

Charter of the Safer Congregations Committee

Purpose: The Safer Congregations Committee advises the Board on the creation, implementation and oversight of policies and procedures that insure a safe environment for children, youth, and adults at The Unitarian Church of Westport. The Safer Congregations Committee also acts as the Response Team for any allegations of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, professional misconduct, or violent, threatening or harassing behavior committed by a member or regular visitor to the congregation or to determine if and how a person with a history of sex offenses can be safely engaged in the congregation.

Goals:

1. Each year the Committee reviews the current safer congregations policy in order to insure that current policies are being followed and to update policy recommendations to keep up with current best practices.
2. Educate the Board, staff, and congregation regarding safer congregations issues
3. Serve as a response team in cases of allegations or person with a history of sexual offenses, including creating a limited access agreement.

Roles: The Committee consists of a Chair who is appointed by the Board, one of the TUCW ministers, the Director of Religious Education (DRE), a member of the Board of Trustees, and at least two members of the congregation appointed by the chair of the committee.

The Chair shall serve for no more than two years. (It is recognized that the current chair has been in place for a significant length of time. It will take some time to mentor a new chair, so the two year term limit shall not take effect for at least a year.)

Minute taking will be rotated among committee members. All committee members will share the follow up work that emerges from each meeting.

Guidelines: The Committee will meet at least twice during each church year. The Chair calls the meetings, creates an agenda, and facilitates the meetings. Minutes will be kept of all meetings. Each year in the fall the committee reviews current policies and procedures, and insures that they are being followed. The Committee may meet again in the spring to assess new best practices and make recommendations to the Board. Meetings in between are at the discretion of the Chair or as necessitated by events and issues that come up, including meeting within 10 days of an allegation of abuse, harassment, or misconduct.

Accountability: The Safer Congregations Committee is a committee of the Board and is accountable to the Board. Requirements for reporting to the Board are determined by the Board. The Committee will present a written annual report to the congregation prior to the time of the Annual Congregational Meeting.