

GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS

I. Selection of the Religious Educator

Before any employment arrangement is entered into, the religious educator and the congregation or community being served need to assess the needs and support for religious education in the congregation or community being served and the skills and interests of the applicant.

LREDA endorses the UUA policy of non-discrimination in employment. When hiring a religious educator, congregations should not discriminate on account of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, disability, class or ethnicity. In addition, the promotion of diversity should be taken into account when choosing among well-qualified candidates.

A. The Congregation

The process of selecting a religious educator is an important one. Guidelines for suggested procedures are available in *The Search for Religious Education Leadership* (http://www.uua.org/documents/ellenwoodpat/re_leadershipguide.pdf) developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association in cooperation with LREDA. The "Search" provides congregations a basic handbook of good practices for the hiring of lay religious educators.

Settlement procedures for Ministers of Religious Education and Credentialed Religious Educators are outlined in *The Settlement Handbook*, also available from the UUA Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group. Helpful information is provided on how to form a search committee, evaluate needs, interview candidates, draw up a contract, and make other arrangements. [Search Process](#)

B. The Religious Educator

A wide range of positions exists for professional religious educators. As one considers professional religious education leadership, it is important to explore the choices that are available. Information about the UUA Credentialing Program for professional religious educators is available from the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group. (see [RE Credentialing](#)).

II. Defining the Relationship

A. To insure a clear understanding between both parties, a written contract or agreement should exist between a congregation and the religious educator. In the case of an interim religious educator* the agreement should specify that the candidate will not be considered for a permanent position in that congregation. In the case of an acting religious educator** the agreement should specify how and when that person's continuing in the position shall be determined.

*An **Interim** religious educator is hired for 1-2 years to serve as a bridge between settled religious educators.

An **Acting religious educator is hired for 1-2 years but may apply for the settled position.

B. A carefully drawn agreement or contract is the best instrument for avoiding hurt and disappointment which often result from unstated and unclarified expectations. It is recommended that this be developed and agreed to by both parties. A typical agreement would contain:

1. Position description , responsibilities, and evaluation process
2. Compensation-- nature and method of increments; employer expenses (i.e., insurance, pension, professional expenses)
3. Housing provisions (for ministers),
4. Moving and settling-in expenses
5. Working conditions
6. Vacation time, leave and sick leave provisions
7. Personal study
8. Support for Parents
9. Sabbatical and continuing education provisions
10. Accountability
11. Professional staff relations
12. Departure Procedures

1. Position Description, Responsibilities, and Evaluation Process for Religious Educators Serving Congregations

The responsibilities of the religious educator may vary from congregation to congregation and are arrived at through negotiation and in mutual agreement. They may include: responsibility for children's religious education, worship, youth programs, adult education, rites of passage, young adult and campus ministry, administration, counseling, and committee support.

It is the task of the congregation to design a job description in anticipation of searching for a religious educator.

It is the responsibility of the religious educator to study that document in light of her /his own expectations, skills, knowledge, and experience. It is the joint responsibility of the congregation and the religious educator to determine whether or not a good match exists between them.

Job descriptions can be modified over time, but clarity is an excellent protection against unnecessary conflict in the future. A process should be mutually established by the congregation and the religious educator through which the whole religious education program and the performance of the religious educator are evaluated.

2. Compensation Standards

A. Level of Compensation

The level of compensation should be based on several criteria:

1. Size of the congregation/place of employment and size and/or scope of the religious education program. For information and guidelines, contact the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group and/or the Office of Church Staff Finances at the UUA.

<http://www.uua.org/aboutus/professionalstaff/ministryprofessional/officechurch/index.php>

2. Education, experience, and ability of the religious educator:

--Religious education training, an academic degree in religious education or a related field, and/or Renaissance Modules;

---Religious educators enrolled in the UUA's Religious Education Credentialing Program should be compensated according to their level of achievement as indicated in the most recent Compensation Guidelines.

-- Educational background and experience in fields related to education or ministry;

---Involvement in continuing religious education opportunities

-- Professional experience in related professions and occupations;

-- Significant volunteer work in religious education or related fields

-- Present career stage and readiness for movement to the next stage. Such movement is an important part of each religious educator's professional life. This progress should take place whether the religious educator remains in the same congregation for a period of time or moves to another congregation. It is generally accepted that a religious educator moves to the second step in the compensation tables after five years. Most often the "min" step assumes someone with less than 5 years' experience in a role (at all congregations served); "mid" level assumes 5-7 years' experience in a role at all congregations served; and "max" level assumes more than 7. A congregation is encouraged to credit a religious professional with experience s/he has had from another field or other

related experience. For example a new DRE who has been a schoolteacher previously would not start at the minimum.

3. Other factors:

- Cost of housing.
- Cost of living adjustment. It is desirable for a congregation or employer to establish personnel policies that include annual automatic cost of living increases;
- Merit advancement --recognition for outstanding performance of duties.
- Additional responsibilities -- Expansion of the religious educator's duties (adding another session, taking responsibility for adult religious education, etc.)
- Length of service: Recognition of the educator's increased experience and professional skills. This increase should be a predetermined percentage of the educator's salary and should occur automatically at specified time segments with renewal of the religious educator's contract. A longevity increase is usually between two and four percent of the current salary.
- Advancement in career stage. This raise is not automatic. It should be substantive and in addition to other increases. It signifies the congregation's appreciation of the religious educator's growth in professional development. If the religious educator is participating in the UUA's R.E. Credentialing Program it represents congregational affirmation of new levels of professionalism which have been attained. This stage-step should be considered every three to five years (sooner if appropriate).

B. Benefits (employer expenses): The congregation should provide the following benefits (pro-rated for part-time employment):

- Insurance: Family Plan Health insurance, life insurance, and disability insurance. Some coverage may be available through a UUA group policy. Each congregation should pay at least 80% of the cost of the Health Insurance premium.
- Pension: Each religious educator should be offered a pension plan as part of her/his remuneration package. Employees of UU congregations who are 18 years of age or older are eligible to participate in a UUA sponsored retirement plan after one year of employment in which they work 1,000 hours or more. **Seventy percent of all eligible employees must be enrolled in order for any to be enrolled.**

C. Professional Expenses: A budget category separate from that of the religious educator's salary and benefits package, should be established to cover conference, professional, and travel expenses. The religious educator should account for expenditures according to established procedures of the congregation.

Professional expenses may include such things as: dues to LREDA and other related professional organizations; books and periodicals; out-of-pocket costs connected with congregation-related meetings/events; continuing education and training programs; conference/travel expenses to denominational and professional conferences such as General Assembly, CUC Annual Meeting and Conference, LREDA meetings and conferences, District annual meetings, District religious

education meetings, CUC Regional Conferences, Meadville/Lombard Winter Institute, Summer Religious Education Conferences, Renaissance Modules, and specialized educational conferences such as sexuality education, family counseling, group process, etc. Since participation in these conferences is part of her/his function as religious educator in the congregation, the educator should be fully compensated for travel, room and board, cost of childcare and registration expenses from their professional expenses budget line.

3. Housing Provisions

Each religious educator should be allowed to select her/his own housing.

If the religious educator is not a minister, the salary should reflect the cost of housing in the area in which the congregation is located (consult the Fair Compensation Guidelines on the UUA website for specific information). If the religious educator is an ordained minister, a housing allowance should be included in the salary package and should reflect the cost of housing in the area in which the congregation is located.

If the religious educator chooses to live in congregation-owned housing, a fair rental value should be established by an outside professional source.

If the religious educator lives in congregation-owned housing, it is essential to have a written understanding between the religious educator and the congregation as to what responsibilities each assumes for maintenance and improvement of the property. If the religious educator is responsible for upkeep, adequate compensation should be made in the salary schedule; if the congregation is responsible, provisions should be made to have work done regularly.

4. Moving and settling-in expenses

Relocation expense reimbursement, including a temporary housing allowance, should be offered to a lay religious educator. It can include (a) precisely what fees for assistance are allowable, (b) mileage allowance, (c) food and lodging costs, (d) insurance coverage, and (e) schedule for advances and/or reimbursement of expenses.

5. Working Conditions

a. Hours:

The religious educator should, in consultation with the committee(s) or individuals to whom she/he is directly responsible, determine the extent and use of his/her working hours. This should be done on the basis of the needs of the

congregation as perceived by the religious educator and those who supervise her/him. The following guidelines should be considered:

- A full-time religious educator should work no more than 12 units or 40 hours a week (a unit is one morning, afternoon, or evening). If the position is part-time, clear agreements should be made about the number of hours of work expected.
- Time spent on the following activities should be considered working time: administration, communication, locating or creating educational materials, program planning and implementation, committee meetings, attendance at congregational functions, visitation with children/parents/teachers, professional study and reflection, counseling, denominational and professional organizational responsibilities and activities (including travel), representing the local society in community activities, consultation with colleagues and other professionals, conferences
- A full-time religious educator should have two days each week freed from professional responsibilities.
- Each religious educator should be offered the opportunity to be relieved of church-related duties one Sunday a month.
- The congregation should respect the family and personal time of the religious educator. Except in an emergency, the religious educator should not be contacted during the dinner hour, late at night, or on days off.
- The religious educator should, in consultation with the committee(s) or individual to whom she/he is responsible, establish regular office hours. Congregation personnel should know at all times where the religious educator can be reached in emergencies.

b. Office

The religious educator should have an adequately furnished, private office with telephone, computer, internet access and other necessary equipment similar to other professional staff.

Because program planning, study, and reflection require uninterrupted periods of time, provision should be made for the religious educator to work, as needed, at home or in some other suitable place.

Adequate administrative support should be provided.

6. Vacation Time and Leave

For a 12 month/full time position, the religious educator should receive at least four weeks paid vacation each year, which should not be limited to the summer months. Congregations should be flexible with the individual circumstances of each religious educator. During vacation, the educator should be freed of all professional responsibilities. It should be the educator's time to use as desired. Time spent by the religious educator at conferences, summer camps, etc., should not be considered vacation time.

Provisions for sick leave should be spelled out, including the conditions under which leave will be granted and the extent of remuneration and coverage.

In the event of resignation or dismissal, accrued vacation leave shall be paid by the congregation.

7. Personal Study

It is imperative both for the personal competence of the religious educator and the effectiveness of the religious education programs that the religious educator have ongoing opportunities to deepen and expand her/his understandings of the discipline of religious education and related fields. Time and financial assistance should be available for continuing education. The following possibilities are suggested:

- Time each week within defined working hours for personal study and reflection;
- Attendance at meetings of professional religious educators, particularly LREDA meetings;
- Attendance at conferences of professions related to religious education;
- Extended periods of study, e.g., a period of time during the year (often but not necessarily in the summer) during which the religious educator is not actively engaged in congregational work.

8. Support for Parents (Male or Female)

A number of our congregations have shared the exciting and positive experience of a woman religious educator's pregnancy and birthing. Family leave should meet or exceed four to eight weeks, if there are no medical complications. Salary and all other benefits must continue during this time.

Because circumstances surrounding each birth are singular, flexibility is the key word for successful planning of the woman religious educator's work during pregnancy and in the early months following birth.

During a pregnancy, the religious educator must take primary responsibility for educating the support committee and the Board, and with their assistance, the people of the congregation, regarding her changing needs and practices.

Committees and leaders closest to the religious educator's primary responsibilities may be asked to assume additional responsibilities during this period. Some congregations may wish to create a special committee to work with the religious educator in planning her absence, reduced duties and more limited office presence during the weeks before and after the birth.

The religious educator should expect seek and obtain help from other religious educators in the LREDA Chapter and possibly from religious educators in other liberal congregations for emergency performance of her/his duties during temporary unavailability.

Some religious educators, in event of pregnancy, may want to seek arrangements for an interim religious educator or for use of sabbatical leave. These possibilities are, of course, matters for joint negotiation to be entered into with full care for the good of the life of the congregation.

Medical and hospital insurance coverage needs to be a special concern to the committee writing a covenant with a religious educator, since some policy writers require a waiting period for pregnancy benefits.

In the event of medical complications during or after pregnancy, the policy of the congregation must be similar to that adopted in the event of any other disability.

Because circumstances surrounding each birth are singular, the congregation supporting and encouraging parents' roles in the birth and care of a child will be both sensitive and flexible in determining the length of leave and changed working habits. It is the religious educator's responsibility to work with their congregation to find solutions to special needs during this time.

Because adoption of a child creates family circumstances that can be similar to those surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, congregations should approach the religious educator's needs during such a time with the same flexibility and support needed during a birthing process.

9. Sabbatical and Continuing Education

(see [LREDA Sabbatical Handbook](#) for fuller information)

The religious educator is a member of a profession utilizing an ever-growing body of knowledge and cluster of skills and should be granted an extended period of leave with salary every five to seven years for personal growth, enrichment and renewal (not to include scheduled vacation time). Individual arrangements vary, but one month for every year of service is standard.

The sabbatical period should be determined well in advance (one year is recommended) so that the educator may plan for the most profitable use of the period granted and so the congregation can adequately provide for the educator's absence. In determining how to use the sabbatical period, the educator should thoroughly explore the variety of educational programs available that would contribute to his/her growth in his/her areas of concern.

10. Accountability

The body or individual within the congregation to whom the religious educator is accountable should be clearly defined and followed. Reporting relationships differ from congregation to congregation. In many instances, the religious educator is accountable to the Board of Trustees and, ultimately, to the congregation. In other instances, the religious educator is accountable to the parish minister. In yet others, the religious educator is accountable to the Leadership Team. Good team work requires accountability between or among all involved.

11. Professional Staff Relations

a. Shared Leadership

The professional staff is engaged in common enterprise and shared leadership within the congregation. Means and occasions (such as staff meetings and retreats) should therefore be regularly provided for the exploration and development of program and direction of the congregation by the staff acting as a team. -

b. Trust, Partnership and Collegueship

Essential to the well being of any congregation is a harmonious and coordinated relationship among all staff members. These may include ministers, religious educators, music directors, program directors, volunteer coordinators, administrators, and other staff positions as designated. It is desirable for the religious educator to be visible to the entire congregation as a religious professional.

Each professional staff member has special competence within her or his particular sphere of expertise. In the conduct of congregational responsibility, she or he shall have freedom and support to exercise professional discretion. Each professional staff member shall protect and encourage one another's gifts and specialties.

Each professional should have a commitment to the congregation as an institution and should relate her/ his activity to the congregation as a whole; encouraging by example an inclusive, loyal, generous and critical spiritual leadership. However, religious educators are encouraged to join a congregation other than where they are employed.

Each member is bound by the LREDA Code of Conduct. This includes sharing of pertinent information and insights, providing programmatic support, respecting confidences, and giving public support, although not necessarily agreement.

Congregations should consider implementing a review period following the arrival of a new religious educator (four to six months in most cases) to examine

relationships within the professional staff. This review should be conducted together by the religious educator and the designated body.

c. Professional Staff Relations Committee (also known as Committee on Ministry or Ministerial Relations Committee)

It is suggested that a committee for staff relations be formed, its members to be designated by the staff person concerned (minister, religious educator, etc.) and the Board, its function to be to encourage communication, share concerns, and facilitate interaction among professional leadership and congregation. In instances of conflict involving staff and/or congregation, this committee may function as a mediating body. In some congregations, this committee also acts as an advocate for the professional leadership concerning salary, working conditions, etc. In some congregations, this committee is also responsible for helping the religious educator set and evaluate her/his goals. When such evaluations are done, they should focus on the over-all religious education program as well as the role of the religious educator.

12. Departure Procedures

Regardless of the reason for departure, a former religious educator must respect the previous relationship. Although she or he has left the position, the confidences granted and information about individuals gained must be forever treated with the utmost respect.

a. Voluntary Departure

When a religious educator is seriously considering resigning, he or she should inform professional colleagues on the staff and the chairperson of the committee(s) to which she/he is responsible as soon as possible. When the decision to resign is finalized, the committee(s) to which the educator is responsible should be informed immediately. The period of time between the resignation and the actual departure should conform to the educator's contract. A minimum of three months' notice is considered appropriate.

The religious educator should consult professional colleagues on the staff and the committee(s) to which she/he is directly responsible to determine the most constructive manner of informing the congregation of the resignation.

The educator's responsibilities continue until the effective date of resignation.

The religious educator should take no part in the creation of a selection committee to recommend a successor or in the selection of the successor.

b. Involuntary Departure

Involuntary departure of a religious educator can be a destructive experience for the educator and the congregation. Involuntary departure should occur only after

every effort has been made to create a more satisfactory resolution of whatever difficulties have arisen.

When an involuntary departure occurs, the congregation leadership and the religious educator should make every effort to prevent serious division within the congregation, and to support the ongoing leadership. The congregation leadership should also make every effort to support the continuing professional standing of the educator unless there has been a breach of the Professional Code of Ethics.

The terms of the involuntary departure should take into account the length of time required by a religious educator to seek out and candidate for another position. The religious educator should be given a minimum of three months' notice with full salary plus a month's salary for each year of service, up to a maximum of six months, or until he/she finds another position, whichever comes first. In addition, any accrued vacation shall be compensated in the financial equivalent. Any accrued sabbatical leave shall not be compensated in the financial equivalent. Separation pay will begin from the date of dismissal or negotiated resignation.

Religious Educators should have the opportunity to contact a LREDA Good Officer and/or the UUA or CUC before an involuntary termination.

Following a decision for an involuntary departure, the committee(s) directly responsible for the work of the religious educator should determine the manner in which the educator should continue to fulfill her/his responsibilities in the congregation. The religious educator should abide by the decision of that committee.

III Part-time Religious Educators

Specific guidelines are difficult for these positions because of the variation of situations. Nevertheless, it is imperative that an agreement between congregation and religious educator be drawn at the time of hiring and that it cover all items listed elsewhere for full-time positions. The responsibilities of a part-time religious educator need to be described fully and carefully to avoid ambiguity and disappointment.

If possible, the precise hours should be noted and respected by the congregation and the religious educator.

Since a part-time religious educator cannot be expected to do all that a full-time religious educator does, there should be a very clear division of responsibility between the religious educator and specific committees and officers.

Since many part-time religious education responsibilities grow as the congregation and/or program grows, there need to be procedures established for renegotiating hours and duties.

Financial support, vacation and study leave for the part-time religious educator should reflect proportionally the full-time scale.

The part-time religious educator will discover that there is more to be done than the scope of “part-time,” however defined, will allow. Hence the religious educator and the congregation should be prepared to deal creatively and flexibly in balancing expectations and staff time.

IV. Appointment and Installation

Careful planning is needed to make the entrance of the religious educator into her/his new position a good one for both the educator and the congregation. Responsibility for settling the religious educator into her/his new home, community, and position rests with the Search Committee.

The Committee should:

- Notify the Canadian Unitarian Council or the UUA Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group and their district office of the religious educator's hiring/call;
- Arrange for publicity in the congregation newsletter and local community newspaper where appropriate;
- Arrange for the religious educator to be formally introduced to the leadership of the congregation;
- Continue to help educate the congregation on the role of the religious educator. Both Board and Search Committee need to foster realistic expectations of the new religious educator. Education of the congregation needs to include statements recognizing and honoring the new religious educator's singular capabilities and style, which will be different from those of any predecessor. Members may need help in appreciating the limitations of the new religious educator in a new situation. Inexperienced religious educators will require additional time for training and development.
- Work with the congregation or the Board of Trustees, in consultation with the religious educator, to appoint a committee (which may or may not be the Search Committee) to consult with the religious educator in planning an installation. Financial support for the installation should be included in the congregational budget;
- Investigate the covenanting process with the UUA or the Canadian Unitarian Council.

V. Professional Rights Procedure

All religious educators are entitled to full protection, rights and courtesies, as accorded in this Code of Professional Practices.

Members of the Liberal Religious Educators Association carefully and conscientiously guard the professional rights and standards of behavior defined in the Code of Professional Practice and elsewhere in the Handbook for Professional Religious Educators. To this end, members are encouraged to enlarge and clarify their understanding of such rights and standards of behavior by discussing that at Chapters meeting and by making inquiries and suggestions to the LREDA Board.

In accordance with the LREDA Bylaws, Article II. Membership, Section D. The Suspension of Membership, complaints or grievances concerning behavior which is inconsistent with the Code of Professional Code should be addressed to the LREDA Board, directed to the attention of the LREDA President. Such complaints or grievances will be responded to promptly by the President in consultation with the Continental Good Offices Person and, as necessary, other members of the LREDA Board.

In fact finding, discussion and action in response to complaints and grievances, the president and members of the Board will be guided by four fundamental principles:

- confidentiality;
- caring for the persons involved;
- fairness; and
- concern for the severity of the issues.

Consistent with these principles, members of LREDA bringing complaints and grievances, or against whom complaints and grievance may be brought, are assured that collegial confidences will not be disclosed by anyone, except:

- as mandated by law,
- to prevent a clear and immediate danger to a person or persons,
- where disclosure of a confidence may be required for defense in a legal action between colleagues; or
- if and only to the extent that, there is a waiver previously obtained in writing concerning persons against whom the finding are adverse. Public notice will be given only when the action is in the form of probation, suspension, or removal from membership (See Section F below).

Members whose behavior seems inconsistent with the rights and standards in Code of Professional Conduct should first be cautioned by their colleagues through friendly remonstrance and/or referral to a Chapter Good Offices Person in accordance with LREDA procedures for [Good Offices Persons](#). When this action fails, formal grievances or complaints may be made in accordance with the following procedures:

- a. A grievance or complaint may be made in writing to the President of LREDA

who will refer it promptly to the Continental Good Offices person. At the same time the President will provide a copy of the complaint to the person against whom it is directed.

b. In all cases, the first action in response shall be to approach those involved in a pastoral manner, seeking a fair and sound collegial resolution. If it is determined that additional fact-finding is needed, the President or other designated members of the LREDA Board may have to question the person, or persons, involved, seek documentation, and if necessary, make an on site visit, always within the limits of confidentiality as indicated above.

c. LREDA members shall have full access and full freedom and right to respond to all complaints and evidence cited against them. They always have the right and option of advisement by counsel at their own expense.

d. The LREDA Board's actions in response to a complaint or grievance shall be in writing and may be in the form of one of the following actions:

1. Advice that the complaint or grievance is unfounded;
2. Caution, admonition or reprimand;
3. Probation, suspension or removal from membership in LREDA.

e. In accordance with the provisions of the LREDA Bylaws, Article II: Membership, Section D: Removal of Membership, any member who considers that he/she has been treated adversely by the proceedings of the LREDA Board may appeal, within thirty days, to a meeting of the membership.

f. When an action consisting of probation, suspension or dismissal has been taken, and no appeal has been made within thirty days, notice of the action shall be given immediately thereafter to the member's congregation or other employer and to the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group of the Unitarian Universalist Association or the Canadian Unitarian Council.