

Policy for Including Sex Offenders in Church Community

As Unitarian Universalists we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. As religious communities, we can provide compassion, support and reconciliation to those who truly have indicated that they have taken responsibility for their actions. We believe in the healing power of involvement in a spiritual home. Sex offenders who have completed prison sentences and mandated treatment, as well as registered with the state, have according to the court system complied with their punishments. As faith-based communities, we can provide support and compassion with awareness and vigilance so that all are safe, as those who have sexually offended return to or join our church community.

This policy is in addition to our existing Religious Education Safety Policy.

No adult person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of any sexual misconduct can be permitted to be involved in any children/youth education or children/youth group activities. The response of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland to a convicted or accused sex offender's request to participate in congregational activities is a LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT created on a case-by-case basis. The message to the sex offender should be that they are both welcome to participate in appropriate adult events and that they must covenant with the congregation to avoid all contact with potential victims. Procedures for dealing with youth convicted or accused of sexual misconduct shall be dealt with in age appropriate ways.

STEPS TO TAKE

1) The minister (or other representative should the minister be unavailable) shall meet privately with the individual to discuss the concerns that have been raised. The minister shall check the local sex offender registry before meeting with the person. (If the minister is the one being accused, this policy does not apply. Instead, the President of the Board should be contacted immediately and the President should contact the Director for Congregational Services at the UUA and /or the Congregational Life staff serving the congregation.) If the person has a partner who also attends the church, then the minister shall reach out to the partner as well. The person should then be asked to meet with the minister and a representative of the Committee on Ministry (if there is not an active Committee on Ministry: a person selected by the Minister and DRE) and the Director of Religious Education (if there is not a Director of Religious Education, then the chair of the Religious Education Committee). If there is not an active minister, then a person selected by the Board in consultation with the DRE and Committee on Ministry. **These individuals will comprise the Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland's Safety Team.** The Safety Team may appoint other members of the congregation to assist, with a preference for members who have professional expertise with this issue.

2) The individual shall be asked to complete a questionnaire and sign a release form (see in this policy: "Sex Offender Background Information" - pg 1 and pg 2) so that a UUCOM representative can contact his/her sex offender treatment provider and/or current therapist and/or probation or parole officer. The UUCOM representative shall ask if those professionals are members of ATSA, the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. The therapist and, if applicable, the probation or parole officer shall be asked for their professional assessment of the likelihood that the sex offender will re-offend and whether additional restrictions beyond the standard Limited Access Agreement ought to be placed on the person's participation.

3) If the offender refuses permission to contact therapists/parole or probation officers/other professionals as determined by the Safety Team or refuses to go for an assessment, the congregation shall refuse the offender participation in any congregation activity. All appropriate church leaders shall be notified of this person's identity and the congregation's decision to refuse them participation.

4) If the assessment indicated that the person has completed or is participating successfully in treatment and is not at high risk for recidivism, the Safety Team shall develop a Limited Access Agreement in consultation with the Board President. If the professional assessment indicates that the person is at high risk for re-offending, involvement in the faith community shall be denied until treatment is successful at reducing the risk. A representative of the Safety Team shall then set up a small group, consisting of approximately five persons, including the minister, the Board President, persons (who should be of the same gender identification as the offender as long as the church has gender specific bathrooms) who have agreed to offer pastoral support for the offender and accompany them in worship and other church activities, and someone with expertise or experience in this field. The Safety Team and the small group shall observe the confidentiality of the offender's identity unless one of the items in Section 10 applies.

5) The group shall acquaint itself with any therapeutic program the offender has undergone or will continue to be part of. The group shall meet the offender, their parole or probation officer, and other appropriate people so that clear boundaries can be established for the protection of children and youth and to reduce the likelihood of false allegations or suspicions. This group will operate alongside other agencies in a multi-agency approach to the offender's rehabilitation. If the person has a partner in the community, that person shall be involved in developing the Limited Access Agreement as well. The Safety Team should consult with the church's insurance provider to determine if they have any additional requirements of the church or the offender.

6) All persons with past histories of sexual offenses shall be asked to sign a Limited Access Agreement even if they have already been attending church activities without notifying the church of their history. Upon entry into the congregation and depending on the circumstances,

the person may be asked to sign one annually. If the offender refuses to do so, they shall then be denied access to congregational functions and church property. An offender who refuses to sign a Limited Access Agreement will know that if they enter the congregation or its property, they will be asked leave to by a member of the Safety Team or the Board of Trustees. If the person further refuses, the police will be called for assistance.

7) The first year the Safety Team or its designated representative will meet at least quarterly with any individual with whom it has a Limited Access Agreement to review the arrangement and address any concerns. After the first year, the meetings will be at least annually or as determined by the Safety Team.

8) If the minister or the Director of Religious Education changes, as well as the President of the Board of Trustees, it is important that the departing person inform the new person of this situation to ensure provision of pastoral support for the offender as well as continuity of awareness of the situation. In sharing information appropriately, it is also important to remain aware of confidentiality and privacy for all involved.

9) Copies of files, including Limited Access Agreement information, shall be treated with care and kept in a secure file drawer.

10) REASONS FOR EXCLUDING A PERSON FROM ALL CONGREGATION ACTIVITIES

- Refusal to permit a UUCOM representative to contact the treatment provider and/or probation or parole officer.
- Refusal to submit to a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.
- Report by a treatment provider and/or probation or parole officer that the individual's involvement in the UUCOM community is not suitable, or that the individual is at too high risk for repeat offenses.
- Refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement.
- Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement.

11) If later an individual decides that they can comply with these conditions, the process will begin again, at the discretion of the Safety Team, to reassess the individual and determine if they can be welcomed into the life of the congregation anew.

LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT (CONFIDENTIAL)

Introductory Paragraph in cases of allegation:

A serious complaint or allegation, now under review, has been made about you to the Safety Team. While this complaint is being investigated, in order to protect the participants in our programs from potential risk, and in order to protect you from further suspicion, we ask you to abide by this interim agreement. Signing this document in no way constitutes a presumption or confession of guilt. This is a routine safety precaution, activated without prejudice toward particular individuals or circumstances. This document will be treated confidentially and made known only to the minister, the Director of Religious Education, a member of the Committee on Ministry, and the Board President. It will be kept in a locked file in the office.

Introductory Paragraph in cases of convicted sex offender:

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk both to you and to them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation and our membership but your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

Within the below guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in the church.

Guidelines include the following (items will be checked):

- Please avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation-sponsored events (including as specified below).
- Please do not talk with children.
- Please do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- Please remain in the presence of an adult who knows your situation at all times when children are present.
- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Please avoid being in the building unsupervised when activities involving children are in session, such as children's religious education classes or youth group.

The following activities checked "Yes" are activities that we feel are appropriate for your participation:

Worship Services: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Coffee Hour: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Adult meetings with children in building, such as choir: No () Yes ()

With support person* No () Yes ()

Adult meetings without children in building: No () Yes ()

With support person* No () Yes ()

Have a key to the building: No () Yes ()

Intergenerational church activities: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Intergenerational group activities such as ice skating, baseball games, etc: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Alone in building with minister or other staff: No () Yes ()

Access to church computer: No () Yes ()

Social activities in other member's homes with children present: No () Yes () With support person* No () Yes ()

Other:

_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

_____ : No () Yes ()

*A support person is a person who knows about your history/situation and has been designated by the Safety Team to accompany you to activities where children and youth may be present. It is your responsibility to ensure that a support person is in attendance with you and present with you at all times.

I accept that the following people will be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/youth for whom they care:

INSERT NAMES AND/OR POSITIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property. I understand that this contract will be reviewed quarterly the first year and at least annually in subsequent years or as determined by the Safety Team.

Signature

Date

Minister

Date

Director of Religious Education or Chair of RE Committee

Date

Board President

Date

Third Member of Safety Team

Date

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland
Sex Offender Background Information**

Date (or date range) of Offense(s):

Describe the Crime:

Age/ Sex of Victim:

Crime charged:

Actual Crime convicted:

Date of conviction:

Sentence:

Time Served:

Current Status Legal Status (e.g. on probation until July 1, 2018):

Post-Conviction Probation/Parole/Registration Violations:

Current Restrictions on where you can be or who you can be with:

Describe what you would like to have included in your access plan (e.g. *I want to be able to attend the Sunday service and _____.*)

Other information you believe it is important for the committee to have when designing your access plan:

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I, _____, give permission for Unitarian Universalist Church of Midland to discuss my case with the following, and to review my case with a mental health professional:

1. Supervising Officer Probation/Parole:

Name and Contact Information: _____

2. Treatment Provider

Name and Contact Information: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

If no professionals are available, please provide detailed information about your arrest (date and agency) and conviction (Date, State, County, Court), so that we can retrieve records for review:

Best practices:

1. Have the applicant complete the Criminal Background Form and the Sex Offender Background Information Form.
2. If applicant provided professional contacts, interview those contacts about their opinion about applicant's access.
3. If applicant does not have professional contacts, get records including investigation, arrest, and as much trial docs as you can afford.
4. Conduct Applicant interview where you review the records (so we all agree on what the applicant is seeking and the facts we are considering). At that time, you should ask the following questions and make detailed note of the demeanor and answers. If they cannot answer these well, they are still in their offender cycle.
 - Please describe how your crime impacted the victim, immediately, since the crime and in their future:
 - At the time of your crime, what was your plan for not being caught?
5. You should now have enough info to make an access plan and/or go consult with a professional.