



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATION OF VENICE, FL  
SAFER CONGREGATION  
POLICIES

November 22, 2023

UUCOV 1971 Pinebrook Rd., Venice, FL 34292



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# 1

## Code of Ethics

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Venice, FL November 22, 2023

Our congregation is a voluntary association of people who gather for the purpose of religious fellowship. The relationships which develop within our church may more resemble friendships, with their attendant risks and rewards, than professional relationships. The potential for intergenerational friendship and learning at our church is unique and important to the spiritual life of all concerned – adults, children, and youth.

There is an inherent power differential between adults and young people, thus it is important for adults to exercise good judgment and maturity in their influence upon children and youth, and to refrain from using young people to inappropriately fulfill their own needs. Young people are vulnerable, in that they may find it difficult to speak out about the inappropriate behavior of adults or even to recognize such behavior as inappropriate.

Your signature on this page is a promise to:

1. Refrain from engaging in sexual, seductive or erotic behavior with children and/or youth.
2. Refrain from harassment or behavior which constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.
3. Refrain, while working with our children and youth, from being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs or any other substances which impair your judgment or your ability to function effectively in a leadership role.
4. Read, affirm, and sign the Affirmation for Those Working with Children and Youth about my past behavior and to report any future action that may bear on your fitness to work with our children and youth.

**I have read and understand the UUCOV Policy on Safety from Abuse and Harassment. In addition, I understand and hereby agree to abide by this Code of Ethics.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## 2

# Policy Regarding Conflicts, Violations of Covenant, or Destructive Behavior

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Venice, FL November 22, 2023

**Rationale:** It is the responsibility of each member of our church community to assure the safety, health and well-being of every other member of our community, especially with regard to abuse and harassment of all types.

**Policy:** Employees, volunteers, and all members of the congregation (including children) are prohibited from all types of abuse and harassment (including bullying) against any member or participant in church activities or any employee or applicant for employment. In response to violations of this policy, the Board of Trustees, if necessary, shall take disciplinary action, which may include termination of employment or membership and/or exclusion from church property and programs.

**Note:** Please also see separate **Policy: Safety from Bullying**.

### Definitions:

**Abuse** includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment, or offensive physical or sexual contact.

**Bullying** is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.

**Emotional harassment** means activity that produces emotional fear in an individual. Such harassment is anything from verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle tactics, such as intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to ever be pleased.

**Physical abuse** includes activity that causes bodily injury or impairment or offensive physical contact.

**Sexual abuse** means any sexual touching of a child or any activity that causes a person to engage in any sexual act or conduct without that person's consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

**Physical harassment** means activity that places a person in fear of bodily injury by acts as threatening or tormenting behavior, compelling a person by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which a person has a right to abstain.

**Sexual molestation and sexual exploitation** mean activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual conduct to which that person would not voluntarily consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

**Sexual harassment** means making sexual advances or requests for sexual favors to another person, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where the other person by words or conduct has indicated that such words or conduct are not desired, or where a reasonable person would expect that such words or conduct would not be desired.

**Adopted by UUCOV Board of Trustees on November 12, 2013**

### **Procedures: Safety from Abuse and Harassment**

Complaints involving bullying, abuse or harassment of any type should be brought to the attention of the Minister, the DRE, and/or the President of the Board of Trustees. Information about the complaint will be shared with a previously identified Ad Hoc committee to investigate the matter.

The Board of Trustees each year will identify members of an Ad Hoc Committee that will be ready to take action if a complaint is registered by any member of the congregation.

### **Preventive measures that must be taken for children and youth:**

- The DRE must undergo a background check.
- Every volunteer must agree to sign a Code of Ethics and be advised they are subject to a background check.
- Volunteers new (i.e., less than 6 six months) to the congregation must always be accompanied by another adult when they are in the presence of a child.
- Each class will be conducted with the expectation that observers will be present.
- Each classroom door will remain open at all times unless there is a window that permits observation by anyone passing.
- Whenever possible two adults will meet with each class.
- The DRE or a designated substitute will circulate among classes without prior announcement.
- If travel is required, signed parent permission must be obtained before the event.
- If travel is required, no child or youth will be alone with one adult (i.e., non-parent) in the vehicle.
- Volunteers who are interested in working with children and youth must sign the included "Code of Ethics" and the "Affirmation by Those Working with Children and Youth."

**If a complaint is made regarding a child (ages 0 through 12) or youth (ages 13 through 21):**

- If the allegation is bullying, the Minister, the DRE and the President of the Board of Trustees must be notified. The DRE will be responsible for working with the teacher and parents to resolve the issue and to share that resolution with the Minister and the President of the Board of Trustees.
- If the allegation is abuse in any form, a complaint should be registered with the Minister, the DRE, or the President of the Board of Trustees who will activate the Ad Hoc Committee. It is the responsibility of the Ad Hoc Committee to conduct a preliminary investigation and recommend an appropriate response plan.
- If the preliminary investigation confirms even a possibility of abuse, the proper state and/or federal officials must be notified immediately. It is the obligation of the Minister, DRE, or President of the Board of Trustees to notify the proper authorities who will then conduct a formal, complete investigation.
- Care must be taken to protect the identity and rights of both the alleged victim and the alleged aggressor.
- It is the responsibility of the Minister, the DRE and/or the President of the Board to notify the UUA Regional/District administrator and the insurance company when an allegation of abuse is confirmed.

**If a complaint is made regarding an adult (aged at least 21):**

- If an allegation of bullying or abuse of any type is made, the Minister, DRE and/or President of the Board of Trustees will activate the Ad Hoc Committee. This Ad Hoc Committee will develop an appropriate response plan.
- Care must be taken to protect the identity and rights of both the alleged victim and the alleged aggressor.
- It is the responsibility of the Minister, the DRE and/or the President of the Board to notify the UUA Regional/District administrator and the insurance company when an allegation of abuse is confirmed.

**Adopted by UUCOV Board of Trustees on November 12, 2013**

## **Appropriate Response Plan: Guidelines for the Ad Hoc Committee**

*It is the responsibility of each member of our church community to assure the safety, health and well-being of every other member of our community, especially with regard to abuse and harassment of all types. A situation might arise that challenges our sense of individual and communal safety and wellbeing. Such a situation could result in a formal complaint which would need to be addressed with an appropriate response plan. These guidelines should be considered when it becomes necessary to write such a plan.*

Complaints involving abuse or harassment of any type should be brought to the attention of the Minister, the DRE, and/or the President of the Board of Trustees. Information about the complaint will be shared with a previously identified Ad Hoc committee to investigate the matter.

The Ad Hoc Committee should consider the following dimensions in assessing the nature and severity of the alleged behaviors:

1. Dangerousness – is the alleged aggressor a source of threat or harm to persons or property?
2. Disruptiveness – what is the extent of disruption to church functions?
3. Congregational Integrity – how likely is it that existing or prospective church members will be driven away by the alleged behavior?
4. Probability of Change – how likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?
5. History -- what has been the frequency and the degree of disruption caused by the alleged aggressor or the alleged victim in the past?

The Ad Hoc Committee will adhere to these guidelines:

- Persons identified in the complaint will be responded to as individuals of dignity and worth.
- Information concerning the alleged incident(s) that led to concern will be systemically collected from all the concerned parties by delegated committee members and documented before any action is taken.
- If appropriate, the Ad Hoc Committee may offer referrals for professional services.
- In the event of imminent risk or actual harm to church members, church employees or church property, immediate action must be taken to secure the safety of persons and property.

- All documentation developed in the course of investigating and resolving allegations will be kept confidential. The President of the Board of Trustees will be responsible for determining access to such documentation and for ensuring its security.
- The Ad Hoc Committee will meet to assess the findings and decide on a course of action, with the following responses recommended:
  - If the basis of the original concern is determined to be not valid, the Minister will be asked to counsel both parties involved in the complaint.
  - If the basis of the original concern is determined to be valid, the Ad Hoc Committee must:
    - Clearly communicate to the parties involved that the concerns have been validated, thus it is necessary to negotiate a contract for clearly defined behavioral change. Such communication and contract must be documented.
    - If the alleged offender refuses to negotiate a contract or refuses to abide by a contract, he or she may be excluded from the church for a specified period time, with reasons for such action, and conditions for return clearly communicated and documented.
    - If the alleged offender continues the abuse or harassment or is engaging in behavior of sufficient severity, he or she may be permanently excluded from the church and the church premises. Should the Ad Hoc Committee decide on the serious step of exclusion or expulsion from the congregation, they must consult the Board of Trustees prior to action being taken.



### 3

## UUCOV Safety Policy

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Venice, FL November 22, 2023

Purpose: To provide safe surroundings while participating in UUCOV worship services and other UUCOV sponsored programs.

### **A. Safeguarding Children and Youth**

The following items are the responsibility of the Religious Education Committee.

1. That all materials used by the children will be age appropriate and in good working order.
2. That the learning environment is free from chemical hazards.
3. That smoke alarms are in good working order.
4. That there is an evacuation plan that teachers and volunteers are familiar with.
5. That there are sufficient numbers of adults (and at least two) present to ensure child safety.
6. That all teachers have a background check.
7. That a teacher or volunteer will immediately report to the Board of Trustees and/or minister if problems arise regarding the physical space, employees or equipment.
8. That the committee prepare and implement a written standard of conduct for adult/child relationships which establishes parameters of conduct for adult - child interaction during and after normal activity hours.
9. That at least one person is trained in First Aid.

### **B. Safeguarding the congregation from faulty equipment and chemical and other preventable hazards**

The following items are the responsibility of the Facilities Management Committee.

1. That all hazardous chemicals, paints and other solvents are stored in a safe place with adequate ventilation.
2. That the size, number and location of fire extinguishers are determined and their locations are communicated to the congregation.
3. That fire extinguishers and smoke detectors are inspected at least once per year.
4. That all electrical equipment is inspected once per year.
5. That an official fire inspection by the Venice Fire Department is conducted every 3 years.
6. That there is sufficient dusk-to-dawn lighting.
7. That emergency exits are unlocked and free of obstructions when buildings are occupied.
8. That emergency lighting is tested once a year.
9. That electric heating and air-conditioners are inspected by qualified contractors
10. That the organ in the sanctuary is turned off when not in use to prevent overheating.
11. That the keys to all facilities are tracked and returned to the office when no longer needed.

### **C. Safeguards During Worship Services**

The following items will be the responsibility of the Security Committee:

1. That one member will stand in the rear of the sanctuary and porch and remain on the lookout for potentially dangerous situations or individuals who may appear suspicious.
2. That the team member standing security watch carry a cell phone and call either the Venice Police Dept. or 911 in the event of an emergency.
3. That periodically during the service, the person standing security watch step outside the sanctuary and scan the grounds for suspicious activities or persons.
4. That the person standing security watch walk over to Waters Hall at least once during the service to ensure the children are safe.
5. That all members of the security team know the location and use of fire extinguishers and first aid kits.
6. That in the event of an emergency during the service the team will instruct the congregation to evacuate the building. This includes severe and dangerous emergencies such as an armed gunman entering the building.

### **D. First Aid**

The following activities are the responsibility of the Safety Team:

1. That first aid kits are available in the sanctuary and in Waters Hall and their locations are publicized.
2. That records are kept of any first aid care given to members, guests, volunteers, or employee.
3. That emergency phone numbers are clearly posted.
4. That if corrosive liquids or materials are handled, means are provided for quick drenching or flushing of the eyes and body.
5. That the team members are trained in CPR and first aid.

### **E. Other Safety Considerations**

The Board of trustees must be informed about safety issues on a regular basis.

The minister or board members must immediately report to the board president if he/she has received hateful or threatening e-mails, letters, or phone calls. The president, in consultation with the minister, will determine whether or not the Venice Police Department should be contacted. However, the minister or board member who has received a hateful communication should report the incident to the Venice Police Dept or 911 if he/she feels in imminent danger.

**Adopted by the Board 12-08-09**

## 4

### Active Shooter and Lockdown Policy

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When a hostile person(s) is actively causing deadly harm or the imminent threat of deadly harm or is barricaded within a building, the following procedures should be followed:

- Lock yourself in the room you are in at the time of the threatening activity.
- If communication is available, call 911 or other appropriate emergency numbers.
- Don't stay in open areas.
- If in the office, office staff should use the designated safety phrase to alert staff to potential danger.
- Do not sound the fire alarm. A fire alarm would signal the occupants in the rooms to evacuate the building and thus place them in potential harm as they attempted to exit.
- Lock the window and close blinds or curtains.
- Stay away from windows.
- Turn all lights and audio equipment off.
- Try to stay calm and be as quiet as possible.

If for some reason you are caught in an open area, such as a hallway or main congregation area, you must decide what action to take.

1. You can try to hide, but make sure it is a well hidden space or you may be found as the intruder moves through the building looking for victims.
2. If you think you can safely make it out of the building by running, do so. If you decide to run, do not run in a straight line. Keep any objects you can between you and the hostile person(s) while in the building. Use trees, vehicles or any other object to block you from view as you run. When away from the immediate area of danger, summon help any way you can and warn others.
3. If the person(s) is causing death or serious physical injury to others and you are unable to run or hide, you may choose to play dead if other victims are around you.
4. The last option you have, if caught in an open area, may be to fight back. This is dangerous, but depending on your situation, this could be an option.
5. If you are caught by the intruder and are not going to fight back, follow their directions and don't look the intruder in the eyes.

6. Once law enforcement arrives, obey all commands. This may involve your being handcuffed or made to put your hands in the air. This is done for safety reasons, and once circumstances are evaluated by law enforcement, they will give you further directions to follow.
7. If you are not in harm's way and it is appropriate for the situation fill out the Kidnapping and Hostage Checklist form and give it to the police when they arrive.

When faced with an armed, violent person, consider precautions as listed above. Follow directions from Worship/Incident Leader (or designee) when possible and consider what is best for your and other's safety. Some of the actions discussed above may be appropriate for congregants as well as calling 911, if out of sight.

## **Financial Safety Policies**

The UUCOV Finance Committee will develop a comprehensive set of safety policies for the Board to approve.

## 6

### **Religious Education and Children**

UUCOV is in the process of developing a comprehensive set of Children's Religious Education Policies

## **7**

### **Safety in Youth Ministry**

UUCOV is in the process of developing a comprehensive set of Youth Ministry Safety Policies

## 8

### **Sexually Safer Congregation Policies**

UUCOV is in the process of developing a comprehensive set of Sexual Health and Safety Policies using Debra W. Haffner's Guide.

<https://www.uua.org/safe/healthy/assessing/checklist>



## Social Media and Safer Communications Policies

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Venice, FL November 22, 2023

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply lessons from commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries to the virtual world of digital media and communication.

In the pages that follow, you will find information on social media sites and groups and recommended practices for interacting on each, plus information about behavioral covenants, video chats, blogs, video blogs, emailing, text messaging and tweeting.

### Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safeguarding All People

1. Adults have more power than children and youth.
2. Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
3. The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.
4. Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact with each other any time they engage in ministry with children or youth.
5. Windows in doors allow transparency of interactions with children, youth and adults who may be vulnerable.

### General Information about Digital Communications

1. All communications sent digitally (i.e. email, messages on social media sites, notes or posts, etc.) are **not confidential** and may be shared or reposted to others.
2. Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, just as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
3. In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
4. In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate with through that medium. In the physical world, “friend” can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self- disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.
5. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.
6. Everything you post online is public and a part of your witness.
7. Clergy, especially, should not post if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

## **Recommended Practices for Interactions with Children and Youth**

### ***Relationships on Social Media Sites***

1. Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social media profile, or to only post things they feel comfortable sharing with the youth to whom they minister. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Adults should not submit friend requests to minors or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be friends and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
2. If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their faith community, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult's profile and correspondence.
3. Adults who want to connect via a social media website with youth to whom they minister may want to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to friend an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult's personal profile account. The purpose of this is to create a line of privacy between youth and one's family, friends and colleagues. Alternatively, the DRE could also post only that which he or she feels comfortable sharing with the youth to whom he or she ministers.
4. Any material on any site (whether church affiliated or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or the Child Protective Services. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with CPS and/or the police. To find the hotline in your area: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/pg93.htm>.

### ***Groups on Social Media Sites***

1. Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth.
2. Closed groups, but not hidden groups, should be used for youth groups
3. Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite another youth to join the group.
4. Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
5. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or CPS. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with CPS and/or police.

6. Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child as been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.
7. Any content that details inappropriate behavior, which is outside of the bounds of the established behavioral covenant, during a church sponsored event or activity should be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
8. Social media groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
9. Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are not within the purview of adult youth leaders.
10. Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or those who are no longer eligible because they aged-out of a program, should be removed from digital communication with youth groups via social media sites, list servs, etc. In some cases, the discretion of the DRE must be trusted in this area.

## **Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Adults**

### ***Relationships on Social Media Sites***

1. Clergy are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social media profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate. Or, clergy may have the mindset that they will only post that which they feel comfortable sharing with their whole congregation on a Sunday morning.
2. Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with friends, family and peers. Clergy should not submit friend requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
3. Clergy who want to connect via a social media website with parishioners are encouraged to set up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy between parishioners and family, friends and colleagues. Clergy may also only post that which they are comfortable sharing publicly with congregants.
4. Clergy should consider the impact of declining a friend request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in real world relationships. Clergy can direct friend requests from parishioners to the parish's group page.
5. Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
6. When a cleric's ministry at a congregation or other ministry setting ends, the cleric should remove parishioners as friends or contacts in all forms of digital communications whenever possible.
7. Clergy should make use of private messages for matters that should be discussed privately.

8. All individuals relating to one another on the church Facebook page should behave in the same way as they would during a fellowship moment at church. The atmosphere should be friendly, kind and safe. If anyone fails to maintain that friendly spirit, he/she will be asked to leave. Opinions are welcome, but nastiness is not.

## **Recommendations for Digital Communications and Content**

### ***Behavioral Covenants***

1. Covenants should acknowledge that materials posted on church sponsored sites and/or group pages are not confidential.
2. Covenants should acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.
3. Covenants for communities of faith should address the following issues:
  - Appropriate language
  - Eligibility of membership to join a social media group. Things to consider include whether you have to be a member of a parish or youth group and whether there are age requirements.
  - Loss of eligibility of membership and removal from the social media group. Consider how and when members will be removed from the group due to moving away, leaving the faith community, becoming too old for youth group, clergy leaving to minister to another parish or exclusion from ministry positions for other reasons.
  - Who, how and when photos may be tagged with members identified by name. One suggestion is for individuals to tag themselves in photos, but not to tag others.
  - Appropriate and inappropriate behavior of members, such as bullying, posting or sharing pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, etc., and the consequence for inappropriate behavior.
  - Compliance with mandated reporting laws regarding suspected abuse.

### **Recommendations for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs**

1. Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth.
2. Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing, state of dress, etc.
3. All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
4. All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. The voice of DREs and clergy is often considered the voice of the church.

## **Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content Online**

1. Congregations must inform participants when they are being recorded on video because church buildings are not considered public space.
2. Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media must post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
3. All communities of faith should take care to secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of minor children who will, or may, participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
4. Photos that are published on church-sponsored sites should not include names or contact information for persons under 18.

## **Recommendations for Use of Email, Text Messaging & Twitter**

1. Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
2. Email may not be an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
3. If an email message is longer than a couple of paragraphs, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
4. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
5. Take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the “send” or “reply all” button.

## **In Conclusion**

- ***Remember, if you don't want it published on the front page of the local paper, don't write it or post it.***
- If you have any inkling that what you're about to post may be questionable to anyone, don't post it.
- Use social media responsibly to build friendships and share the Gospel. Use your common sense.
- If you have questions or concerns, contact the Board of Directors or the Minister.