

## **UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BATON ROUGE SAFE CHURCH PROTECTION POLICY**

### **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 to the staff and communities 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 of 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 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 oriented 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:
    - i. such conduct has the purpose or effect of
      - (1) unreasonably interfering with an individual’s participation or enjoyment at UCBR; or
      - (2) creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment; or
    - ii. 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:
  - i. **physical abuse** – deliberately inflicting bodily harm to a child;
  - ii. **emotional abuse** – subjecting a child to verbal assault or emotional cruelty, i.e close confinement, extreme discipline, or deliberately permitting destructive behaviors such as drugs or alcohol abuse;
  - iii. **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
  - iv. **neglect** – chronic withholding of food, clothing, medication, and proper living quarters, as well as abandonment; can also include physical, emotionally, 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: **(C.)** Code of Ethics; **(D.)** 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 **(E.)** 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 reads: “... 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. Prevention 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 upon 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:

- i. completing an application and/or a primary screening form;
  - ii. undergoing a reference check;
  - iii. undergoing a personal interview;
- iv. undergoing a criminal record check (finger print type); and
- v. 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 and youth at times other than during Sunday morning R.E. will include the following:
  - i. completing a primary screening form;
  - ii. undergoing a reference check; and
  - iii. 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:
  - i. completing a secondary screening form; and
  - ii. signing the UCBR Code of Ethics.
- d. The screening process for all regular volunteers working with adults as Branches, Leaders, Committee Chairs, Board Members, or other similar leadership positions will include:
  - i. completing a secondary screening form; and
  - ii. 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:
  - i. completing a primary screening form;
  - ii. undergoing a reference check;
  - iii. submitting a recommendation from a person who has been a member of the UCBR for two or more years; and
  - iv. 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 by **obtaining advance permission from the DRE or Religious Education Council Chair** [notifying the DRE].
5. Parental permission will be obtained for youth participation in any lock-in or church-sponsored event 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 the 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 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 action as warranted in the event the allegation has merit or cannot be disproved, to include:
    - i. suspending and/or terminating employment or volunteer duties;
    - ii. **providing supports to the victim(s), and the complainant, if different.**
    - ii. notifying the District Executive; and
    - iii. 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:
    - i. assuring that those involved are not harmed any further by the allegations;
    - ii. providing supports; and, if appropriate
    - iii. suggesting counseling.
  - g. Maintaining a confidential written record of the incident, investigation and response.