

## **POLICY FOR INCLUDING SEX OFFENDERS IN THE WESTSIDE UU CHURCH**

As Unitarian Universalists it is important for us to remember to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This includes adult offenders who have been formally accused but not yet adjudicated, as well as those who have been adjudicated of state-defined sex crimes. We recognize that the nature and procedures of our criminal justice system are complex. We also recognize that there may be various reasons why someone may have pleaded guilty to sex offenses, just as we understand that there are many different sex offenses defined by state law.

As a religious community, we shall try especially to provide compassion and support to those who are trying to change their behaviors, and who have taken responsibility for whatever misdeeds that previously may have occurred.

Any offenders who have completed their sentences and required treatments, as well as having complied with state-mandated registration requirements, may well have completed all of the formal requirements of state laws.

At the same time, we have a responsibility to the members of our congregation, especially to juveniles. We recognize and require that **no** person who has been duly convicted of (or with an unresolved accusation of) any form of sexual misconduct (as defined by the laws of the State of Texas) shall be allowed to have any close contact (defined here as direct physical contact, social conversation, and/or any form of physical assistance, such as providing transportation to Westside UU Church-related events) with children or youth (defined here as under 20 years-of-age) at any function of Westside UU Church or at any church-sponsored or affiliated function. There are **no** exceptions to this policy, unless specific instances have been addressed by the Westside UU Board of Directors by the provision of a specific Covenant of Limited Access agreement for a particular person. The Board of Directors may direct the Safe Congregation Committee to develop said agreement.

Policies and procedures for dealing with any accusations or misconduct of children or youth (again defined as under 20 years-of-age) shall be addressed separately and specifically by the Westside UU Board of Directors. This policy is not intended to apply to them.

## **PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED**

1. The minister of Westside UU Church, or any person designated by the Minister, should the Minister be unavailable (or in lieu of the Minister's designation by the President of the Board of Directors of Westside UU Church or her/his designee) shall meet privately with the individual concerned, to discuss the individual's role in our church, and/or to discuss any concerns that have been raised by anyone concerning this individual's conduct. Should the minister be the one involved in such concerns, the President of the Board will take the steps here described as applying to the Minister. If the individual concerned has a life partner who also attends our church, then the partner **may** be involved as well in any meeting that may take place, but that should depend on the discretion within the best judgment of the Minister or President of the Board conducting such meeting. The Board-approved Safe Congregation Committee members **may** appoint other members of Westside UU Church to assist with the process here described.

2. The individual concerned in this process shall be asked to answer a set of pertinent questions, and to sign any releases that may be required by law or good practice, so that the individual's sexual offender treatment provider and/or any current treatment therapist, or any current probation or parole officer may be engaged in this process. Given such releases, any of the persons working with the individual concerned may be asked to assess the probability that this individual may offend again, and/or what provisions ought to be included in any **Covenant of Limited Access** regarding this individual's participation in the life of Westside UU Church. Any individual with legally-established histories of sexual offenses within the knowledge of Westside authorities **may** be asked to sign a **Covenant of Limited Access**.

3. Should the individual concerned in this process fail to grant permission to contact any persons engaged in this person's treatment or supervision, or otherwise refuses to engage in an assessment of her/his risk, the Board of Directors of Westside UU Church may refuse to allow the individual concerned any participation in congregational activity.
4. Assuming that an assessment has taken place, the Board of Directors of Westside UU Church **may allow, or refuse to allow**, the offender's participation in any congregational activity, except as specified in the requirements of a particularized **Covenant of Limited Access** applying to this individual, or not at all in the best judgment of the Board.
5. The **Covenant may** be reviewed, adjusted and required annually, in the best judgment of the Board of Directors. The Minister, or her/his designated representative, **may** meet with the individual concerned to review and adjust the **Covenant as may** seem necessary and appropriate in the best judgment of those concerned.
6. As leadership changes at Westside UU Church, it is important that the information relevant to the circumstances described in these procedures be passed on to the next generation of leadership by the Safe Congregation Committee, Minister, or President of the Congregation.

# Appendix 1 - Example Covenant of Limited Access

## Covenant of Limited Access (3 complete pages)

Westside Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Worth affirms the worth and dignity of every person. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who choose to worship and to meet with us, especially in difficult times, or in the event of serious personal troubles.

Based on your personal history, we understand that our community may have legitimate concerns about your contact with children and youth in our community. The following provisions are intended to reduce the risks to you, and to our community, and to ensure the safety of our children and youth, as well as to protect you from false or inappropriate accusations.

**Please review and initial any of the checked points below that apply to you:**

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Not engaging in conversation with children *or* youth (through age 19) unless there is a compelling reason to do so, such as an emergency. Provided, however, that short pertinent responses to direct questions asked by children are permitted.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Not touching children or youth (through aged 19) unless there is a compelling reason to do so, such as an emergency.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Not offering or volunteering for or leading, chaperoning, or otherwise participating in any event for children or youth (under 20–years), including religious education classes, Story/Time for All Ages, OWL classes, choir programs, church-related camping trips, youth group meetings or rallies, and religious education fund raisers (these are examples that should be followed in other activities of much the same nature).
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Seeking (as may be possible) to remain in the presence, at least, of another adult, who may or may not know of this covenant, whenever children or youth are present.
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Excusing yourself, politely and immediately, whenever an unaccompanied child approaches you, either at the church or at a church-related or church-sponsored event in the community.
- \_\_\_\_ 6. Avoiding, in so far as possible, areas of the church building and grounds (without the presence of another adult) whenever activities involving children or youth are in session (e.g., Religious Education classes for children and or youth, meetings of children or youth groups, and social events for children and/or youth).

## Appendix 1 - Example Covenant of Limited Access

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Restricted to use (solely) the single-user restrooms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Not possessing or attempting to possess a key to the building.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Seeking clarification and/or advice, whenever questions may arise regarding the propriety of any activity that may arise. The persons who ought to be asked for clarification and/or advice should be consulted, as may be possible, **in the following order:**
- a. Any member of the Westside Church Safe Congregation Committee, which includes the Minister of Westside Church and the Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE) of Westside UU Church.
  - b. The President of the Westside UU Church Board of Directors
  - c. Any member of the Westside UU Church Board of Directors
  - d. The Chairs of any Religious Education Committee for Children & Youth
  - e. Sponsors of youth groups
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The persons listed in **9 a.-e. above** have been or will be told of your covenant/agreement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. **(As Needed)**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. **(As Needed)**

We have reviewed this covenant/agreement and agree to abide by and follow its provisions and intentions. We understand that should the person to whom this agreement is intended to apply be determined to have violated this agreement, such person may be denied access to any and all church functions and property.

There shall be established a process for applying this agreement, and for determining whether violations may have occurred, following the general rules of due process. These rules require notice, the specification of the charges, and the opportunity to respond in a fair hearing.

After all efforts to enforce this agreement have been tried, should the restrictions determined to apply to this person not be accepted by the person concerned, the Westside Disruptive Behavior Policy shall apply.

# Appendix 1 - Example Covenant of Limited Access

This agreement shall remain in effect until modified or terminated by the Westside UU Church Board of Directors.

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<b>Name of Person Concerned</b>	Date
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<b>Minister</b>	Date
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<b>Board President or Designee</b>	Date
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<b>Director of Lifespan Religious Education</b>	Date
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<b>Safe Congregation Committee Chair or Designee</b>	Date
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## Appendix 2 - Additional Guidance and Considerations

### **Considerations for Additional Restrictions on Participation**

Requiring the name of parole officer

Requiring the name of therapist/counselor

Requiring a risk assessment with a qualified therapist

Lighting the Chalice

Presenting the Time for All Ages

Presenting role in an intergenerational service

Attending all-church camping weekend

Interviewee for Coming of Age classes

Attending all-church events designed for children (1.e. Halloween party/Trunk or Treat)

Participating in musical group where children or youth participate

Participation in social justice marches that include children/youth

Presence at social justice events/projects if children or youth also participate

Being present in the building during over-night youth rallies

Participating in church workdays when children/youth are also volunteers

Bringing a pet to the church building

Need to be assigned a “buddy”

**\*\*\*From the UUA: 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 or 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

## Appendix 2 - Additional Guidance and Considerations

- refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement (Covenant of Limited Access)
- refusal to comply with the requirements of the Covenant of Limited Access