

Chapter VII: Miscellaneous

Church Newsletter Policy/Guidelines (Adopted by the Board of Trustees, 9/10/2000)

Policy

1. Out newsletter is dedicated to advancing and promoting our own church community. All news items and other submitted items are to be judged by this standard.
2. While the ultimate power to determine what is in the best interest of the congregation lies with the congregation, in practice, editorial power shall be delegated to by used carefully, but to be exercised nonetheless.
3. The Church Administrator and Senior Minister serve as editors and are empowered to edit. In the Church Administrator or Senior Minister's absence or unavailability, a person may be temporarily appointed to serve as co-editor. Editorial considerations include content, length, appropriateness, etc.
4. The editors are expected to exercise their judgment on matters of taste, degree of relevance to the congregational life and appropriateness of language and tone. Nothing actionable under libel statutes should be printed.
5. Editorial decisions may be appealed to the Board President. The President may decide appropriate action and/or defer the matter for review by the Board of Trustees.
6. The newsletter address/ mailing list is maintained by the Church Administrator. The Church shall not give out the newsletter/ mailing list for non-church purposes such as personal, commercial or political purposes.

Guidelines

1. Deadline for submission, changes or corrections shall be 10:00 AM on Mondays. Exceptions may be granted with prior permission.
2. Regular columns will be assigned a column length and location by the editors of the newsletter.
3. Language that recognizes and preserves the dignity of everyone is to be used throughout the newsletter.
4. Sourced material is to be acknowledged in articles.
5. Authorship of articles must accompany their submission.
6. No commercial or political ads are permitted.

7. Non-profit events (such as fundraisers) for organizations outside our church may be announced under two circumstances:

- (a) The church or a committee of the church is co-sponsoring the event, or
- (b) A church member is involved in the event in such a way that the member's involvement is newsworthy. When such an announcement is printed, the focus of the newsletter article shall be highlighting a church member's involvement or our church's direct or indirect involvement in the event.

8. "Letters to the editor" are not encouraged and in general not printed. An exception to this guideline may be a member offering thanks or appreciation to the larger community for something. The intent of this guideline is to discourage persons from broadcasting complaints against other persons or the institution and encourages persons to talk directly with one another.

9. Articles submitted for inclusion in the newsletter by a member of a committee must have the approval and acknowledgement of the chairperson of that committee before it will be accepted. It is preferable that only the chairperson submit articles.

10. If, in the editor's opinion, an article appears inflammatory, confusing or misleading, it is automatically pulled and immediately referred to the Senior Minister. Actions taken may include contacting the person who submitted the article for clarification or modification, contacting the Board President, or, if necessary, contacting the entire Board of Trustees.

Safe Church Protection Policy
(Adopted May 18, 2003)

A. Preamble

We believe that there is no greater priority in our church community than creating an environment of safety for everyone – physically, emotionally and spiritually. Acknowledging the lifelong pain and damage caused by sexual abuse of children, the Religious Education Committee prepared a child sexual abuse policy several years ago. Today, with a greater consciousness of the prevalence of abuse in church environments, we have prepared an expanded policy which will more closely guard our young people, and provide a code of conduct and a method of response for adult sexual harassment and misconduct as well as child sexual abuse.

We acknowledge that this expanded policy will result in some inconvenience to our volunteers and to the staff and committees which administer the policy. However, the safety of our young people, and the members of our community, is well worth the inconvenience. We cannot guarantee that no sexual predator will ever succeed in entering our doors, but we are determined to make it as difficult as we possibly can for such a person to gain access to our most vulnerable individuals.

It is a sad fact that sexual predators seek out religious communities for easy access to children, youth and other individuals. It is our very openness and trusting nature which make us vulnerable to such victimizers. Now is the time to join our hands and hearts together to form a bulwark against those who would harm any part of our congregation, calling upon our principles to “affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person” and to “affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations.”

B. Policy Statement

In keeping with the principles of this church and in light of the above stated preamble, the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge declares itself to be a “Safe Church.” As such, UCBR recognizes its responsibility for maintaining a safe and protective environment and strives to ensure that all settings within the church and the church family will be free from sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, clergy misconduct and child abuse. Any form of that conduct is a violation of its Safe Church Protection Policy and will not be tolerated.

1. Scope of the Policy. The scope of this Safe Church policy extends to the following situations:
 - a. a minister or any other paid church staff person that is involved as an alleged perpetrator or an alleged victim concerning behavior that violates this policy during a church sponsored event;
 - b. any adult within the church community alleging sexual harassment or misconduct from another adult in the church community during a church sponsored event;

- c. any person reporting suspected behavior that violates this policy by any adult within or outside of the church community toward any child within the church community; and
- d. any child within the church community disclosing fear, harassment or abuse by anyone within or outside of the church community.

2. Definitions. For the purposes of this Safe Church Protection Policy, the following definitions are used:

- a. We define “**sexual misconduct**” as any instance of undesired or inappropriate sexually orientated humor, language, questions or comments, or undesired or inappropriate physical contact, or inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance, or intimidating or hostile sexually oriented comments or images when:
 - (1) such conduct has the purpose or effect of (i) unreasonably interfering with an individual’s participation or employment at UCBR; or (ii) creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment; or
 - (2) submission to such conduct is an explicit or implicit condition of employment or is used as a factor in decisions affecting an individual’s employment.

Sexual misconduct may be limited to a one time occurrence.
- b. We consider that “**sexual harassment**” occurs “when one person subjects another to repeated, ongoing, and unwanted incidents of sexual misconduct.”
- c. We consider that “**clergy misconduct**” occurs “when a person in a ministerial role (clergy or lay) commits any instance of sexual misconduct with a member of the church, church employee, or other person associated with the church.”
- d. We define “**child abuse**” as “an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust that harms or threatens to harm a child’s well-being or physical or mental health”. Child abuse can include:
 - (1) ***physical abuse*** – deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child;
 - (2) ***emotional abuse*** – subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty, i.e. close confinement, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse;
 - (3) ***sexual abuse*** – engaging in sexualized behavior, verbal or physical, with a child; using a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child; or
 - (4) ***neglect*** – chronic withholding of food, clothing, medication, and proper living quarters, as well as abandonment; can also include physical, emotional or educational neglect.

- e. A “**regular volunteer**” is a person whose volunteer efforts are regular and consistent throughout the year. This category would include, for example, R.E. teachers and assistants, Senior Youth Advisors, Branches Leaders, Committee Chairs, Board members, etc.
- f. An “**occasional volunteer**” is a person whose volunteer efforts may vary throughout the year, may be of a shorter duration, or who volunteers on an occasional basis. This category would include, for example, helping hands, playground supervisors, substitute teachers, mentors, etc.

The following sections also form a part of the UCBR Safe Church Protection Policy: (a) Code of Ethics; (b) The prevention of conduct prohibited under this policy by the selection, screening and supervision of workers, and by education of the entire church family; and (c) The reporting and response procedures for suspected violations of this policy.

C. Code of Ethics

- 1. Our church’s Code of Ethics statement, based on the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Code of Ethics adopted in 1986, is a statement signed each year by all classroom teachers, youth advisors, mentors, facilitators and other staff who work with minors. It read “...leaders will refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive, or erotic behavior with children and youth. Neither shall they sexually harass or engage in behavior with children or youth which constitutes verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.”
- 2. It is also the policy of this church that the ministers and director of religious education will abide by the *Codes of Professional Practice* of the UUMA and LREDA, that these codes will be posted in visible locations in the church building and maintained in the church’s policy manual, and that members will be informed about the codes and how to initiate proceedings against perpetrators.

D. Preventions by Screening and Selection of Workers

- 1. The policy for the screening and selection of UCBR’s paid and volunteer workers is as follows:
 - a. All workers, whether paid or volunteer, will go through the screening process.
 - b. Screening results will be confidentially maintained.
 - c. Persons who have criminal abuse violations will be ineligible to work with children and youth.
 - d. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. Individuals who have such a history

should discuss their desire to work with children or youth with the minister before engaging in any volunteer service.

- e. The UCBR Code of Ethics is to be signed annually by all workers.
2. The actual screening to be conducted is dependent on the type of work to be performed by the individual.
 - a. The screening process to be conducted on all paid employees will include the following:
 - (1) completing an application and/or a primary screening form;
 - (2) undergoing a reference check;
 - (3) undergoing a personal review;
 - (4) undergoing a criminal record check (finger print type); and
 - (5) signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.
 - b. The screening process for all regular volunteers who will work with children or youth *and* all occasional volunteers who will work with children or youth at times other than during Sunday morning R.E. will include the following:
 - (1) completing a primary screening form;
 - (2) undergoing a reference check; and
 - (3) signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.
 - c. The screening process for all occasional volunteers who are members of the church or are persons who have regularly attended the church for six or more months and who will work with children or youth will include the following:
 - (1) completing a secondary screening form; and
 - (2) signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.
 - d. The screening process for all regular volunteers working with adults as Branch Leaders, Committee Chairs, Board Member, or other similar leadership positions will include:
 - (1) completing a secondary screening form; and
 - (2) signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.
 - e. The screening process for persons who have been a member of UCBR or have regularly attended UCBR for less than six months, regardless of the type of volunteer work they wish to perform, will include:
 - (1) completing a primary screening form;
 - (2) undergoing a reference check;
 - (3) submitting a recommendation from a person who has been a member of the UCBR for two or more years; and
 - (4) signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.

E. Prevention by Supervision

1. All classrooms are to have a window in the door.
2. Only “qualified” workers (i.e. those who have gone through the screening process) will be used for positions involving the supervision of children and youth and in adult leadership roles.
3. A sufficient number of adult supervisors will be present at every church sponsored activity.
4. At a minimum, two adult supervisors will be present during any church activity involving youth and children. Any exception to this rule (e.g. transportation or mentoring) is permissible only upon obtaining advance parental permission and notifying the DRE.
5. Parental permission will be obtained for youth participation in any lock-in or church-sponsored even that takes place away from the church site.
6. The DRE is to be informed in advance of the identity of adult supervisors for all church sponsored overnight activities involving children and youth.
7. Appropriate church nursery identification procedure will be used.
8. Reporting procedures are to be followed promptly upon noticing any suspected abuse or neglect.

F. Prevention by Education

1. All paid employees and regular volunteers working with children and youth are to receive training at the annual R.E. teacher training. In addition to receiving training on the R.E. program, this training session will also include a discussion of: appropriate behavior; inappropriate behavior; signs of child abuse; reporting procedures; and a signing of the UCBR Code of Ethics.
 - a. Attendance at this training session prior to beginning volunteer teaching activities is preferred.
 - b. A list of attendees is to be maintained by the DRE.
2. A copy of the *Codes of Professional Practice* of the UUMA and LREDA will be prominently displayed in the church and maintained in the church’s policy manual.
3. A brief description of the UCBR Safe Church Protection Policy will be included in the Roots curriculum.

4. An insert will be included in each New Member Packet regarding the existence of the UCBR Safe Church Protection Policy.
5. Adoption of the UCBR Safe Church Protection Policy, and any future changes to the policy, is to be approved by the Board and voted on by the congregation.
6. Age appropriate information about development and sexuality will be made available to children and youth as it is recognized that, through knowledge, children and youth can be empowered to better protect themselves from abuse and report inappropriate behavior.

G. Reporting and Response Procedures

1. If a worker, volunteer, or any other adult suspects inappropriate behavior within the scope of this policy, that person must immediately report it to the DRE, the Minister or the President of the Board of Trustees, who must then notify each other of its receipt.
2. UCBR recognizes that when an alleged violation of this policy has occurred its concern extends to the families of all involved, the protection of the alleged victim, prevention of possible further violations, and the need to protect the rights of the accused.
3. If the DRE, Minister or President of the Board of Trustees ascertains that a child is in a situation of risk, the responsible person should immediately remove the allegedly abusive individual (or the child) from the situation and take any other steps necessary to protect the minor.
4. The ultimate determination of the validity of any alleged violation of this policy shall be the responsibility of the DRE, Minister and President of the Board of Trustees.
5. The DRE, Minister and/or President of the Board of Trustees are to conduct an appropriate, prompt and confidential investigation of, and response to, the incident. Their actions may include the following:
 - a. Meeting with the individual(s) who reported the incident, and obtaining a written statement.
 - b. Meeting with other individuals having knowledge of the event.
 - c. Reporting, when appropriate, suspicions to the Child Protective Services.

- d. Until the matter is resolved, relieving the individual suspected of inappropriate conduct of any duties involving the supervision, care, or teaching of children and youth, or facilitating programs for adults within the church community.
- e. Further actions as warranted in the event the allegation has merit or cannot be disproved, to include: suspending and/or terminating employment or volunteer duties; notifying the District Executive; and appointing a media spokesperson.
- f. If there is no reasonable cause to believe the allegation is true, appropriate steps to be taken to promote a healing process and reinstate a positive climate within the church family, further actions may include: assuring that those involved are not harmed any further by the allegations; providing support; and, if appropriate, suggesting counseling.
- g. Maintaining a confidential written record of the incident, investigation and response.

If you answer “yes” to any of the following questions in this section, please explain on a separate sheet of paper and attach to this application form or you may discuss your answer(s) in confidence with the minister. Answering “yes” will not automatically disqualify you as an applicant for children or youth work.

1. Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle one) Yes No
2. Has any civil judgment ever been made against you for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle one) Yes No
3. Have you ever resigned from employment or been disciplined or terminated by an employer for reasons related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle one) Yes No
4. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children or youth? (Circle one) Yes No

The following question need only be answered if you will be driving children and/or youth:

5. Have you ever been convicted of driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence of drugs, or reckless driving? (Circle one) Yes No

Church History and Prior Youth Work

Are you a member of the UCBR? (Circle one) Yes No

When did you become a member? _____

If you are not a member, how long have you been regularly attending UCBR? _____

List (name and address) of other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

List all previous church work involving youth (list each church's name and address, type of work performed, and dates): _____

List all previous non-church work involving youth (list each church's name and address, type of work performed, and dates): _____

List all experiences, skills, education, or other factors that have prepared you for children or youth work: _____

Applicant's Statement and Release

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I agree to inform the church in the event any information supplied changes or becomes incorrect. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children or youth. I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization.

I understand that any information obtained about me through this application process will be kept in the strictest confidentiality among staff members of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge who will be screening applicants for compensated or volunteer positions and I understand that the information obtained may be used by those staff members in making their decision as to my suitability for working, whether paid or volunteer, at the church or in any of its programs with the children, youth or adults within the church family. I have read and agree to be bound by the Safe Church Protection Policy of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please Print Name: _____

CONFIDENTIAL

SECONDARY SCREENING FORM

This application is to be completed by: (1) any occasional volunteer working with children or youth during Sunday morning R.E. who has been a member of, or has regularly attended, UCBR for more than six months; and (2) any regular volunteer in the adult programming who has been a member of, or has regularly attended, UCBR for more than six months. This form is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for individuals who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

Your responses to the following questions will be kept fully confidential.

1. As a church volunteer, do you agree to observe the UCBR Safe Church Protection Policy? (Circle one) Yes No

If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions in this section, please explain on a separate sheet of paper and attach to this application form or you may discuss your answer(s) in confidence with the minister. Answering "yes" will not automatically disqualify you as an applicant for children or youth work.

2. Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense related to sexual misconduct or child abuse? (Circle one) Yes No

Only those volunteers who want to work with children and youth need answer the following question:

3. Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children or youth? (Circle one) Yes No

Signature

Date

Communicating Concerns within the Church Community (The Matthew Model)

Adopted: May 9, 2010 by the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees endorses the following process as the preferred procedure for resolving grievances and maintaining right relationship within our church community. At all points in the process, members are asked to: Remember we are all in covenant with one another; Give the process an opportunity to work; Be of good courage. Be forthright. Speaking the truth in love is a spiritual discipline; Encourage others to engage in the process, which concretely means we do not engage in gossip with others; Apply the Golden Rule in our thinking and speaking with others, especially when we must register a complaint; When speaking, use “I” language that concretely means we must not speak for others unless others have given their consent, in which case, their names are disclosed as complainants; In other words, delivering un-attributed remarks is to be discouraged; Guard against email and texting discussion about someone for key reasons: a) email avoids face-to-face communication; b) email does not communicate eye contact, gesture, or tone of voice; c) email often develops a permanent and damaging life of its own. The steps of the process are: When an individual has a concern about the conduct of any church member or non member (including a volunteer or paid staff person in our church) we, the congregation, should encourage that individual to communicate with that party directly. This communication is step one in the process, offering the best chance for clear communication. If the first step does not resolve the concern, a second step in the process involves speaking to the party with another person present . This third person should be invested in a good outcome and can be anyone, including a friend, church member or any council co-leader. If the second step does not resolve the concern, the third step is to have a member of one of our committees or councils present in the room for a third conversation in an effort to come to an agreement, a compromise, or some resolution. In a personnel matter (one involving professional responsibilities of staff), the Senior Minister will be involved at this stage and will notify the Trustee for Personnel.

If the third step does not resolve the concern, step four involves the Council or committee members or Senior Minister notifying the President of the Congregation, who may choose to be involved or may appoint another Board member to participant in the ongoing conversation.

If the fourth step does not resolve the concern to any party’s satisfaction, a fifth, more serious step, is to bring the matter before the Board. When a matter is brought to the Board, the Board may appoint an ad hoc committee to hear the grievance and make recommendations to the Board. Then the Board will hear the grievance and the recommendations to the Board from the ad hoc committee and make a decision. If it is a personnel matter, Board President will direct that the ad hoc committee meetings and the Board meeting to hear the matter not be public, reporting only a decision by the Board without a full disclosure of the proceedings and rationale for such a decision.

If the fifth step does not resolve the concern, a sixth, last step in our process is to take the matter to the congregation, in accordance with Article VI of the bylaws. For obvious reasons, personnel matters brought before the congregation can be harmful to individuals and institutions alike when discussed at a congregational meeting, which is why this mode of conflict resolution is widely discouraged and almost never (if ever) advisable.

The process above assumes the following:

- 1) That if any one of us is in the presence of someone who is about to do or has threatened to do injury, then law enforcement should be called immediately. The above process does not apply when the police need to be called.
- 2) In every church, members of the professional staff have an extra calling of responsibility beyond that of the laity. The three professional associations to which our Director of Music, Director of Religious Education, and our Senior Minister belong (*UU Musicians Network, Liberal Religious Education Directors Association, and the UU Ministers Association*, respectively) list guidelines to which our professional staff is held accountable to each other, to the congregations we serve, and to our member associations.
- 3) Sometimes the worst time to get a staff member's undivided attention on something important is on Sunday morning. Staff serve hundreds of persons on our campus each Sunday in a concentrated block of time. It is the nature of human relationships to misunderstand or misjudge another person's sense of urgency, crisis, or general sharing of information. Assuming the presenting issue is not an emergency, members who needs to speak with staff (minutes before or after the worship services) are asked to write a short note about her or his concern with name and phone number so that they can get in touch with that member later.
- 4) Each member in a congregation is accountable. No exceptions.
- 5) Here in the church, because we are part of culture, every once in a while we will have to remind one another that all members of a church are private citizens and all of us are thus protected by laws against libel and slander, actionable offenses under the law. If not for etiquette and civility, then the law itself guides us, guarding us in what we say about one another.
- 6) While some may argue that any communication is good and more of it is better, the Board recognizes that some communication can be quite toxic; therefore, it behooves us to support *quality* communication in an agreed upon process at the beginning of a resolution process.
- 7) Conflict in human institutions is not necessarily a sign of disease. Actually, a good church probably has any number of conflicts going on at the same time.