress or harm; safe to be in relationship with companions who share the religious quest; safe to be honest and authentic; safe for one's partner, children, and families. Being attentive to what makes a congregation a place that values just relations can help to make it safe in all these ways. We should expect nothing less.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Religious professionals
- Congregational leaders

Goals

- Achieve clarity regarding what makes a congregation safe
- Explore the use of justice as a defining characteristic of right relations
- Understand how our Principles shape contexts of just relations

Materials

- Copies of "Just Relations in a Faith Context" for all participants
- Copy of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint and markers
- Your congregation's mission statement, by-laws, and committee descriptions
- Copies of Handout 14, Just Relations Grid, and Handout 15, UUA Responsibility and Accountability, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute "Just Relations in a Faith Context" and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to "Principles and Purposes for Us All," reading 594 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read responsively.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group's guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share

what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 70 minutes

In the first two paragraphs of "Just Relations in a Faith Context," Fredric Muir discusses some characteristics of a safe congregation. Ask the group to discuss what being a "safe congregation" means to them.

Muir asserts that our first and last Principles are Unitarian Universalist theological bookends originating in our histories and shaping contexts of just relations. Our fourth Principle describes the way we are together. Ask participants to respond to and discuss the first three of Marie Fortune's elements and Muir's interpretations of them in this essay:

- **Acknowledging.** "In a safe congregation, in a congregation committed to just relations, acting on the first Principle means ensuring that congregants feel heard and making sure they know they are valued just as they are." Brainstorm ways a congregation might do this, then discuss your ideas.
- **Restitution.** "Unitarian Universalist congregations are covenantal communities, not creedal ones. Our communities are built on the promises we make about the way we want to be in relationship with each other." Covenants will be broken. Respond to the story of Center County UU Church.
- **Truth-telling.** "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning often involves a delicate and wise balance." Respond to the story

of River's Edge UU Congregation. What challenges would you add?

Integrating 30 minutes

Using Handout 14, Just Relations Grid, discuss with the group how compassion, protection, vindication, and accountability are integrated into the contexts discussed above.

Distribute Handout 15, UUA Responsibility and Accountability, and review the responsibilities of various groups—UUA offices and staff groups, district staff, and professional organizations—in addressing issues of congregational ethics and professional disciplines, safety, and prevention education. Use examples to illustrate accountability structures at local, district, and national levels.

Closing 10 minutes

Read aloud:

People arrive at our faith communities wondering if they are places of safety—safe to imagine the Divine in unorthodox and meaningful ways; safe from physical, emotional and spiritual stress or harm; safe to be in relationship with companions who share the quest of religious journey; safe to be honest, authentic and congruent; safe for one's partner, children, for family. Being attentive to what makes a faith context a place where just relations are important can help shape a congregation into a safe community of faith. We should expect nothing less.

Turn to "Spirit of Life," by Carolyn McDade, hymn 123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and sing together.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Working for Safety and to End Oppression

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Increase understanding of the intersection between safe congregations work and anti-oppression work
- Explore issues of power disparity, privilege, and oppression in UU congregations
- Pay attention to ways the congregation can become more truly hospitable

Materials

- Copies of “Working for Safety and to End Oppression” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Your congregation’s covenant and mission statement
- Copies of Handout 16, Privilege and Oppression, for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Working for Safety and to End Oppression” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to “A Litany of Restoration” by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, reading 576 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read responsively.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 10 minutes

In the beginning paragraphs of “Working for Safety and to End Oppression,” Tracey Robinson-Harris et al. state that issues of oppression and issues of safety often collide. Ask participants to respond to these questions:

- Where have you experienced this collision in a UU context?
- What were the major elements of this situation?

Exploring 20 minutes

Distribute Handout 16, Privilege and Oppression, and review it with the group. Ask participants to discuss one congregational challenge that relates to the connections between lack of safety and oppression. Pose the following questions:

- What would safety look like and feel like for the various players in this situation?
- What is the difference between *safety* and *comfort* in this situation?
- Reflecting on this situation and congregational culture, what structures of cultural oppression do we need to pay attention to in order to make the congregation safer?

Closing 5 minutes

Read “Stubborn Ounces” by Bonaro Overstreet out loud to the group:

You say the little efforts I make
 Will do no good; they will never prevail
 To tip the hovering scale
 Where Justice hangs in balance.
 I don't think
 I ever thought they would.
 But I am prejudiced beyond debate
 In favor of my right to choose which side
 Shall feel the stubborn ounces of my weight.

Conclude by saying something like, “May we tend to the justice work of this congregation in our decisions today.”

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Congregational leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

Gain knowledge and understanding of the intersection between safe congregations work and anti-oppression work

- Explore issues of power disparity, privilege, and oppression in the congregation
- Identify and define cultural competence in various congregational contexts
- Develop strategies for making the congregation truly hospitable

Materials

- Copies of “Working for Safety and to End Oppression” for all participants
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Your congregation’s covenant and mission statement
- Copies of Handout 16, Privilege and Oppression, and Handout 17, Five Case Studies, for all participants
- One bowl and one cup for each participant
- Ten pennies for each participant

Preparation

- Distribute the essay and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the chalice or candle. Turn to “A Litany of Restoration” by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, reading 576 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and read responsively.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group's guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 50 minutes

In the beginning paragraphs of "Working for Safety and to End Oppression," Tracey Robinson-Harris et al. state that understanding where safety and oppression collide in the lives of our congregations requires experience and information from the standpoint of persons who are part of historically marginalized groups in U.S. culture and understanding that the experience of safety for Unitarian Universalists who enjoy the privileges of status (as straight, white, able bodied, or male, for example) is mediated by that individual and collective status. Ask the group:

- How do you understand these two things?
- How do you describe the difference between safety and comfort?

Ask participants to reflect on the words *power* and *power disparity* in the context of safety, trust, privilege, and oppression. Ask the group to discuss what these words mean, both in general and in a UU congregation?

Distribute Handout 16, Privilege and Oppression, to everyone in the group. Allow time for participants to read and reflect on the handout. Remind participants that no category is absolute. Identity and multiple identities add complexity to the experience of power and vulnerability. Then engage participants in the following exercise (adapted from an activity developed by Joan Olsson of Cultural Bridges).

Give everyone in the group a bowl, a cup, and ten pennies. Begin the exercise by saying something like the following:

In our discussion of the definitions of *privilege* and *oppression*, we noted that most of us are members of at least one

target group and members of at least one dominant group that experiences privilege. If you are female, you have experienced sexism; if you are male, you have experienced male privilege. If you are a person with a disability, you have experienced ableism. If you are able-bodied, you have experienced the privileges of able-bodied people. To illustrate how each of us stands in different relationship to oppression and privilege, I invite you to listen to ten scenarios and to place your pennies in the bowl or in the cup accordingly. To allow you time to think, I will read each scenario twice.

Then read the following list:

- If your parents spoke English as a first language, put a penny in the bowl. If your parents' first language was another language, put a penny in the cup.
- If you had a room of your own with a door when you were a child, put a penny in the bowl. If you had to share a bedroom or sleep in a room that doubled as another room, put a penny in the cup.
- If your home when you were growing up had more than ten children's books and thirty adult books, put a penny in the bowl. If not, put a penny in the cup.
- If police have harassed or disrespected you because of your race, put a penny in the cup. If that has not been your experience, put a penny in the bowl.
- If neither of your parents nor you had to spend any amount of time on public assistance, put a penny in the bowl. If either you or a parent was ever on public assistance, put a penny in the cup.
- If your religious holidays are regularly recognized in the media, in schools, and by employers, put a penny in the bowl. If your religious holidays are not recognized in these institutions, put a penny in the cup.

- If you never have to consider the gender of the pronouns you use to refer to the person you are dating or who is your life partner, put a penny in the bowl. If you have to consider pronouns, put a penny in the cup.
- If you have one or more major credit cards, put a penny in the bowl. If not, put a penny in the cup.
- If you do not have to consider whether a workplace, restaurant, bank, or friend's home is physically accessible to you, put a penny in the bowl. If you do have to consider this, put a penny in the cup.
- If you experience being ignored, discounted, or condescended to because of your age, put a penny in the cup. If this is not your experience, put a penny in the bowl.

Invite participants to count their pennies in their bowls and in their cups and to reflect on what they are discovering and experiencing. Ask them if this exercise held any surprises for them. Talk about the feelings and reflections this exercise elicited.

Integrating 50 minutes

Adapt this activity to fit the size of your group:

- For a group of eight or more participants, ask the group to review all five situations on Handout 17, Five Case Studies, and respond to all discussion questions.
- For small groups of three or four participants, ask the group to review, choose, and discuss one of the situations on Handout 17, Five Case Studies. Each small group needs a person to be a recorder and to take notes on a sheet of newsprint.

Let the groups engage in discussion for 30 minutes. Then return to the whole group and either summarize pertinent cultural competencies or invite summaries from the group recorders.

Using your congregation's covenant, mission statement, and policies and procedures docu-

ments, identify and define your congregation's next steps to increase its cultural competency. Record these on newsprint.

Closing 10 minutes

Invite participants to gather in a closing circle. Light the chalice or candle on the table in the center of the circle. Turn to reading 701 by Sara Moores Campbell in *Singing the Living Tradition* and read it to the group. Then sing together "Spirit of Life," hymn 123.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Healing

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Lay pastoral care leaders
- Religious professionals

Goal

- Explore questions and challenges of congregational healing

Materials

- Copies of “Healing” for all participants
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition* for all participants

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Healing” and ask everyone read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the candle or chalice. Read “Life Prayers” by Ted Loder:

Empower me to be a bold participant, rather than a timid saint in waiting, in the difficult ordinariness of now; to exercise the authority of honesty; rather than to defer to power, or deceive to get it; to influence someone for justice, rather than impress anyone for gain; and, by grace, to find treasures of joy, of friendship, of peace hidden in the fields of the daily you give me to plow.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting 30 minutes

In groups of three discuss:

- What are your experiences of broken trust in this congregation?
- How have you addressed these experiences?
- Has there been any healing? If so, what created the possibility of healing?
- In what ways did congregational structures and policies help or hinder the healing?

Closing 5 minutes

Have each group share one sentence about what they have learned. When everyone has had a

chance to share, read “The Task of the Religious Community,” reading 580 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Extinguish the chalice or candle.

2-HOUR WORKSHOP

Suggested Participants

- Lay pastoral care leaders
- Religious professionals

Goals

- Address the issues and challenges of sexual misconduct in a congregation
- Explore its impact on individuals and the congregation
- Learn about the dynamics/systems of misconduct

Materials

- Copies of “Healing” for all participants
- Chalice or candle and matches
- Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*
- A slip of paper labeled with a letter from A to E for each participant (or A to G if you have a large group)
- Newsprint and a marker

Preparation

- Appoint workshop facilitator(s).
- Distribute “Healing” and ask everyone to read it before the session begins.

SESSION PLAN

Gathering and Centering 5 minutes

Light the candle or chalice. Read “Life Prayers” by Ted Loder:

Empower me to be a bold participant, rather than a timid saint in waiting, in the difficult ordinariness of now; to exercise the authority of honesty; rather than to

defer to power, or deceive to get it; to influence someone for justice, rather than impress anyone for gain; and, by grace, to find treasures of joy, of friendship, of peace hidden in the fields of the daily you give me to plow.

Focusing 5 minutes

Review the goals of the workshop and the workshop process with the group. Invite participants to discuss and agree upon the group’s guidelines for openness and sharing. Say something like,

There is much potential for open sharing throughout this program. On many occasions we will invite participants to share what may be intimate material. Therefore, it is important that people speak only when they are comfortable; it is always okay to pass if people choose not to share. By establishing a norm of respect for each other and our expression within the group, we want to ensure safety and right relations for all participants.

Engage participants in discussing the value of respect and confidentiality in a group and the destructive effects of sarcasm and put-downs. Print your group’s guidelines for openness and sharing on newsprint, and post it as a reminder for each session.

Reflecting and Exploring 85–105 minutes

Take some time to talk about the group’s experiences or knowledge regarding sexual misconduct by a religious professional. Ask the following questions:

- Have you been in a congregation where this has occurred?
- Do you know the story of a congregation where this has happened?
- Do you think this is a significant issue that faith communities are addressing?
- Is it a significant issue in Unitarian Universalism?

- Has your congregation addressed this issue?
- If so, how? If not, why?

Divide the participants into congregational constituencies by drawing letters from a hat. The groups are as follows:

- A: Two to four board members, including a board president. Divide remaining people evenly among the following three groups, with extra people going to group E.
- B: Supporters of the minister who have had good experiences with him and think he was treated badly
- C: Critics of the minister who have had some bad experiences with him and think they have been treated badly. This group may include one or two alleged victims or parent/guardians of alleged victims.
- D and E: Newcomers and other members unaware of what is going on
- F and G: For a large group, consider also having a religious education committee and a worship committee.

Read aloud the following scenario:

Three months ago the minister of the congregation resigned following a series of closed Board meetings. There are rumors in the community that he had had sexual relations with several people in the congregation, but nothing official has been said. The Board is afraid that someone will file suit against the church and membership is starting to drop. The annual congregational meeting will be next month, and various groups are starting to make plans on what to do at this meeting.

Tell the groups that they have 45 minutes to plan what to do at the meeting. Be sure to share various key resources with all groups, such as chapters from this book, bylaws, and relevant policies.

For the next 45 minutes, have the congregational meeting.

Now ask participants to suggest ways for the congregation to heal and keep a list on newsprint. Check near the end to see who the healing is for and if everyone's needs are being met in some measure. The group is likely to dwell on the authenticity of the different experiences but try to minimize this discussion in the interests of time.

(In the interests of time, the facilitator can act as a special consultant and help the board president run the meeting.)

NOTE: If this scenario is close to the truth and the experience is still raw, allow for extra time and give people the opportunity to swap roles, so that they can play a role different from the one they have experienced if possible. Be sure to also have at least one professional therapist from outside the community help with the session.

Integrating 15 minutes

Ask the reassembled group to process the exercise with the following questions:

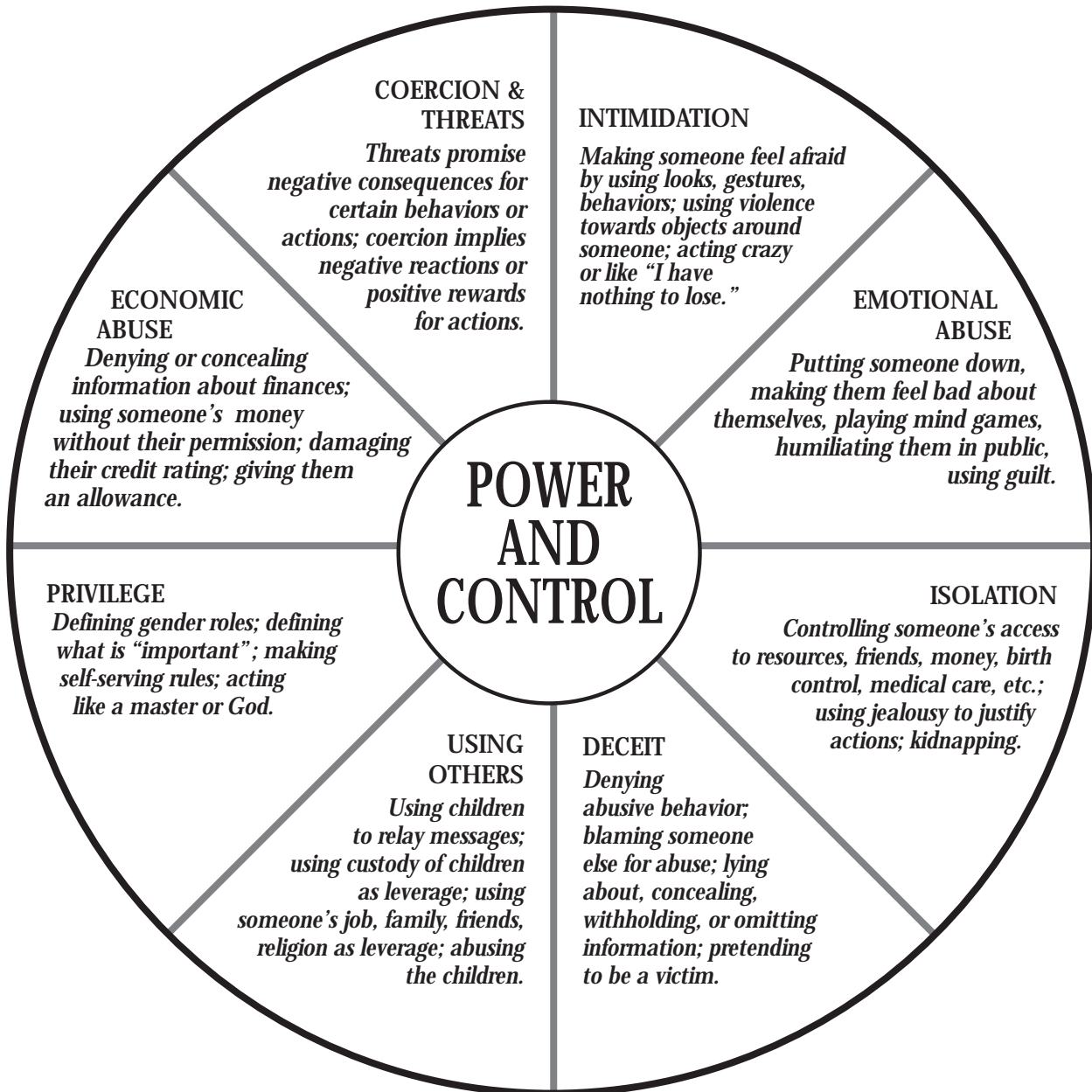
- Is everyone okay?
- How did you feel in your assigned roles?
- What should we be doing differently?
- What is the damage, who needs to heal, and how can we do this?

Closing 5 minutes

Have each group of three share one sentence about what they have learned. When everyone has had a chance to share, read "The Task of the Religious Community," reading 580 in ***Singing the Living Tradition***.

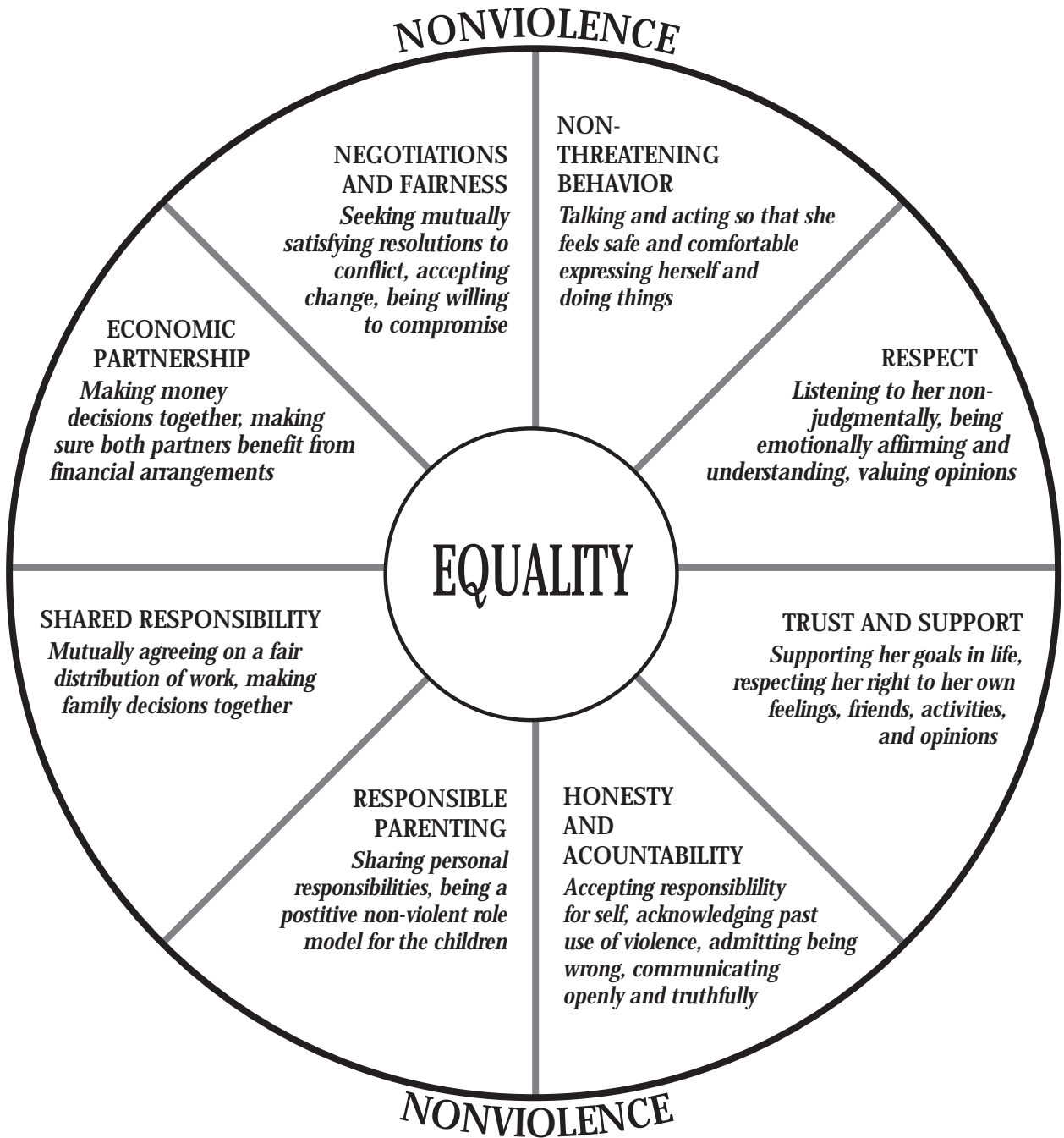
Extinguish the chalice or candle.

Wheel of Power and Control



—Domestic Abuse Intervention Project

Wheel of Nonviolence and Equality



—Domestic Abuse Intervention Project

Handout 3

The Seven Laws of an Emotional Triangle

1. The relationship of any two members, A and B, of an emotional triangle is kept in balance by the way the third party, C, relates to each of them and to the relationship.
2. It is generally not possible for the third party, C, to bring about change in the relationship of A and B.
3. Attempts to change the relationship of the other two sides of an emotional triangle are not only ineffective but often have the opposite result of what one intends.
4. The third party, C, who unsuccessfully tries to change the relationship between A and B, often winds up carrying the stress for the other two. Thus the “dysfunctional” member is often not the “weakest” but the one who “over-functions.”
5. Triangles are infectious and interlocking: Triangling in yet another triangle diffuses the anxiety in the central triangle. Think about alliance formation in families and society. Change in the primary triangle leads to change in the others.
6. One side of the triangle tends to be more conflict-prone than the other two. In a healthy system, different sides of the triangle experience conflict with relatively similar frequency. Put differently, less healthy systems are more predictable and consistent in terms of who experiences the conflict. Triangles serve to lower anxiety.
7. You can only change a relationship if you are in it and if you can manage your anxiety and define your own values and goals without requiring others to agree or go along.

Handout 4

Letter to the Minister

Dear Reverend Minister:

Several of us in the congregation want to bring to your attention a matter of grave concern. Methuselah Rancher and Persnickety Baloonski are having an adulterous affair. As you know, they both have young children at home.

We believe their behavior reflects poorly on our church community and is morally reprehensible. As you can imagine, many of us are quite upset and there has been considerable discussion now for months.

We believe it is your duty to bring this immoral behavior to a stop. We expect you to intervene with these people at your earliest opportunity.

Rest assured, your action or lack thereof will be noted and will reflect on our assessment of you as our spiritual leader.

Concerned Members

Handout 5

Assessment Questions for Effective Leadership

- ◆ Am I assuming the responsibilities of leadership for the right reasons?
- ◆ Am I taking into account the assorted skills of co-leaders?
- ◆ How am I going to work with leaders and followers with different approaches?
- ◆ Do I have a habit of openness and transparency in my communications with others?
- ◆ Am I working with others to define what the problem is before implementing a solution?
- ◆ Do I place a high priority on training and empowering leaders who will succeed me?

Handout 6

A Covenantal Faith

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal faith, created and sustained by relationships. We come together not around religious dogma or creed, but unite to walk together toward a vision of the Beloved Community as named in our Statement of Principles and Purposes as well as the vision that our congregation has named. How we walk together, holding and honoring our congregation's diversity, is a challenge and the value of covenant.

—Conrad Wright,
“Congregational Polity and the Covenant”

Three Case Studies

Case Study A

A newly ordained minister has been serving for six months as an assistant minister in a large church setting. The highly respected senior minister has been at the church for many years. The senior minister and spouse are generally beloved by the congregation. A congregant comes to the assistant minister for counseling and asks, "Whatever I tell you in private is confidential, right?" to which the assistant minister responds, "Yes, of course." The congregant divulges that they have been having a consensual affair with the senior minister, which the senior minister has now ended, saying the affair was wrong and "out of character." The congregant does not want anyone else to know nor does the congregant want the senior minister to know that the congregant has told the assistant minister. The congregant simply wants support in dealing with their feelings of loss and rejection. The assistant minister feels bound by the promise of confidentiality but also feels uneasy carrying this information alone.

Questions

- If you were the assistant minister, how would you handle this situation?
- Would you keep the congregant's confidence?
- What type of secret is this?
- Is this a matter of privacy or secrecy?
- Is there an abuse of power involved?
- How might your obligations to the

congregant and obligations to the church as a whole be in conflict?

- What are the confidentiality issues here?
- What matters of judgment should enter into the decision?
- How might William Rankin's four guidelines (see page 31) help with your decision?
- Who might you go to for advice?

Suppose that after careful deliberation you first divulge the information to the senior minister, without naming names. The senior minister admits the affair but says that it has never happened before and will never happen again. The senior minister asks you not to act on this information, citing the desire to avoid a congregational rift, hurting their spouse, and further pain for the congregant involved.

- Does this conversation change anything about your decision?
- If you substitute a board president for the assistant minister in the above scenario, what changes, if anything?

Case Study B

Ruth facilitates a church covenant group that is intended as support for members of the church who are primary care-givers for chronically ill family members. Ruth is the primary care-giver for her father, who has Alzheimer's. Ruth is good friends with a couple, John and Mary, who are also members of the church. Mary is confined to a wheelchair, the result of a tragic accident several years earlier, and John is her primary

care-giver. Both John and Mary maintain outwardly that her disability is no impediment to a vigorous lifestyle, and from all appearances, the couple enjoy a full and happy life. Privately, however, John has confided to Ruth that there are times when he really doesn't know if he can carry on, that caring for all Mary's needs has reduced him to an asexual "nurse." John says that he would like to attend the covenant group but he knows that Mary would be mortified if she thought John was talking about her to other church members. John tells Ruth, "Mary doesn't think of me as her *care-giver*" and asks Ruth if she could keep his participation in the group a secret. Ruth is genuinely concerned for John's mental health and knows that John would benefit from attending the group.

Questions

- If you were Ruth what would you do?
- What kinds of secrets are involved in this scenario and whose are they?
- What confidentiality issues are involved?
- What matters of judgment would enter into your decision?
- Are William Rankin's four guidelines (see page 31) helpful in sorting out this dilemma?
- Who might you ask for advice and how would you ask?

Case Study C

Tom and Dick have been close friends and members of the same church for many years. Tom is currently serving as the president of the Board of Trustees and Dick is the treasurer, also an elected position. Dick's wife, Ann, has been battling breast and related cancers for many years. Dick comes to Tom and confesses that he has been "borrowing" money from church funds to pay his wife's heavy medical bills. The church is due to have an outside audit in the next month. Dick asks Tom if he could find a way to delay the audit until Dick has had a chance to pay back the money he has taken

from the church. Dick assures Tom that he will be able to pay the money back in two months when certain investments come to maturity. All Tom's experience of Dick leads him to believe that Dick is a trustworthy man. Tom himself has confessed transgressions to Dick in the past and Dick has never betrayed his confidence. Dick gently reminds Tom of this fact saying, "You have trusted me with your secrets in the past and I have never let you down. Help me out on this one please, Tom. I swear to you I will make this good."

Tom is torn by his friendship with Dick, his concern for Ann, and his duty to the church. He wonders if waiting a few weeks to do the audit would cause any harm. His feelings are further complicated by the fact that he recently read of a similar situation in the newspaper. At a church of a different denomination the church administrator was caught embezzling church funds. When the church discovered this, the church was torn apart by opposing reactions. Half the church had wanted to give the administrator the chance to pay back the money. The other half of the church had wanted to prosecute. News had leaked out, the police had been called in, and now half the members had left the church and started a new one. Tom worries that whatever he decides to do, there will be church members upset with him.

Questions

- If you were Tom, what would you do?
- What kinds of secrets are involved in this scenario?
- What issues of confidentiality are involved?
- What matters of judgment would enter into your decision?
- What values?
- Are William Rankin's four guidelines (see page 31) helpful in sorting out this dilemma?
- Who might you ask for advice and how would you ask?

Handout 8

The Difference Between Stress and Burnout

Stress involves too much transition, novelty, and change, and taxes our ability to adjust. It can result in:

- loss of perception
- loss of options
- regression to infantile behavior
- becoming locked into destructive relationships
- fatigue
- depression
- physical illness

Burnout can be the result of coping with too many needy people and too much responsibility, which strains our ability to listen and care. Consequences include:

- physical and emotional exhaustion
- cynicism
- disillusionment
- self-depreciation

—adapted from Roy M. Oswald,
Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry

Handout 9

A Self-Assessment Checklist

As spiritual leaders all of us are at risk of crossing boundaries inappropriately, thereby violating our roles and abusing those who are vulnerable. But we can reduce this risk through self-knowledge and self-care. If we understand our personal history and its effects on us, our behavior and perceptions are less likely to be shaped by that history. If we are aware of our personal needs and taking care of those needs in appropriate ways, we are less likely to impose them inappropriately upon our ministerial relation-

ships. Furthermore, if we are aware of the power implicit in our role and how that power affects those we serve and supervise, we are less likely to misuse that power.

Use this checklist to assess your risk of violating boundaries. If you answer no to the first question in "Personal History," skip to the questions under "Psychosexual Integration." An answer of no to any question except the first indicates an area in which self-awareness and self-monitoring are crucial.

Personal History

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | Does my personal or family history include sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, or other family dysfunction? |
| Yes | No | Am I coming to terms with the issues and feelings involved in my personal history?
Am I able to identify areas in my history where I need healing? |
| Yes | No | Am I taking steps to address the areas where I need healing? |

Psychosexual Integration

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | Have I discussed my sexual history with someone (a professional or a friend)? |
| Yes | No | Am I comfortable with my sexual orientation? |
| Yes | No | Do I monitor my sexual fantasies for inappropriate persons such as children, clients, congregants, employees, etc.? |
| Yes | No | Are my personal friendships and intimate relationships appropriate and not involving anyone with whom I have a professional relationship? |
| Yes | No | Am I able to identify my emotional and sexual needs and meet them appropriately? |

Personal/Professional Self

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | Am I meeting my personal needs outside of my work setting? |
| Yes | No | Do I acknowledge the power inherent in my professional role? |
| Yes | No | Am I aware of the effects of that power on those with whom I interact, for example, the attraction that power holds for some people? |
| Yes | No | Am I aware of the consequences to me of violating the boundaries that are inherent in my role as a spiritual leader? |
| Yes | No | Do I have a consultation or supervision setting in which I can discuss these questions? |

—adapted from Marie M. Fortune, *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship*

Eleven Guidelines for Preserving Boundaries

To Counsel or Not to Counsel

- Do not attempt to counsel anyone unless you are trained as a counselor.
- Do not attempt to counsel victims or survivors of abuse or abusers without special training in this area. Refer them to an appropriate care provider with specialized training.

Setting Limits

- Avoid counseling in any setting that might suggest dating or other social interaction.
- Limit the length and number of sessions in advance.

Sexual Feelings

- Be aware of any sexual feelings toward congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc. (Expect to have these feelings.)
- Acknowledge these feelings to yourself, to a supervisor, and/or in consultation session—not to the individual who is the object of those feelings nor to any other congregant or staff member.

Sexualized Behavior

- Do not attempt to sexualize any professional relationship.
- If a congregant or staff member engages in sexualized behavior towards you, do

not respond in kind. Rather maintain your role as spiritual leader and consult with a colleague, consultant, or supervisor.

Stress Management and Self-care

- Provide for your own physical, psychological, and spiritual self-care with recreational times, time off to care for self or family, retreats, educational leave, etc. To assess how you are doing with this, list activities you engage in outside of your congregation. (Institutions have an obligation to support individuals' self-care efforts through financial support and generous leave policies.)

Dual Relationships

- Do not enter into a dual relationship in which you are both spiritual leader and lover or partner to a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, etc. If you and one of these persons agree to pursue an intimate relationship, end your role as spiritual leader.
- Try to avoid dual relationships with congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc., in which you relate to an individual in two capacities.
- Try to avoid dual relationships in which you are both spiritual leader and friend.
- If a dual relationship is unavoidable (for example, if you work in a small community,

supervise employees and serve as their spiritual leader, or serve as priest in a seminary where you also teach), discuss the inherent problems and possible consequences with the individuals involved, establish whatever boundaries you can to limit the duality, mutually decide upon strategies for protecting the relationship you have as the other's spiritual leader, and be open about the duality.

Personal Relationships and Intimacy Needs

- Attend to your personal and familial relationships. Maintain and nurture them.
- Assess whether you are meeting your needs in this area by listing the relationships you have with people who are not members of your congregation.

Workaholism and Burnout

- Be clear about your job description and the accompanying expectations. (Obviously, institutions must take the first step by providing job descriptions and specifying expectations.)
- When you encounter situations beyond your expertise, consult and refer. If your workload seems unreasonable or unmanageable, discuss this with a supervisor or consultant and see what can be done to improve the situation.

Supervision and Evaluation

- Ask a supervisor to meet with you periodically to review your position and work if your supervisor does not do this on his/her own initiative.

Isolation

- Maintain contact with colleagues.
- Consult regularly with peers, friends, and supervisors.

Spiritual Practice

- Engage in regular prayer and meditation.

—adapted from Marie M. Fortune, *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship*

Needs Assessment Checklist for Congregations

The following checklist can help you conduct an assessment of your congregation's safety needs. To reduce the risk of abuse, misconduct, harassment, and sexual violence in your congregation, pay attention to boxes left unchecked to indicate work your congregation needs to address.

Does your congregation

- have a safe congregations committee or a sexual misconduct and abuse response team with primary responsibilities for these issues?
- have insurance coverage in case such a claim should occur?
- have a written safety policy that includes screening supervisory staff and volunteer workers, reporting procedures for suspected incidents of abuse, and response strategies?
- make sure that the minister, the religious educator, and the board chairperson know the state laws for reporting concerns about abuse to children?
- have all volunteers in the religious education program receive annual training on what to do if they suspect child abuse or child sexual abuse?
- have a screening form for all employees, regardless of position, and all volunteers who work with children and youth that asks them directly about possible histories of sexual offenses?
- have each staff person and volunteer who works with children and youth sign a code of ethics annually?
- have a draft of a Limited Access Agreement or checklist for convicted or accused sex offenders who want to participate in the congregation?
- teach *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education in the religious education program, including sessions about child sexual abuse prevention, at least twice at the elementary school age level, once at the middle school age level, and once at the high school level?
- hold an annual adult education program on sexual abuse prevention for parents and families as well as for religious education teachers?
- have two adults present in each class or program for children and youth as well as in cars transporting young people to activities?
- have a referral list of community organizations and therapists who specialize in sex abuse prevention and treatment in case you need them?
- have support groups or counseling available to those who have survived child sexual abuse?

Six Case Studies

Case Study A

You receive a report from a congregant that he saw the mother of a young child in your pre-school room handle her child roughly and with what seemed to be extreme frustration and anger. The congregant, who was shocked at the intensity of behavior and fearful for the child's well-being, informs you that he has reported the incident to the county Department of Social Services.

Case Study B

One of the children attending your religious education program is being stalked by a sexual predator at her bus stop after school. The girl observes the man pulling up in his car at the intersection by her home over the course of several days, just as she walks up from the bus stop. One day, he pulls up to the sidewalk where the girl is walking, calls to her out of his car window, and exposes himself to her as he masturbates. A police report is made and the perpetrator is later caught during an undercover investigation that found him to be following bus routes in at least two neighborhoods, where he was stalking young women and girls. The girl and her family are very distressed about the situation and face a possible court hearing.

Case Study C

A couple—both members of your congregation—has come to you to announce that they are considering adopting an infant with AIDS. You realize that appropriate policy, training, and procedures must be put in place to ensure and maintain healthy and safe conditions in the church nursery.

Case Study D

A male member of the congregation discloses to the minister that he is attracted to young adolescent boys. He has no known record, is an active member of the congregation, and has not disclosed any predatory impulse. As the new religious educator, you are informed of the disclosure and monitor the man's behavior and interactions in the congregational setting. One Sunday morning you observe the man pacing back and forth on the church playground. Curious about this uncharacteristic behavior, you stop to ask him how he is doing, why he is in the playground, and how you can help him. While engaged in this exchange, you look across the playground and see a young teenage boy sitting alone on a nearby bench apparently waiting for a parent to come out of Sunday service. The boy is known to you but is not registered in the religious education program or youth group.

Case Study E

After returning from a religious education program field trip, you are informed that the parent volunteer who rented and drove the van for the field trip does not have a driver's license issued by the state where she resides and does not carry her own motorist insurance. The volunteer claims to have lost her driver's license, which was issued by another state, but assures you the lost license is still valid. The children's parents and Religious Education Committee members discovered the nature of the driver's situation after the fact and are extremely upset.

Case Study F

A community group arranges with your church office to rent your religious education program space for an evening program. A member of the group contacts you as the religious education director to inform you that her child fell from one of the pieces of playground equipment. The child was not seriously injured, but in researching the new recommended standards for public playgrounds, the caller wants to inform you that the church playground does not meet those standards.

Questions

- How would you handle these situations in your leadership role?
- What additional information, resources, or support might you need to respond most effectively to these situations?
- Are there any other circumstances present in your congregation or wider community that could create similar incidents?
- What measures would you like to see in place in your congregation that would address these circumstances or prevent similar situations from arising in the future?

Checklist for Developing Youth Group Safety Guidelines

Within the congregation:

Youth Group Staffing

- Clear accountability structure
- Clear step-by-step advisor-selection process
- Ongoing supervision of the advisor
- Explicit advisor termination process
- Availability of advisor training

Boundaries for Adults Working with Youth

- Limits to one-on-one time
- Clear physical boundaries
- Clear emotional boundaries
- Clear boundaries of role (i.e., advisor is not the youth group's therapist)

Creating Rules

- Consequences of rules infractions
- Site safety procedures and policies
- Parental permission
- Prevention through education
- A signed and understood code of ethics

Beyond the congregation:

Field trips

- Safety procedures followed by all participants
- Emergency contact information available
- Parental permission obtained
- Communication with congregation about purpose, length, time, and place of field trip
- Liability issues responsibly covered by adult leaders and congregational policies

Conferences

- Policies for travel to and from conference site
- Rules and policies created together for conference covenant
- structure for addressing violation of rules

Handout 14

Just Relations Grid

Marie Fortune's Justice-Making Element	UU Principle	Scripture Reference
<i>Acknowledging</i> making a person feel heard and affirmed in their worth	<i>First Principle</i> the inherent worth and dignity of every person	<i>Genesis 1:27</i> the sacredness of each person
<i>Restitution</i> renewing right relations and patching broken wholeness	<i>Seventh Principle</i> respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part	<i>Proverbs 25:28</i> the value of structure and mending
<i>Truth telling</i> looking at all of a person's circumstances	<i>Fourth Principle</i> a free and responsible search for truth and meaning	<i>Daniel 13: 1–16</i> steadfastness in pursuing the truth
<i>Compassion</i> suffering with a person	<i>Second Principle</i> justice, equity, and compassion in human relations	<i>Dhammapada, "Thousands," 1</i> a "beneficial word"
<i>Protection</i> accepting what has occurred and taking action	<i>Third Principle</i> acceptance of one another	<i>Deuteronomy 10:10</i> giving shelter to the vulnerable
<i>Vindication</i> setting one free from blame, making things right	<i>Sixth Principle</i> the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all	<i>Dhammapada, "Happiness," 9</i> peace and tranquility
<i>Accountability</i> an institutional process and responsibility	<i>Fifth Principle</i> the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process	<i>Exodus 18: 18b</i> sharing the work

UUA Responsibility and Accountability

There are groups within the Unitarian Universalist Association with responsibility and accountability for various issues of safety and ethics. The Responsibility and Accountability Grid located on the UUA web site (at [www.uua.org/cde/ethics/ Handbook](http://www.uua.org/cde/ethics/Handbook)) gives you current information about these policies, procedures, practices, and structures.

The following is an overview of common safety questions and ethical issues:

Is there a Professional Code of Practice that defines the ethical practices and right relations for UU religious professionals?

The Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) and Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) write and revise their respective Codes of Practice and Guidelines and discipline their colleagues in situations of misconduct.

If I have a complaint against a minister or other religious professional, whom can I call? If there are issues of interpersonal violence in my congregation, whom can I call for advice in dealing with these issues?

Call the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety to voice a complaint against a minister and/or to discuss a safe congregations issue.

If I am the victim of clergy misconduct, where can I turn to for support and advice in negotiating the UUA complaint procedures?

The UUA Office of Ethics and Safety has a Complainant Assistance Program and will

identify a liaison to work with you throughout the complaint procedures.

As a congregational leader, whom can I call for advice and guidance in addressing a safe congregations issue?

For consultation, guidance, and support, UU leaders can call their district office and/or the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety.

Where can I find prevention education resources?

Contact the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety and the UUA Lifespan Faith Development Staff Group.

Who can advise me on disciplinary actions to address congregants' inappropriate behaviors?

Contact the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety.

Who can advise me on afterpastor settlements and congregational healing resources?

Contact the UUA Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group and the UUA Office of Ethics and Safety.

Privilege and Oppression

Privilege operates on personal, cultural, and institutional levels to give advantages, favors, and benefits to those who have the greatest access to resources in our society. For persons with privilege, it is characteristically invisible, the advantages it gives are unearned, individuals who have it are unconscious of it, and the advantage it gives is the direct result of the oppression of others.

Oppression exists when one social group knowingly or unconsciously exploits another social group for its own benefit. Social oppression is an interlocking system that involves ideological control as well as domination and control of the social institutions and resources of society,

resulting in a condition of privilege for the dominant social group relative to the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the subordinate social group.

Privilege and oppression and power and vulnerability are relative and contextual. A person has power or is vulnerable in relation to another person in a given context. Power is a measure of one person's or one's group's resources as compared to another person's or group's resources. Those who have greater resources than others have power relative to them; those who have fewer resources are vulnerable relative to them.

	Sources of Power	Sources of Vulnerability
Ability	ability, large physical size, strength	disability, small size, lack of strength
Age	status as adults or middle-aged people	youth or old age
Class	wealth, job skills, credentials	poverty, lack of skills and credentials
Education	knowledge and information	lack of knowledge and information, lack of access to these
Ethnicity/ Race	status as white (Caucasian)	status as people of color (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American)
Gender/Sex	status as male	status as female
Gender Identity	conformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics	nonconformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics
Psychological Resources	life experience, stability	inexperience, lack of coping skills
Role	status as professional, leader, clergy	status as client, congregant, student
Sexual Orientation	status as heterosexual people	status as gay, lesbian, or bisexual people
Social	support, community, contacts	isolation

Five Case Studies

Case Study A

Your congregation's board has voted to create a Welcoming Congregation Committee. The Nominating Committee has submitted a list of names for possible committee membership. The list reflects the diversity of the congregation and is approved. After several meetings, the committee's straight members share that they want the congregation to be welcoming to all people, not as the program implies, to only the BGLT community. "Don't we want to welcome everyone?" they insist. The BGLT committee members say that yes, we want to welcome all but that is not what the Welcoming Congregation program is about. When this discussion is shared in the congregation at large, many of the BGLT members are disappointed and hurt.

Case Study B

You are a member of the Board of Trustees of your large UU congregation. Your African American minister has served the congregation for five years and revitalized the congregation with his inspiring sermons, boundless energy, innovative worship music, public social justice ministry, and witty sense of humor. You have recently received several complaints from members that he is too evangelical, too Christian, and that the music chosen for Sundays is too loud and not what attracted them to the congregation (prior to this minister). They say that this isn't Unitarian Universalism.

Case Study C

You and three others are transgender-identified members of your small suburban UU congregation. The congregation and its leadership expect you to educate the congregation about transgender identity by sharing your personal experiences and stories of what it's like growing up transgender. For you and your three friends to make yourselves vulnerable in this way, particularly when you share experiences that evoke strong emotional memories, makes other members of the congregation feel that you are too fragile or emotional to assume leadership positions. You have become so identified with this one aspect of your identity that the community doesn't see other aspects of your complex human identity. You would like to run for a position on your congregation's Board of Trustees. You take your concerns to your three friends.

Case Study D

You are a member of the board of a mid-sized UU congregation. He is a forty-one-year-old Latino musician who performs in many local venues and has been attending your congregation for only three months. He is very sociable during coffee hour and displays affection effusively, hugging and touching many women. Some people find this behavior amusing, some find it embarrassing, and some say that they will stop attending the congregation if something isn't done.

Case Study E

You are president of the Board of Trustees of your large congregation. Your congregation is in a difficult transition period with the retirement of your beloved minister of thirty years and a dramatic shortfall in the canvas. Many members say you need a second canvas. But you remember your conversations with some older members of your congregation who are living on a fixed income and feel they can no longer participate because they can't afford to pledge annually and/or their physical condition doesn't allow them to perform service as an alternative to financial stewardship.

Questions

- Name the power differences between the persons or groups involved in these situations. What experiences of personal bias or structures of cultural oppression may be present here? What is normative for this congregation?
- What responses are called for? Who needs to be involved? What are the issues that need to be addressed? What resources and/or resource people need to be engaged?
- What congregational structures and strategies—policies and procedures—for safety need to be in place? What role does the UUA or district have in these situations?

Resources

Abuse and Interpersonal Violence

Benyei, Candace. *Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems: Scapegoating, Family Secrets and the Abuse of Power*. New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1998.

This book explores why sexual misconduct occurs in religious systems and the psychology behind scapegoating, family secrets, and abusive power. The author includes proactive strategies for holistic change in congregations.

Ellison, Marvin M. and Sylvia Thorson-Smith, editors. *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003.

This book is a collection of essays by prominent theologians—Beverly Harrison, Judith Plaskow, Mary Hunt, Daniel Spencer, et al.—on the theme of sexuality, religion, and ethics for a new millennium. These analyses address the possibilities and demands of a justice-love ethic for individuals, faith communities, and society.

Fortune, Marie. *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Group, 1995.

The author discusses the process of ethical decision-making in intimate relationships. Starting with the premise that “love does no harm,” the author offers a set of guidelines that can assist people of all ages in making sexual choices.

Fortune, Marie. *Is Nothing Sacred: When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*. San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1989.

This is a case study of a church as an institution, as a community of faith, and as a family. It is the story of a pastor, six women who risked a great deal to come forward to tell the secrets of their relationship with him, of the many players who knew and did nothing or who knew and did something, and of a congregation that was broken apart by the actions of its pastor.

Fortune, Marie. *Sexual Violence, The Unmentionable Sin: An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

Part One examines the social and religious roots of sexual violence, and the consequences of silence. Fortune reflects on the lack of ethical attention on the problem, then focuses on the development of an ethical stance. Part Two provides a pastoral perspective, providing information useful to leaders attempting to respond to victim or offender. The author discusses the role of counselor and minister, offering pastoral tools for practical response. Fortune concludes with a strong argument to examine sexual violence in a broader context, moving beyond the initial response to individual victimization.

Hanna, Jeffrey W. *Safe and Secure: The Alban Guide to Protecting Your Congregation*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1999.

This comprehensive and practical guide helps identify risks and develop strategies for minimizing a congregation's liability and ensure safety of its members and visitors. Hanna outlines issues, offers solutions to common problems, and helps leaders assess their congregations' risks.

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Reprint. New York: BasicBooks, 1997.

This book is a classic in the field of psychology, linking the public traumas of society to those traumas of domestic life. Herman presents a compelling analysis of trauma and the process of healing.

Goldfarb, Eva S. and Elizabeth M. Casparian Hopkins, Nancy M. *The Congregational Response to Clergy Betrayal of Trust*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1992.

This booklet examines the ways everyone in a congregation is seriously affected when a minister betrays the trust of even a single member. This practical response to abuse includes the ways a congregation can work through the resulting conflict and confusion to emerge a stronger community.

Hopkins, Nancy and Mark Laasar, editors. *Healing the Soul of a Church: Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1995.

Through a variety of essays, authors describe the nature of the damage to the whole congregation when clergy sexual misconduct occurs, from primary victims and secondary victims, to congregants and leaders, to successor ministers and the whole community. This book includes long-term healing strategies for damaged congregations that can restore them to healthy and safe faith communities.

Lebacqz, Karen and Ronald Barton. *Sex in the Parish*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.

This book is a realistic appraisal of the complex relationships between minister and congregants. It addresses not only the sexual problems of clergy, but also the issues that must be addressed by congregational leaders and judicatories in dealing with accusations against clergy.

Lebacqz, Karen and Joseph Driskill. *Ethics and Spiritual Care*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000.

This book seeks to untangle the complex ethical responsibilities and opportunities of pastors, chaplains, and spiritual directors who work to serve as guides to others on their spiritual journeys. Because this is a collaboration between ethics (Lebacqz) and spirituality (Driskill) it raises professional ethics in ministry to new higher standards.

Oswald, Roy M. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1991.

To help clergy restore the balance needed for effective ministry, the author integrates research and experience into a liberating perspective on the pastoral calling. This book includes self-assessment tools and self-care strategies to help ministers discover how imbalances in their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual lives can diminish effective ministry.

Poling, James Newton. *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991

The author is both a practical theologian and a pastoral counselor who works with survivors of sexual abuse and perpetrators. This important book examines the influences of gender, race, and class in the perpetration of sexual violence and

the reality of this violence in its most common occurrence against women and children, particularly in the home or with trusted adults.

Rutter, Peter. *Sex, Power and Boundaries: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Harassment*. New York: Bantam Books, 1996.

This resource is a manual on sexual harassment: what it is, why it occurs, and how to prevent it. The author's previous book, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers and Others—Betray Women's Trust*, provides a foundation for this book.

Staff of Volcano Press. *Family Violence and Religion: An Interfaith Resource Guide*. Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1995.

Acknowledging secular awareness and religious concerns, this book helps clergy understand family violence and respond appropriately. This collection of resources identifies how issues of diverse theology, ethnicity, age, and community particularize the prevailing characteristics of family violence.

Prevention and Education

Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality education curriculum series:

Casparian, Elizabeth M. and Eva S. Goldfarb. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 4–6*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and United Church Board Homeland Ministries (UCBHM), 2000.

Participants learn about and discuss the physical and emotional changes of puberty. Participants will read *It's Perfectly Normal* by Robie Harris, illustrated by Michael Emberly, and examine topics such as values, communication, and decision-making. Each session includes a HomeLink—a homework activity for parents and children to complete together. Note: This program is designed for use with either grades 4–5, grades 5–6, or with one of the three grades separately.

Goldfarb, Eva S. and Elizabeth M. Casparian. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 10–12*. Boston: UUA and UCBHM, 2000.

Using a comprehensive approach, this program helps senior-high youth gain the knowledge, life principles, and skills they need to express their sexuality in life-enhancing ways. Includes a parent orientation. Adaptable for classroom, after school, or youth group settings.

Kimball, Richard. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Adults*. Boston: UUA and UCBHM, 2000.

Using values, communication skills, and spirituality as starting points, this program explores sexuality issues of interest to adults of all ages. It builds the understanding of healthy sexual relationships, affirms diversity, and helps participants accept and affirm their own sexuality throughout the life cycle. This is adaptable for many formats.

Sprung, Barbara. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K–1*. Boston: UUA and UCBHM, 1999.

Supports parents in educating children about birth, babies, bodies, and families. Following a Parent Meeting and Parent/Child Orientation, the eight class sessions engage children with stories, songs, and activities and include a weekly HomeLink—a homework project for parents and children to do together. Promotes dialogue between parent and child. Appropriate for use in classroom and home settings.

Wilson, Pamela M. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7–9*. Boston: UUA and UCBHM, 1999.

Presents a comprehensive approach to human sexuality in an age-appropriate manner. Based firmly on the values of respect, responsibility, justice, and inclusivity. Helps young people apply these values to their behavior and provides them with information and skills they can use throughout life. Includes a comprehensive parent orientation.

Hoertdoerfer, Patricia. *The Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives: Grades K–1 and 4–6*. Boston: UUA and UCBHM, 2000.

A session-by-session guide to what children will learn in an *Our Whole Lives* class for grades K–1 and 4–6. Helps parents answer tough questions about sexuality issues. If their child is not enrolled in a class, parents can teach *Our Whole Lives K-1* at home with this guide and the *Our Whole Lives K-1* curriculum.

Cobble, Jr. James and Richard Hammer. *Risk Management Handbook for Churches and Schools*. Matthews, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 2001.

Risk management from a theological perspective is the purpose of this handbook that describes caregiving leadership and safe, caring environments. This book includes a comprehensive set of risk management resources for churches and schools with helpful safety and liability checklists.

Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Churches and Synagogues*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

In this volume, Friedman applies the concepts of systemic family therapy, along with his unique experience as rabbi and practicing therapist, to the emotional life of congregations and their leaders.

Hammer, Richard R., Steven W. Klipowicz, and James F. Cobble, Jr. *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church Program*. Matthews, NC: Church Law and Tax Report, Christian Ministry Resources, 1993.

This four-part resource—guidebook, training manual, video, and audiotape—addresses a most critical and moral problem facing congregations today. These resources show congregational leaders how to implement an effective prevention program to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in their congregation.

Hoertdoerfer, Pat and William Sinkford, eds. *Creating Safe Congregations Workbook: Toward an Ethic of Right Relations*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1997.

This Unitarian Universalist resource tackles the problem of recognizing, addressing, and responding to interpersonal violence in our congregations and communities. This workbook offers a variety of resources for examining clergy misconduct, peer harassment, and child abuse in the congregational setting.

Rendle, Gil. *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1999.

This handbook provides materials on how to foster thriving, creative congregations despite differences in age, race, culture, gender, theology, and politics. It includes leadership instruction, training, visual models, sample covenants, small-group exercises, and plans for meetings and retreats.

McClintock, Karen A. *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations: A Resource for Leaders*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2004.

This comprehensive resource demonstrates that sexual abuse in congregations is preventable and gives clergy and lay leaders the tools they need to prevent it. How to protect children and vulnerable adults, prevent sexual harassment by and of clergy, and strengthen clergy families are areas of risk and vulnerability addressed in this book.

Shelton, Michael. *Secret Encounters Addressing Sexual Behaviors in Group Settings*. Natick, MA: American Camping Association, 2003.

Although this book specifically deals with children and youth sexuality in a camp setting, there are materials, processes, and strategies of use to congregational staff and volunteers. This book discusses: creating an atmosphere that discourages inappropriate sexual behavior, screening staff, setting up a safety plan, talking with staff about safety, and dealing with sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual assault.

Audiovisual Resources

Available from FaithTrust Institute (Formerly the Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence).

A Sacred Trust: Boundary Issues for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers. A program of four training videos, 2003, 22 minutes each.

This series of four training videos is designed to increase the awareness of the need for healthy boundaries in clergy-congregant or teacher-student relationships and to provide clergy and teachers with guidelines for developing appropriate boundaries and self-care strategies. The accompanying facilitator's guide includes background information, discussion questions, interactive exercises, and participant handouts.

Domestic Violence: What Churches Can Do. 2002, 20 minutes.

This one-hour program offers basic information on domestic violence and concrete ideas about how congregations can become involved in prevention and offer safe space for battered women. A study guide provides worship materials (Christian), background information, discussion questions, and practical steps for congregations on becoming involved in preventing domestic violence.

Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence. 1994, two-part video—Part I: 37 minutes/Part II: 22 minutes.

This two-part video presents stories of six battered women—Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant—and demonstrates how religious teachings have been misused to perpetuate abuse. The program includes ways religious communities can work proactively to end domestic violence. A forty-page study guide and a packet of awareness brochures completes this resource.

The Healing Years: A Documentary About Surviving Incest and Child Sexual Abuse. 2001, 52 minutes.

This video profiles three women through their journey of pain and despair from incest, and their incredible process of recovery as they finally work to end the cycle of incest and child sexual abuse for generations ahead. The video is accompanied by a study guide, developed by FaithTrust Institute, which addresses religious issues.

Bless Our Children: Preventing Sexual Abuse. 1993, 40 minutes.

This video and accompanying study guide are intended for Christian clergy, lay leaders, religious educators, and teachers who are interested implementing a personal safety curriculum to help prevent child sexual abuse.

Hear Their Cries: Religious Response to Child Abuse. 1992, 48 minutes.

This video, along with a companion study guide for discussion leaders, is intended for use in training sessions for clergy and lay leaders on recognizing and responding to child abuse. The goal of the videotape and study guide is to raise awareness among clergy and lay leaders of the vulnerability of children and the need to intervene at times on their behalf.

Not in My Church. 1991, 42 minutes.

This video depicts a docudrama that portrays the dilemma of one faith community when faced with sexual abuse by its minister. It is intended to help people deal with the problem of clergy misconduct involving sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship. A study guide for leaders includes additional information and discussion questions.

Web Sites

www.uua.org/cde/ethics

- Ethics in Congregational Life Program
- *Balancing Acts* Manual
- *Restorative Justice for All: UUs Responding to Clergy Sexual Misconduct* Report
- Resources: Covenants and Codes, Sample Policies
- Links to District Offices

www.uua.org/programs/ministry/responsiblestaffing

- *Responsible Staffing* Guidelines

www.uua.org/re

- *Our Whole Lives* comprehensive sexuality education curriculum series
- *Creating Rules in UU Youth Communities*
- *Principles for the Establishment of Community*
- *Codes of Ethics: Adults and Older Youth, Adults, Youth in Leadership Positions*
- Sample Youth Codes

Organizations

The Alban Institute
2121 Cooperative Way, Suite 100
Herndon, VA 20171
www.alban.org/

Childhelp USA
15757 N. 78th Street
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
www.childhelpusa.org

Christian Ministry Resources
P.O. Box 2301
Matthews, NC 28106
www.churchlawtoday.com

Church Mutual Insurance Company
3000 Schuster Lane
P.O. Box 357
Merrill, WI 54452
www.churchmutual.com

FaithTrust Institute (CPSDV)
2400 North 45th Street, #10
Seattle, WA 98103
www.faithtrustinstitute.org

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse
and Neglect Information
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20447
www.calib.com/nccanch

Religious Institute on Sexual Morality,
Justice and Healing
304 Main Avenue, #335
Norwalk, CT 06851
www.religiousinstitute.org

Stop It Now!
P.O. Box 495
Haydenville, MA 01039
www.stopitnow.org

About the Contributors

Laurel Amabile



Laurel Amabile, a life-long UU and religious educator since 1989, is the Southeast Regional Lifespan Program Consultant serving the Florida, Mid-South, and Thomas Jefferson Districts of the UUA. She resides in Asheville, North Carolina, with her husband Fred, and is the mother of two grown daughters, Christine and Nicole.

Ken Brown



Ken Brown has been a UU minister for thirty-one years and District Executive in the Pacific Southwest District for six years. He leads workshops and consults on church systems, organization, and ministry in the digital age.

Becky Edmiston-Lange



Becky Edmiston-Lange is currently serving the Emerson Unitarian Church in Houston, Texas, as co-minister with her spouse Mark. Prior to this settlement, Becky served as solo parish minister to the Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church in Burke, Virginia, for thirteen years. Becky received her M. Div. from Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where she concentrated her studies in the Psychiatry and Religion program. She also holds a Ph.D. in counseling from the Catholic University of America and is a graduate of the Institute for Pastoral Psychotherapy in Washington, D.C. Over the years, she has served on the boards of a number of community organizations and has served in many capacities in district and UUMA organizations.

Sarah Gibb



Before becoming a minister, Sarah Gibb worked extensively with youth programs (both as a youth and as an adult) and assisted with the development and launch of the *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education series. A sexuality educator and trainer, she is editor of *The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health, and Justice: Resources for Communities of Faith*.

Debra W. Haffner



Debra Haffner is the director of the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing and an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. She is the former president and CEO of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States and an endorsed community minister with the Unitarian Church of Westport, Connecticut.

Patricia Hoertdoerfer



Patricia Hoertdoerfer is the children, family and intergenerational programs director in the UUA's Lifespan Faith Development Staff Group. Her previous publications include *Creating Safe Congregations: Toward an Ethic of Right Relations*, *In our Hands: Grades 4–6*, *Neighboring Faiths*, and *The Parent Guide for Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4–6*. As a minister and religious educator, Pat has served congregations in Syracuse, New York, and Bethesda, Maryland. She is married to Manfred and they have four adult children with multicultural families of their own.

Betty B. Hoskins



Betty Hoskins has been an active layperson in Unitarian Universalist congregations in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas and held leadership and planning positions in the UU Women's Federation, Women and Religion, UUs for Right Relations, Second Circle workshops, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the UUA Pamphlet Commission, the Skinner Sermon Award Committee, and Collegium, the Association of Liberal Religious Scholars.

Kenneth Gordon Hurto



Kenneth Gordon Hurto, senior minister at the Florida Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Myers, has served Unitarian Universalist congregations for more than thirty years. Having trained in family systems theory with Rabbi Dr. Edwin H. Friedman, he is a frequent lecturer on church and family dynamics among Unitarian Universalists.

Anna Belle Leiserson



Anna Belle Leiserson has been a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville for more than twenty years. She considers clergy misconduct an unfortunate expertise—with her real calling being family and the Web.

Tera Little



Tera Little has worked as the Lifespan Religious Education Consultant for the Pacific Southwest District for the past six years, and through their district camping program she has encountered a cornucopia of safety issues. She loves being mom to Adrian and is pursuing the path toward UU ministry.

Angela Merkert



Angela Merkert has served the Central Midwest District as congregational services director for five years. She has extensive experience in organizational development and church consulting in addition to graduate work in ethics.

Fredric Muir



Fredric Muir has served as minister of the UU Church of Annapolis, Maryland, since 1983. He is the author of three books and has contributed essays to several publications. He has done consultative work in the areas of safe congregations and as a co-facilitator of the UUA Empowerment Workshop. He is vice president of the UU Partner Church Council. He is married to Karen and they have two children.

Qiyamah A. Rahman



Qiyamah A. Rahman has served as district executive of the Thomas Jefferson District since 1999. She was a board member of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation and a member of Thurman Hamer Ellington, an intentionally diverse congregation, and UU Congregation of Atlanta. She is currently a member of UU Church of Charlotte, North Carolina. She is pursuing community ministry with a focus on interfaith ministry and social justice at Meadville Lombard Theological Center, where she serves on the Catalyst for Change Committee. Her award-winning sermon, "In My Sisters' Gardens: Women's History Month" was recently published in the anthology, *Glorious Women*, edited by Dorothy May Emerson. She is the mother to Libra, Kaleema, and Muhammad and grandmother to Brandon.

Phyllis Rickter



Phyllis Rickter is a longtime member of the Arlington Street Church in Boston and a former president of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation.

Tracey Robinson-Harris



Tracey Robinson-Harris serves on the UUA staff as the director for Congregational Services. In this role she works with congregational leaders on matters of safety and ethics and in support of our anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism commitments.

Phil Thomason



Phil Thomason joined the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville in 1976 and served as president of the congregation from 1995 to 1996. He is principal of Thomason and Associates, an historic preservation consulting firm.

Patricia Tummino



Patricia Tummino has been minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Middleboro, Massachusetts, since 1998. She is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School.

