

**Congregational Boundaries Working Group**  
**Report to UUA Board of Trustees**  
**October 2016**

Moderator Key and I continue to meet with stakeholders and advisors in our ongoing effort to continue to refine and improve the process of handling clergy misconduct. The original task of the working group set out to review ministerial boundaries in a broad sense, but we have limited most of our efforts to discussing clergy sexual misconduct. Specifically, the following thoughts are on our radar for further consideration:

- Are there improvements needed to our reporting and record retention?
- What might constitute an appropriate appeal process?
- Do all involved in the complain process have the appropriate training?
- How might we fundraise to provide strong support for trauma response, website maintenance, reporting, and travel costs for case investigations?
- What opportunity might we have in terms of prevention of misconduct through an extension of OWL training or some other curriculum?

There is a need for the Board to respond to the Berry Street Essay, given by Rev. Gail Seavey from this year's General Assembly. Rev. Sarah Lammert has responded on behalf of the Office of Ministry. A proposed response from the UUA Board is included in the appendix to this report.

Continuing efforts include:

- Upcoming training of all members of the MFC (October)
- Revisions to the UUA website to clean up links and references on web pages related to ministerial misconduct
- Development of a handbook for complainants which includes administrative steps, words of comfort, and journaling opportunities
- Training for the UUA Board (January)

Respectfully submitted,

*Denise Rimes*

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## APPENDIX – Board Response to 2016 Berry Street Essay

Many of you heard read Rev. Gail Seavey's remarks at the Berry Street Essay this year at General Assembly. Rev. Sarah Lammert, UUA Director of Ministries and Faith Development, has [responded to our Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association](#), for which we are very grateful. The Board also wishes to share our thoughts on this powerful lecture and its implications.

In Rev. Lammert's letter, she summarizes the collaborative efforts of the UUA Board and Staff in addressing some of the issues:

In 2013 a petition by a group called Safety Net (a justice ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville) called on UUA leaders to focus on assessing and improving our response to victims of misconduct. Both candidates for UUA Moderator (Jim Key and Tamara Payne-Alex) and the Chair of the MFC signed the petition, indicating their support. Once elected as Moderator, Jim Key created a Board Working Group on Congregational Boundaries, whose work included a review by Marie Fortune of the [Faith Trust Institute](#) of the [MFC's Rules and Policies](#) and the creation of a [Best Practices guide](#) in February, 2015. In response, the MFC passed a number of amendments to its Rules (specifically Rules 16, 20 and 21) and also updated its policies and procedures. Highlights include:

- Giving the complainant(s) the right to be heard in person when a minister accused of misconduct comes before the MFC;
- Ensuring that any investigation of ministerial misconduct is conducted by individuals *outside* of the MFC;
- Clarifying that complainants will be kept informed of procedures and outcomes, and have a right to appeal a decision not to remove fellowship if new information comes to light;
- Ensuring that an advocate will be offered when a person is considering filing a complaint, and not just when they have already filed a formal complaint. A training of 12 advocates was held in October 2015 led by Marie Fortune; this group meets for ongoing training and support quarterly.
- Cleaning up language that was confusing or disparaging, such as the use of "alleged victim" instead of "complainant."

In 2015 Moderator Jim Key made an [institutional apology](#) at the General Assembly on behalf of the UUA Board of Trustees to the victim/survivors of ministerial misconduct and pledged to continue on the path of creating a just UUA.

### **Continuing Work**

Marie Fortune identifies the following elements as critical to Justice-Making in response to misconduct:

1. Truth-telling (giving voice to the victim);
2. Acknowledging the Violation (by someone who matters);
3. Compassion (listen to and suffer with the victim);
4. Protecting the Vulnerable (prevent further abuse);
5. Accountability (confront the abuser and impose consequences);
- 6. Restitution (institution makes symbolic restoration of what has been lost, e.g. payment for therapy)**
- 7. Vindication (set the victim free from the suffering – can involve forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation)<sup>1</sup>**

The work to date has focused on steps 1-5, and we are just beginning our collaborative work on steps 6-7. Currently the UUA is working with the Faith Trust Institute to update and improve the Safe Congregations web page to create clearer links/guidance for complainants. We are also creating a complaint procedure manual.

Rev. Seavey's remarks represented her experience and the experience of many of our current and former members. We will continue this work, not only with an eye to restitution and vindication, but a push for awareness and prevention so that our future is less encumbered than our past. We are grateful to those who have shared their pain, sorrow, hopes and dreams in an effort to live beyond the trauma, help us heal, and look toward a safer and responsible future.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uua.org/careers/history-uua-task-forces>

