By the shores of Babylon we wept: an exploration of the institutional response of the Unitarian univerversalist association to clergy sexual misconduct between 1991-2005

Qiyaman Aisha Rahman
Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations
Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. For more information, please contact cwiseman@auctr.edu.
ABSTRACT

AFRICANA WOMEN'S STUDIES

RAHMAN, QIYAMAH AISHA  B.A. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, 1984
M.S.W. UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, 1986

BY THE SHORES OF BABYLON WE WEPT: AN EXPLORATION OF
THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION TO CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BETWEEN 1991-2005

Advisor: Professor Josephine Bradley

Thesis dated September 2006

This study describes and analyzes the institutional response of the Unitarian
Universalist Association (UUA) to clergy sexual misconduct between 1991 to 2005.

Through the analysis of organizational proceedings, interviews, archival
documents and historical references, qualitative case study methodology is used to
investigate two research questions: 1. What has been the response of the UUA to clergy
sexual misconduct?; 2. What theology/ideology guide(s) the UUA's institutional response
to clergy sexual misconduct? The research findings indicate that increased inclusion of
female clergy, influenced by the women's movement, Unitarian Universalist women's
advocacy, and the sexual revolution were some of the factors that influenced the UUAs institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct. The research identifies obstacles that have impeded more aggressive support of victim/survivors’ leadership and opens a space for the emergent identities of victim/survivors. Data gathered suggests there is a critical need for more rigorous theological reflections to foster transformational dialogues. By providing examples of how the UUA is working to eradicate clergy sexual misconduct, this dissertation demonstrates how faith communities can achieve safe congregations, and empower victim/survivors, while moving toward a new restorative justice paradigm. New and fresh voices, perspectives and analyses are introduced to develop a richer understanding of clergy sexual misconduct and one faith community’s response to this growing problem.
BY THE SHORES OF BABYLON WE WEPT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION TO CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BETWEEN 1991-2005

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
ARTS IN HUMANITIES

BY

QIYAMAH A. RAHMAN

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICANA WOMEN'S STUDIES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

December 2006
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study of this nature is never the result of one person alone. I am grateful to God for choosing me, for helping me conjure the energy, time, resources and vision needed to complete this endeavor. I love my daughters who encouraged me to return to my dissertation research, secondly, to Ama Saran for your inspiration and encouragement. James Beebe, thank you for your sage advice to “stop the clock.” Here are just a few of the individuals that helped me along the way. Forgive me for any oversights: My sister, Evangelist Betty Jean Holmes for providing a place to lay my head when I came to Atlanta and to my dissertation committee I will be eternally grateful. To the many Unitarian Universalists that talked to me including: Kay Montgomery, Reverend David Hubner, Reverend Diane Miller, Reverend Susan Pangerl, Reverend Michelle Bentley, Reverend Tracey Robinson-Harris, Anna Belle Leiserson, Phil Thomason, Reverend John Weston, Reverend David Pohl, Reverend Deborah Pope-Lance, Reverend Fred Muir, Reverend Elinor Artman, Betty Hoskins, Phyllis Rickter, Reverend Susan Pangrel, Margot Garcia, Lynn Thomas, Reverend Bets Wienecke, Reverend Thomas Mikelson, Kathleen Carpenter, and Dave Smith. Special thanks to the following for their wise editing: Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, Reverend Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, Kaleema Nur, Mary Smith and Eva Danner. Finally, this research is dedicated to Margaret Fulgum, former Administrator in Africana Women's Studies. You were responsible for reminding me that we are never ready to claim our good. We just have to do it.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................. ii

ABBREVIATIONS ....................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1

Historical Overview .................................................................................................................. 4

Clergy Sexual Misconduct ......................................................................................................... 10

Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................................. 13

Feminist Theology – Jamming Our Theological Machinery .................................................... 15

Different Schools of Feminist Theological Thought ............................................................... 17

Patriarchal Biases .................................................................................................................... 18

Gender Relations ..................................................................................................................... 19

Patriarchy, Sexualized Violence and Bodily Integrity .............................................................. 20

Navigating the Waters of Feminist Theology Using Hermeneutics ....................................... 22

Manifestations of Clergy Sexual Misconduct and the Erosion of Spirit/Soul ....................... 24

Methodology ........................................................................................................................... 27

Design ..................................................................................................................................... 28

Sample ..................................................................................................................................... 28

Procedure .................................................................................................................................. 29

Instrument .................................................................................................................................. 29

Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 30

Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 31
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Significance of Research ........................................................................................................... 32

Chapter Organization............................................................................................................. 33

Definition of Terms .................................................................................................................. 35

CHAPTER II ............................................................................................................................. 37

Clergy Power and Status ......................................................................................................... 37

Changing Status of Clergy ...................................................................................................... 39

Power ...................................................................................................................................... 40

Fear of Power and Powerless ................................................................................................. 41

Power Dynamics .................................................................................................................... 43

Power and Status .................................................................................................................... 43

Distinction Between Power and Authority ........................................................................... 45

Institutional Accountability ..................................................................................................... 46

Complicity ............................................................................................................................... 48

Effects of Clergy Sexual Misconduct ................................................................................... 50

Re-victimizing the Victims of Clergy Sexual Misconduct ..................................................... 54

Effects on Congregation ........................................................................................................ 54

Effects on Misconducting Clergy ........................................................................................... 56

Boundary Violations or Breach of Trust ................................................................................ 58

CHAPTER III ............................................................................................................................ 61

Gender Violence and Human Rights ...................................................................................... 61

Clergy Sexual Misconduct in the United States .................................................................... 63

CHAPTER IV OVERVIEW OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM .................................................. 66

Roots of Unitarian Universalism - The Historical Development of Unitarian Universalism (UUism) ...................................................................................................................................................... 66
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abolitionists and the Civil Rights Movement: The Prophetic Voice of Unitarian Universalism .......................................................... 71
Consolidation ................................................................................. 72
Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) .................................. 73
International UUism ..................................................................... 78
Unitarian Universalist Theology of Evil/Sin ............................... 79
Theological Groundings of UU Beliefs and Clergy Sexual Misconduct .......................... 86

A Rock in a Weary Land:
The Historical Black Church and Unitarian Universalism .................. 88
Resistance .................................................................................... 89
Nineteenth Century Presence of African-American Unitarian Universalists ... 90
Early Black Ministerial Pioneers ............................................ 93
The Civil Rights Era ................................................................... 95
Third Revolution ....................................................................... 96
Seekers ......................................................................................... 97
Contradictions ........................................................................... 100
The Unitarian Universalists Black Empowerment Era ............... 102
Open membership ...................................................................... 103
Efforts towards Racial Diversity ............................................... 105
Conclusion .................................................................................. 110

CHAPTER V .................................................................................. 112
Unitarian Universalist Association’s (UUA) Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct .................. 112
Infrastructure Initiatives ............................................................... 115
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe Congregations Landscape – Dialogue</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Education as a Prevention Strategy to Institute Change</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation and Dissemination of Educational Materials</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Acknowledgement – Institutional Shift</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Accountability</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UU Culture Shift</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Ministry</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Control</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Revolution</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Considerations</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjudication</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the Theological Foundation That Guides the UUA’s Institutional Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of Theologies</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transformative Power of Social Action – Standing with the Oppressed: Prophetic Voices and Social Witnesses</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Nothing Sacred? The Voice and Story of A Victim Survivor</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Research</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Inclusion and Activism - Analysis</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Power and Control - Analysis ................................................................. 185

Findings about Process ...................................................................... 185

Legal Considerations .......................................................................... 188

Recommendations ............................................................................... 189

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................. 192
## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUA</td>
<td>American Unitarian Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAC</td>
<td>Black Affairs Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAWA</td>
<td>Black and White Alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUUCC</td>
<td>Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDE</td>
<td>Congregational, District and Extension Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOM</td>
<td>Department of Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECLP</td>
<td>Ethics in Congregational Life Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EKC</td>
<td>Episcopal King’s Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRF</td>
<td>Free Religious Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICUU</td>
<td>International Council of Unitarians and Universalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LREDA</td>
<td>Liberal Religious Educators Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLTC</td>
<td>Meadville Lombard Theological Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFC</td>
<td>Ministerial Fellowship Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPL</td>
<td>Ministry and Professional Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSUU</td>
<td>Ministerial Sisterhood Unitarian Universalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORJ</td>
<td>Office of Restorative Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFCRCASM</td>
<td>Task Force on Congregational Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCC</td>
<td>United Church of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UU</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUA</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUMA</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUMN</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist Musicians’ Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UURR</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalists for Right Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUWF</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUWR</td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist Women and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W and R</td>
<td>Women and Religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This research is designed to examine clergy sexual misconduct in the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and its institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct from 1991 to 2005. The research questions are: 1) What has been the response of the UUA to clergy sexual abuse? and, 2) What theology/ideology guides the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct?

Actual research on clergy sexual abuse in the United States of North America is sparse. Clergy sexual abuse is a serious problem that has only recently surfaced, thus its magnitude has yet to be fully comprehended. The first wave of clergy scandals surfaced in the Protestant denomination. Characteristically these were illicit liaisons between married male clergy and “consenting” female adults.¹ The current wave of clergy scandals is not unique. Rather it is the second wave, preceded by equally scandalous events in the 1970s and 1980s. These events involved high profile celebrity clergy such as Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker.² The scandals that have more recently rocked the very foundation of the Catholic Church have involved adult celibate male priests who have primarily victimized male children. Such scandal, specific to the Catholic Church,

¹ Due to the pervasive nature of gender oppression and power dynamics inherent in relations with powerful male clergy, it is nearly impossible to ascribe the term “consensual” since oftentimes contrary to appearance, real and meaningful consent is not possible.

implicates all clergy and casts a suspicious tenor on all religious institutions regardless of
the denomination because the laity in all denominations tend to generalize about such
scandals. Clergy sexual misconduct refers to sexual abuse that occurs when someone in
ministerial role engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a member of the
congregation, an employee, student, or counseling client in the ministerial relationship.
Clergy sexual misconduct can include various degrees of misconduct. Verbal behaviors
may include: innuendos or sexual talk, suggestive comments, talking about sexual
exploits or experiences, questions about intimate sexual details, invitation to participate
in inappropriate behaviors and inappropriate gifts to win favor with the intended victim.³
The physical manifestations of clergy sexual abuse may include some or all of the
following: sexual touching and/or “accidental” touching of sexual areas of the body,
tickling and playful aggression, prolonged hugging when a brief hug is customary and
appropriate, inappropriate sexual intimacy such as kissing on the lips and sexual
intercourse.

However, women have historically been the objects of multiple forms of gender
violence. In earlier years, women have organized and struggled in extremely hostile and
difficult circumstances to overcome oppressive conditions that created violence. They
have been able to mobilize against the violence to garner assistance and protection.
Sexual assault, domestic violence, sexual harassment and stalking are merely some of the
forms of gender-based violence that women have been historically subjected to globally.
Some of this violence reflects cultures with patriarchal notions that defer to male norms,

³ Marie M. Fortune, “Is Nothing Sacred? The Betrayal of the Ministerial or Teaching
Relationship” in Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook, eds. Carol J.
combined with global capitalism that commodifies the bodies and labor of women and children. In the United States, a case in point is the flourishing market of adult entertainment clubs and pornography that capitalizes on the exploitation of women’s bodies that cater to mostly male clientele. In India, it is dowry deaths. In Thailand, it is sex trafficking and child prostitution. In parts of Africa and the Middle East, the culturally specific violence against women takes the form of female circumcision. In India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Iraq and Iran, it is honor killings. Women and their male allies globally are successfully organizing and identifying these acts of violence against women as criminal acts, punishable by law. Advocates have accomplished the difficult task of elevating gender-based violence from an “individual” problem to a “social problem.” Incidents of clergy sexual misconduct have surfaced as still another form of violence threatening the already tenuous safety of women and children.

**Historical Overview**

Hence, theologians of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Old Testament, chronicle Satan’s mythical seduction of Eve in the book of Genesis. After God’s creation of Adam and Eve, the early mythical creation portrays God enjoining Adam and Eve to eat of any of the fruit except from the Tree of Knowledge. This mythical account may be one of the earliest documented accounts of misconduct by someone in a position of

---

4 Annually, in India more than 5,000 brides are killed because their dowries are considered insufficient. Once the bride is killed, suicide is alleged and the groom is free to remarry.

5 Hundreds, if not thousands of women are murdered by their family members to protect their honor. Most occur in countries where women reflect the honor and reputation of the family. Marital infidelity, pre-marital sex, flirting or rape are common “offenses” deemed punishable by “dishonored” family members.
authority, privilege and power. Satan, an angel of God, misused his privileged status to seduce Eve to eat of the apple from the tree of knowledge. Eve, the Bible reads, in turn, persuades Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. This ancient story of Adam and Eve contains all the ingredients of contemporary clergy sexual misconduct that include treachery, deceit, betrayal, silence and banishment. Scholars report that victims of clergy sexual misconduct often suffer feelings of betrayal, grief, loss, shame, terror, shock, violation, confusion, rage and condemnation. While the drama in the Garden of Eden did not involve sexual violations, we are nevertheless confronted with the formidable power and status of Satan and his misuse and abuse of his power.

More contemporary findings contend that clergy sexual misconduct is a “systemic problem with clergy.”6 G. Lloyd Rediger cites numerous lawsuits, public recriminations and resignations of high ranking clergy as the reactions of laity to the growing problem of clergy sexual misconduct7 Marie M. Fortune and James N. Poling’s research supports Rediger’s findings that suggest between ten to twenty percent of clergy offend “against the integrity of the pastoral relationship and the vulnerability of those entrusted to their care by crossing the boundary from religious service to sexual activity.”8 The impact of the sex scandals and the perceived complicity of religious institutions have resulted in the following: a loss of trust in organized religion, a general questioning of religious faith, 

---


7 Rediger, Beyond the Scandals, 3.

and a secularizing of society.

Thus, the fervor of the 1960s spawned several movements that typically questioned and challenged authority, such as the Women's Movement, the Black Power Movement and the Anti-War Movement to name a few. Specific populations such as women, blacks, gays, prisoners and other historically marginalized groups challenged the institutional oppression that relegated them to second-class citizenship. The civil rights and anti-war movements mobilized many activists in this country who, in turn, took to the street to challenge such injustices.

Simultaneously, another equally powerful movement was taking place—the sexual revolution. Society was caught up in the sweeping changes of the times that espoused new emotional and sexual boundaries that challenged the social norms of intimacy in relationships, marriage, and counseling. Many described this era as the “Me Decade.”  

David Knox and Caroline Schacht contend that, “the sexual revolution involved openness about sexuality and an increased frequency of intercourse before marriage.” During this era, Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Ritter maintain that feminists explored how sexual norms were used to control women’s sexual freedom. Some women began to postpone marriage, and live-in relationships increased. Additionally, alternative lifestyles such as open marriages and wife swapping reflected changing relationship norms. Laity and clergy were suddenly confronted with new paradigms of


behavior. Therapy rooms and the pastoral counseling offices suddenly shifted to reflect a variety of human behaviors that initiated sexual options beyond the institution of marriage. None of these changing norms in the therapeutic or pastoral relationship were policed or informed by professional guidelines during this period of transition. Some of these sexual experiments may have begun with the best of intentions and possibly as legitimate protests against the restrictive sexual attitudes and rigid gender roles of the times. However, the changing norms of clergy and counselees had dire effects on women and children because of one factor in particular—the power differential between clergy and women and children. Women and children were, at first, victims of these changing norms. But slowly, as a result of the rise of the women’s movement and feminism in the 1960’s and children’s rights, advocates began to name the violence while seated around kitchen tables, in support groups, and while volunteering on picket lines and in battered women’s shelters and talking on crisis lines. Some women even began to solicit help from one of the offending sources—the church.\textsuperscript{12}

An examination of the number of misconducting priests reveals a serious problem in the Catholic Church. Moreover, Bruce Schreiner, claims that more than 1,200 Roman Catholic clergy have been accused of sexual misconduct with at least 4,200 minors during the previous six decades.\textsuperscript{13} According to data from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, at least 1,092 allegations of sexual abuse were made against 756 U.S.

\textsuperscript{12} James Newton Poling, \textit{Understanding Male Violence: Pastoral Care Issues} (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 1.

\textsuperscript{13} Bruce Schreiner, “Victims, Diocese reach $120 million Settlement,” \textit{Charlotte Observer}, 10 June 2005, sec. 1A.
Catholic priests and deacons in 2004. More than 300 of the complaints were new cases naming clergymen who had not been previously accused. Furthermore, charges have been filed against priests in 161 of the 177 Latin Rite dioceses in the United States including three American Bishops, one Cardinal, two Archbishops and hundreds of priests. It is estimated that at least 400 priests were charged with clergy sexual abuse during the 1980s, resulting in $400 million paid out in damages between 1985 and the early 1990s. To date the most serious case of clergy sexual misconduct involved Father James R. Porter, who is alleged to have sexually abused as many as 100 children while he was a priest in Massachusetts in the 1960s. In this instance, the Catholic Church settled out of court with a multimillion-dollar suit with only twenty-five of the men that the father of four abused while a priest.

Since 1950, the costs from sexual predators in the U.S. Roman Catholic priesthood total more than $1 billion. More than one-third of these expenses came in the past three years. The Boston Archdiocese and several others have agreed to sell property to cover their multi-million-dollar settlements. The rising costs to the church have resulted in three dioceses – Portland, Oregon, Tucson, Arizona, and Spokane, Washington, filing for bankruptcy, and more are expected to follow.

---

14 Ibid.


17 Ibid., 440-441.

18 Schreiner, “Victims, Diocese,” IA.

19 Ibid.
However, the Catholic Church is not the only denomination grappling with misconducting clergy. A survey of four denominations conducted by Fuller Seminary in 1984 showed that thirty-eight percent of surveyed clergy had sexual contact with parishioners, twelve percent engaged in sexual intercourse, and seventy-six percent knew of clergy colleagues who had sexual intercourse with a church member. Another survey published in Leadership Magazine indicated that twelve percent of respondents (clergy) admitted to sexual intercourse outside of marriage; seventeen percent with a counselee, five percent with a staff member, and thirty percent with a parishioner. Still, another survey, conducted in 1993, among Southern Baptist pastors, and cited in the Journal of Pastoral Care, stated that fourteen percent of respondents were having “sexual behavior inappropriate for a minister,” five percent were having sexual contact with someone in their church, and seventy percent noted sexual contact by colleagues with members of that church.20 One recent study indicated that thirty-eight percent of females are victims of clergy sexual abuse.21

The uniquely privileged and powerful role of many clergy has contributed to the systemic and secretive nature of clergy sexual abuse. These and other factors have served as obstacles to uncovering the magnitude of this serious social problem.22 Yet, clergy sexual abuse has begun to capture prominent attention because of the following circumstances:

20 Rediger, Beyond the Scandals, 9.

21 Kathryn A. Flynn, “Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women: A Specialized Form of Trauma” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2000), xii.

22 Rediger, 14.
• adult survivors have come of age and are breaking the silence;
• emergence of strong advocacy groups and networks for survivors;
• use of technology like the internet to provide timely and accessible information about clergy scandals;
• growing empowerment of lay leaders disillusioned with clergy and religious institutions;
• a responsive legal system willing to challenge religious institutions, and pursues the “deep pockets” of religious institutions previously considered taboo;
• the public’s deep dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church’s complicity in protecting priests and such perceived cover-ups and
• Monetary gains for victims and lawyers.

Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Clergy sexual misconduct has been attributed to many factors. Scholars have utilized multiple theories to explain clergy sexual misconduct. The six prevailing models are: an individualist framework, social-structural, cultural, theological, and dominant/feminist, and systems framework.

Individualist Framework. The individualist framework locates the source of the clergy sexual misconduct within the individual and is often identified as a medical model.\(^{23}\) This framework sometimes includes ego development theory that addresses disruptions of and damage to identification. Proponents of the individualist framework might, for example attribute clergy sexual misconduct to individual deficiencies in the clergy personality or the lack of moral character. Sexual deviancy theory, that is, theory attributing the actions of the perpetrator to sexual deviancy tends to focus on the role of individual pathology as the explanation for clergy sexual misconduct. The adherents of

---

poor impulse control would attribute the etiology of clergy sexual misconduct to the perpetrators’ primitive needs and defenses and their inability to control their impulses.24

Social-Structural Framework. The social-structural framework locates the cause of clergy sexual abuse in a larger social context that predisposes individuals to violent behavior such as clergy sexual misconduct. These theorists identify the organization of society and relations that condone the use of power and control. These proponents call for institutional and social changes to address clergy sexual misconduct. Feminists are closely identified with the social structural framework although they specifically attribute the causes of clergy sexual misconduct to male privilege and unequal power dynamics.

Another theory commonly cited in domestic violence research that can be extrapolated to clergy sexual misconduct is social disorder theory. This theory attributes the problem of violence to the general breakdown of order in society.25 Situational theory contributes the etiology of clergy sexual misconduct to particular circumstances that produce clergy sexual misconduct. For example, access to potential victims and isolation from healthy networks, along with poor boundaries, push some clergy over the edge to commit behaviors that then lead to misconduct.

Cultural Framework. Homer Asby’s research introduces some unique cultural components not addressed by any other researcher. He asserts that promiscuous pastors

---


actually replicate some of the sexual offenses typical of plantation culture during slavery.26

Theological Framework. Some specifically theological frameworks explore the ethical components of right relations using a range of different assumptions that include ethics, womanist, feminist and liberation theologies. James Melvin Washington and Traci West identify spiritual malaise as the root cause of social callousness.27 Thus, if the problem of meaninglessness is the root metaphor of modernity as stated by Long, then clergy sexual misconduct might be viewed as a major problem of alienation and materialism.28

Carrie Doehring cites childhood psychological disengagement as the source of the etiology of clergy sexual misconduct.29 She also identifies “existential alienation.”30 Doehring attributes the disengagement and sense of powerlessness as a symptom of society’s post-modern condition. Finally, Rediger, also a theologian, attributes clergy sexual misconduct to the “loss of prayer life as spiritual practices” abetted by role confusion, burnout and depression.31

Dominance/Feminist Framework. In contrast, dominance theory, associated with gender aggression, is embraced by researchers such as James Poling. Poling believes men

26 Rediger, Beyond the Scandals, 28.


28 Ibid.


30 Ibid., 35.

31 Rediger, Beyond the Scandals, 28, 34.
abuse because they are not held accountable for their actions and because they choose to inflict suffering on others. Polling also identifies interpersonal dynamics that could just as easily be associated with sexual dysfunction theory although he primarily identifies as a feminist theorist. His profile to identify a pedophile includes: 1) sexualized dependency (dependency disorder); 2) destructive aggression (aggressive disorder), 3) the grandiose self (narcissistic disorder) and 4) inability to respect limits.32

Systems Theory Framework. Systems theorists maintain that presenting issues in a system are merely symptomatic of the larger system and context and that the players constitute a symbiotic relationship.33 The systems approach emphasizes the interdependence and interrelationship of each and every part to the whole.34

Conceptual Framework

This research examines clergy sexual misconduct and addresses the following research questions:

1. What has been the response of the Unitarian Universalist Association to clergy sexual abuse?

2. What theology/ideology guide(s) the Unitarian Universalist Association’s institutional response to clergy sexual abuse?

While, feminist theory provides a more than adequate explanation of patriarchy as the source of women’s oppression and demonstrates patriarchy’s links to gender violence,

32 Poling, Understanding Male Violence, 105.


it does not necessarily address the notion of God. In order to explain clergy sexual misconduct, a phenomenon primarily involving "men of God" and their predatory behavior toward women and children it is necessary to talk about God/theology. Utilizing a theological framework offers diverse perspectives that offer broader explanations including the recognition that privilege, in this instance, primarily male privilege, creates unequal power dynamics which results in the marginalization of the "other" or women in this instance. Just as there are multiple meanings to any experience, there are multiple doorways and approaches to understanding clergy sexual misconduct.

In order to fully understand the issues related to clergy sexual misconduct, a deconstruction of terminology is needed to establish the links between clergy sexual misconduct and feminist theology. Clergy refers to individuals designated by faith groups to serve the laity's religious and spiritual needs. Clergy sexual misconduct refers to any sexual abuse that occurs when someone in a ministerial role engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a member of the congregation, an employee, student or counseling client in their ministerial role. Clergy sexual misconduct can include various types of inappropriate behavior including verbal, emotional, sexual or psychological. Clergy sexual misconduct is so insidious precisely because it violates one of the most sacred relationships – that between clergy and laity, which is presumed to be the embodiment of trust and safety. Feminism, on the other hand, refers to a diverse collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies primarily concerned with the experiences of women. Feminist theology is derived from the two root words: feminist and theology that refers to the discernment process that seeks the meaning of God for the full humanity of women. Its primary focus is understanding and
interpreting religious texts and life's experiences from women's perspectives.

Feminist Theology\textsuperscript{35} – Jamming Our Theological Machinery\textsuperscript{36}

The term "theology" is from the Greek language and means "discourse about God."\textsuperscript{37} The aim of feminist theology is the "transformation of theological concepts, methods, language and imagery into a more holistic theology as a means and expression of the struggle for liberation."\textsuperscript{38} Some feminist theologians challenged liberation theologian's use of masculine God imagery, their violent rhetoric and their failure to acknowledge women's lives and contributions during the 1960s. Some noted European American feminist theologians include Denise Lardner Carmody, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Carol Christ, Rebecca Chopp, Mary Hunt, Carter Heyward, Maria Fortune, Starhawk, Merlin Stone, and Sharon Welch.\textsuperscript{39} Womanist theology evolved out of African American women's lived experiences. African-American women recognized the need to theorize their own

\textsuperscript{35} While feminist theology now reflects contextual theologies characterized by diverse theoretical perspectives such as womanist, muherista, Jewish feminist theology, African liberation theology etc., the focus of this research is primarily Christian feminist theology. The criticisms of women of color who earlier noted the race, class and cultural blindness are valid and duly noted. However, this research focuses on a predominantly European American denomination and movement, Unitarian Universalists and thus this research focus is feminist theology.

\textsuperscript{36} I would like to acknowledge Grace M. Jantzen's rich and graphic phrase borrowed for this section.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 3, 4.
experiences, that by necessity, included analyses of gender, race and class.40 Some of the noted womanist theologians include Renita J. Weems, Katie Cannon, Karen Baker-Fletcher, Clarice J. Martin, Cheryl T. Gilkes, Delores Williams, Toinette M. Eugene, and Jacquelyn Grant.

Feminist theology includes a variety of theological perspectives that are woman-focused. Feminist theology identifies the oppression of women as the common ground between feminist theologians that sought to correct the distorted biblical depictions of women. Thus feminist theologians commonly articulate critiques of patriarchy with the intent of identifying issues of social justice and liberation.41 Feminist theologians generally embrace all or some of the following:

- the critical, contextual, constructive and creative re-reading and rewriting of theology.
- critical examination of tradition or text to promote the full humanity of women through advocacy for women’s liberation from male oppression
- conceptualizing and developing new names and images that express the Sacred.

Feminist theology, in the opinion of Grace M. Jantzen, offers “ways of thinking and being” that were often denied women by males protecting “ecclesiastical boundaries.”42 Many feminist theologians have worked to reclaim the integrity of religious tradition and its relevance to women’s lives.

40 Womanist theology emphasizes survival and quality of life in the midst of Black women’s complex realities and struggles to be free. Womanist theologians lift up and name the imaginative ways that African American women have developed sophisticated religious responses in their lives.

41 McKim, Dictionary of Theological Terms, 104.

Different Schools of Feminist Theological Thought

Several schools of feminist theology exist. For the purpose of this research only three will be addressed here, the redeemers, unredeemables and denouncers. The "redeemers" maintain that Christianity is "redeemable." They further contend that if the Bible is read in the right way, it is, in fact, possible to advocate equality and justice for women. These feminist theologians within the Christian tradition seek mutual critique and a "holistic" form of practicing theology for men and women. In contrast, the "unredeemables" assume a more "radical new reading of Christian theology. They hold women’s experiences as the standard/criteria for which all theology is judged." The renouncers maintain that traditional Christianity is not salvageable. Mary Daly is an example of one of the earliest feminist theologians that denounced her religious tradition believing that no feminist could save God.

The goal of feminist theology is to bring the lived experiences of women into the agenda of Christian theologians as fully participating subjects. Some feminist theologians seek to "articulate a different theo-ethical religious vision and to reform knowledge about the world and God." One of the primary contributions of feminist theologians is the rewriting of Christian theology to transform the concepts, methods, language and imagery into a more liberatory message inclusive of women’s realities.

---

43 These terms were created by the researcher to facilitate the reader’s understanding about the different schools of feminist theologians.


They aspire to liberate women from oppressive sexist structures. Some of the ways they seek to accomplish this is to help formulate life affirming stories that inspire values and lifestyles that speak to right relations, love, empathy, social justice and companioning. Feminist theologians’ efforts to develop their own critical discourses, narratives and practices of faith drew from the deep and rich well of feminist theory.48

**Patriarchal Biases**

Oppression of women is one of the oldest forms of oppression known to humankind.49 Male misogyny is acted out on a daily basis, not just in this country, but around the world. Feminist theologians’ readily biblically based accounts substantiate claims that women have historically been victims of patriarchal oppression. Many noted scholars have investigated the relationship between patriarchy and religion and have confirmed that many of the major world religions have in fact been deeply influenced by the patriarchal views that developed.50 As a result, women’s contributions and lives have not been fully acknowledged in the Bible and other historical sources. Thus, much of the focus of feminist theologians’ investigations and discourse have centered on the past and present contributions of women as well as resistance to injustices such as clergy sexual misconduct.

48 Watson, *Feminist Theology*, 24


50 Russell and Clarkson, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 205.
Gender Relations

Social relations between men and women are fundamentally about power. Gender is a primary way of signifying and negotiating power relations between males and females in society. Consequently, gender is significant to how power is constructed. Power, its construction and legitimacy, is crucial to understanding women’s oppression and ultimately the particular oppression that is the focus of this research—clergy sexual misconduct. How do the attitudes and beliefs that women are inferior to men contribute to women’s marginalized status? Women’s marginalized status subjects them to male power and privilege. Women’s marginalized status disadvantages them and positions them to have less access to resources. Women’s marginalized status is a reflection of their limited access to resources and privilege. Their diminished status renders them vulnerable to male violence. Violence against women helps sustain male social control of women and thus helps maintain a patriarchal social order according to West. The hegemony of men’s power and its ties to global capitalism is dramatically depicted in societal laws that often fail to protect women, rendering them even more vulnerable to male violence.

Women’s marginalized status in many societies around the world is a result of gender biases. These gender biases are evidenced in the following ways: in general, women tend to hold positions making less money than men while working longer hours, they have less access to political decisions, decision makers and social institutions, and women often stand to inherit less. Thus, while women are granted fewer rights, they are

---


also, in most societies, responsible for the care and nurture of family, including the elderly and infants. One cannot overlook the critical role that many women assume in reproducing the future labor force. In addition to all the aforementioned factors, many women can expect to work either part-time or full-time outside of the home in order to either support her children as a single parent or to help support the two income household to make ends meet.

**Patriarchy, Sexualized Violence and Bodily Integrity**

Patriarchy is enforced through a combination of forces including economic exploitation, violence, and the sexualization of women. Sexual exploitation, including clergy sexual misconduct, cannot be viewed as an aberration of an unfair system, but an integral part of a patriarchal, capitalistic system that is based on the subordination and exploitation of women and children. While all women are oppressed, not all women are oppressed in the same way. The interlocking nature of oppressions subjects individuals to various -isms because they are stigmatized and perceived as different. Such is the case with people of color, the poor, gays and lesbians, elderly, and other marginalized groups. Like the example of women, this does not presume that all oppressed people experience oppression identically. Likewise, women experience patriarchy vastly differently depending on their race, class and other social markers of identity that interact with their gender identity. For instance, a white heterosexual female domestic and a Black female lesbian bank executive may suffer similar incidents of workplace sexual harassment, but race, class, gender and sexual orientation intersect to produce vastly different outcomes.

Another aspect of women’s oppression that is usually linked to capitalism is the commodification of women’s bodies. As such, their labor is sexualized, thus eroticizing
their subordination. 53 A casual examination of any of the industrialized nation’s urban cities quickly establishes the validity of this statement. The proliferation of adult entertainment such as strip joints and prostitution raises grave concerns, as does the increase of sex trafficking around the world. To the chagrin of the “civilized world,” sex trafficking of women and children continues to plague both developing and developed nations. Unscrupulous males from developing nations pimp women and children to developed nations. Angela Gilliam maintains that the rapid growth of the international sex trade market is linked to the ideological notion of women as property whose bodies are fair game to be consumed. 54 High rates of rape and other forms of gender violence abound in so-called developed nations around the world. Traci West believes in some instances that males are actually unable to distinguish between (healthy) sexual intercourse with women and violent assault because of the impersonal marketing of women’s bodies and the messages that conflate sex and violence. 55 Similarly, Karen Lebacqz contends that violence and sexuality have too often been linked in the experiences of women. When sex and sexuality become fraught with violence and power struggles then women’s bodies become battlefields. Witness Bosnia and Rawanda where systematicrapes were used as tools of war to ensure ethnic genocide. Sadly, such acts of gender violence have become routine and perceived as a normal part of war and conflicts. Angela Gilliam connects global capitalism to the sexual commodification of women. She

53 Fortune and Poling, Sexual Abuse by Clergy, 54-55


55 West, Wounds of the Spirit, 117.
contends that capitalism has carried out its expansion on the backs and bodies of women.

Further, Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein articulate similar findings. They contend that while “gender subordination and patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions, through development they have taken on new and more violent forms” of gender-based oppression.” Eco-feminists, Diamond and Orenstein link the “mal-development” of so called third world countries with the simultaneous subjugation of women and nature.

Mal-development is rooted in identifying a narrow Western patriarchal bourgeois interest as universal, a partial as the whole. Violence arises from imposing this part on a diverse and integrated world. It arises by destroying wholeness in the mind, seeing separation where it should see unity. Woman is alienated from and dominated by man, nature is separated from and exploited by man, and society is torn apart by fragmented thought and action, by projecting duality, divisions, and dichotomies where they do not exist... The violence to nature, as symptomized by the ecological crisis, and the violence to women, as symptomized by women’s subjugation and exploitation, arise from this subjugation of the feminine principle... In mal-development, nature and women are viewed as the “other,” as the passive non-self.

Navigating the Waters of Feminist Theology Using Hermeneutics

The strategies for reading texts or the lived experiences of people, especially women, are not inclusive. On one hand, deconstruction as a means of reading a text was popularized by Jacques Derrida and Iris Irigaray. Many early feminist theologians employed “deconstruction,” a way to expose text, to reconstruct traditional theology into what has become known as feminist theology. Deconstruction is viewed by some as an “inherently subversive practice.” It employs reading, writing and thinking in a way that


“unsettles the system of binary oppositions on which Western metaphysics is grounded.” While Grace M. Jantzen utilizes deconstruction, she is critical of comparisons to “demolition.” Instead, she views deconstruction as the “careful dismantling of particular structures of thought in order to reveal their underlying, but unacknowledged assumptions.” It is the resulting “destabilization” which allows new possibilities and new thinking that has characterized feminist theologies.59

On the other hand, double reading, a term popularized by Jantzen, is a rigorous process of reading that pays close attention to the text to discern a “radically different reading of it.” The intent Jantzen says is to “destabilize” the document that leads the reader to a state of “undecidability” that can actually create the possibility of alternative thinking.60 Jantzen attempts to distinguish between double reading and deconstruction.

Thus, another approach common to feminist theology is hermeneutics of suspicion. Many of the texts feminist theologians engage are already existing historical documents such as the Bible. Hermeneutics of suspicion assumes the need to be suspicious of “received interpretations.” Doing so allows the reader to engage such historical and contemporary texts with a discerning eye toward biased interpretations promoted by cultures of misogyny that reinforce “dominance, oppression, and agendas of power.”61

Such tools, double reading, deconstruction and hermeneutics of suspicion, have

58 Russell and Clarkson, Dictionary of Feminist Theologies, 64.
59 Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 2.
60 Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 61.
61 McKim, Dictionary of Feminist Theologies, 127.
proven invaluable in deconstructing documents and analyzing the researchers findings.

Manifestations of Clergy Sexual Misconduct and the Erosion of Spirit/Soul

Clergy sexual misconduct is not a one-dimensional act. It is rooted in centuries of traditional perceptions of women, oppressive devices against women, and mythology regarding women. Two concepts central to more fully understanding this research are provided below:

Metaphysics – a philosophical term for “what is real” or questions of ultimate reality. This branch of philosophy is closest to religion, and thus metaphysicians have had significant influence on religion.62

Materialism – The philosophical view that matter is the ultimate reality from which all else emerges. It thus may be verified by the senses and investigation by scientific procedures. It is in opposition to idealism and all spiritual explanations of what is real.63

Unfortunately, binary thinking has posed many unnecessary obstacles between materialists and metaphysicians. Thus, feminist theologians have attempted to avoid the error of others binary thinking that has produced such destructive schisms. So it is precisely feminist theologian’s discourses about the sacred and its woman-focused “God talk” that recognizes and addresses the non-material nature of humans that is so critical to this research. Consequently, it is feminist theology, utilizing a holistic approach that assumes a connection between body, mind and spirit that this researcher believes can provide insights into clergy sexual misconduct. It is precisely a wholistic approach, utilizing body, mind and spirit approach that can potentially heal the victim survivors,

62 Ibid., 173.
63 Ibid., 169.
congregations, perpetrators and families of same.\textsuperscript{64} The loss of contact with the body, mind and spirit can cause serious dis-connects.\textsuperscript{65} Such disconnects can emerge within the self and relations between persons in the form of anti-social behaviors.

Using feminist theology as the conceptual framework this researcher posits that clergy sexual misconduct is about the erosion of the spirit/soul. It is the total disconnect caused by the machinations of capitalist consumption and patriarchy that results in the breakdown of human values in a society on a collision course characterized by extreme individualism, spiritual ennui, loss of empathy and possibly a loss of self. Ignoring the existence of the human soul and therefore its nurturance, fosters a dwindling deterioration that leads to a spiritual death. An image of the "walking dead" comes to mind. Such humans on a self-destructive path of individualism and self-gratification find themselves in an "altered state of consciousness" that is, acting other than themselves, behaving as alienated robots, "non-humans." In this state, there is little time for things of the spirit such as discernment, reflection, and simply being. Lives are characterized by a sense of loneliness and numbness. Restlessness invades the spirit and destructive behaviors prevail. Many self-medicate the pain. Having lost a sense of who they are, they pursue material goals. Yet they are never quite able to acquire enough material things to fill the hole in their soul. This general depiction of an individual's descent into spiritual death can be applied to society, in general.

Thus, this researcher identified feminist theology to anchor and explain clergy

\textsuperscript{64} The words spirit and soul are used interchangeably by the researcher. They refer to that non material life force and essence that exists in each individual. This is a creative energy and force that cannot be lost or die. It enables an individual to connect beyond the material.

\textsuperscript{65} Adams and Fortune, \textit{Violence against Women and Children}, 155.
sexual misconduct. Feminist theology was chosen because of its capacity to hold both the theories of feminism and those of theology to effectively explain clergy sexual misconduct. Feminist theology does not merely explain clergy sexual misconduct, but it explains the larger issue of gender violence—why and how women have been the victims of male violence since time immemorial. Feminist theology names the silence in both the patriarchal culture and religious culture that has benefited from manipulating religion to hold women in an inferior status.

---

Methodology

This research utilized case study methodology to examine the institutional response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct from 1991 to 2005. The research questions framing this research are:

1. What has been the response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct?
2. What theology/ideology guide(s) the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual abuse?

The design used in this exploration on the institutional response of the Unitarian Universalist Association to clergy sexual abuse is an embedded, single case design in which interviews and archival retrieval serve as the multiple units of analysis with data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included interviews with UUA participants. Secondary sources included archival documents provided by UUA.

Clergy sexual misconduct has been the subject of extensive publicity and research. Institutionally the UUA has engaged in research to understand the problem and devise appropriate guidelines and responses. This researcher’s efforts focused on the motivations and factors that have informed the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct. Besides answering the stated research questions, this research has the following objectives:

- To provide an in depth examination of clergy sexual abuse, its documentation and follow up within the UUA;
- To identify what, if any, advocacy groups have emerged;
- To explore any unique challenges the UUA initially faced, and is facing in addressing clergy sexual misconduct.
Design

The case study methodology was chosen because it allows for an "in-depth, qualitative description and analysis of the behavior of an organization, the UUA that is comprised of a collection of individuals that are dealing with a specific situation—clergy sexual misconduct.67 The case study methodology was supplemented by feminist methodology and the use of narrative analysis. The use of the narrative form was dictated by the need to gather information on the research questions from informed sources. When combining feminist methodology with the other methodologies of choice, the following is emphasized:

1. Attempts to negotiate power dynamics or at least to name them and address them with participants.
2. Participant/observer encourages overlap between the roles so that the participant is invested in the research and views it as something that will hold benefits for the participant.
3. Researcher seeks to invite and include participants in the research process and views them as "experts" in the phenomenon that is being studied.
4. Researcher usually embraces a conceptual framework that is consistent with values of justice, empowerment and claiming self agency as a starting point for inquiries.

Sample

Nine individuals were willing to serve as participants in this research project. They include: 1) UUA staff 2) members of the Clergy Sexual Abuse groups 3) a District Executive and 4) victim/survivors and advocates. Some of the participants represent the following programs within UUA:

- UUA Executive Staff

The subjects/interviewees used in this study were European Americans. Five currently serve on the staff of the UUA, one was a former UUA staff person, two currently serve on various Committees, one is professor at one of the UU affiliated seminary's and one is a victim/survivor/advocate active with the UUA. Most of the subjects were recruited by virtue of their status either with the UUA or their involvement with the subject of clergy sexual misconduct. For the protection of the researcher and interviewees, no actual names were used in naming clergy who were involved in sexual misconduct unless they had already been publicly named in other sources.

Procedure

The participants were contacted primarily via email and followed-up by telephone. Upon initial contact, the researcher explained the nature and significance of the research. A consent form was provided to obtain the consent of the participants to engage in the interview and permission to tape the interview.

Instrument

This research utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews comprised of both closed-ended and open-ended questions (excluding demographic information). The data was collected by means of individual interviews and archival retrieval. The interviews were completed over a four-month period, August to November, 2005. The stand questions that were asked of all participants consisted of the following:
1. What in your opinion influenced the institutional response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct?

2. What if any significant milestones occurred regarding the UUA and clergy sexual misconduct?

3. What is your overall perception of the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct?

4. How would you describe the culture of the UUA?

5. What if any theological reflections provide the grounding for the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct?

Based on the responses of the interviewees, probing questions were asked of each respondent. Probing questions included, but were not limited to the following: Can you say a little more about that? Why do you think that happened? How do you account for that?

The rationale for using multiple sources of data is that triangulation of evidence increases the strength and, therefore, validity of the research. Triangulation also corroborates the data that the researcher gathers from other sources. In this case the sources utilized are those identified by Yin:68

Data Collection

The rationale for using multiple sources of data is that triangulation of evidence increases the strength and therefore validity of the research. Triangulation also corroborates the data that the researcher gathers from other sources. In this case the sources to be utilized include those identified by Yin:69

- documentation,
- archival records,
- interviews,


• direct observation,

The four basic sources of data utilized in this research were:

**Documents** – Including letters, memoranda, agendas, study reports, and other items obtained from the database of clergy sexual misconduct at UUA’s website and the world wide web (www). The validity of the documents were carefully reviewed to avoid incorrect data being included;

**Archival records** – including some of the following: minutes from meetings, lists of names, survey data, and records from previous reports and research;

**Interviews** – included several types: open-ended and structured interviews. In all the interviews there were the following: structured questions as well as open-ended questions. The researcher utilized some telephone interviews. The use of a tape recorder during the interviews was allowed at the express permission of each participant and

**Direct observation** - occurred when the investigator made a site visit to gather data at 25 Beacon Street, the UUA’s national headquarters in Boston, MA.

**Data Analysis**

A review of the archival records and interviews resulted in the emergence of the following themes: 1) women’s inclusion in ministry; 2) external societal factors such as the sexual revolution and diversity, the women’s movement; 3) power and control and 4) Unitarian Universalist culture that influences the theological

In reviewing the data analysis of the second question: “What theology/ideology informed the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct?” data analysis revealed what this researcher refers to as “mythical narrative” that is, who UU’s through their stories tell themselves they are. In the telling of UU’s stories, UU’s emerge as: 1) socially conscious activists 2) outward focused; 3) active in local and national politics; 4) recovering isolationists who have often located their smaller and mid-sized congregations in the past in secluded areas populated by greenery 5) individualists that are weary of authority and uncomfortable with power and their middle to upper class status. Because
no theology is "acultural" or value-free according to James H. Evans, Jr., then in order to understand the UUA one must examine the theology.\textsuperscript{70} The factors above that were revealed in the data analysis from archival records and interviews is consistent with various sources that have written about these very factors.

A final factor gleaned from the data analysis was the fact that while the UUWF and others have championed the cause of victim/survivors, they have failed to bring victim/survivors into leadership in any significant way. What is missing from the model embraced by the UUA is the recognition that part of the individual healing and journey toward transformation and wholeness is the opportunity for broken individuals to transform their individual suffering into wholeness through acts of social activism. The telling of women’s stories is a powerful way to break the conspiracy of silence and give voice to victim/survivors. However, stopping short of activism renders a very individual treatment of the experience as opposed to the power of social change that comes with social activism.

\textbf{Significance of Research}

This research is significant in numerous ways. First, it introduces new primary voices and perspectives to the growing literature on clergy sexual misconduct, along with secondary sources of data. The research provides a fresh perspective on victim/survivor rights and the need to develop analysis of power as well as theology of power that places victim/survivors at the center of its analysis. The research also revisits the discourse on

\textsuperscript{70} James H. Evans, Jr., \textit{We Have Been Believers} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 27-31.
redistribution of power and issues of social power and oppression. Rebecca Todd Peters contends that paradigm of justice that privileges the poor and exploited is needed as a means to rectify their marginalized positions in society. This research opens that conversation for victim/survivors. The research also reveals the critical need for rigorous theological reflections to solidly ground UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct and hopefully deepen the link between its doctrines of forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. And finally, this research demonstrates how important the historical context is in opening new avenues of research such as the influence of female clergy, the sexual revolution and the presence of African-American UUs in UUism.

Chapter Organization

This research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction, definition of terms, historical information, and explanations of the causes of clergy sexual misconduct, the conceptual framework and the methodology. The chapter concludes with important terms used in this research. The review of the literature is presented in chapter II. This section is divided into four sections that include important research findings in the following areas: 1) clergy power and status 2) boundary violations 3) effects of clergy sexual misconduct on victim/survivors and 4) institutional accountability. Chapter III, the context of the problem describes the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct using the global lens of gender violence and human rights. Chapter IV briefly describes the historical development of Unitarian Universalist, its

---


72 While this research did not explore or include any racial themes, it included an historical context and overview that provided rich insights into the contribution of some African-American UUs.
Jewish and Christian origins, the historic consolidation of Unitarians and Universalists, and the subsequent creation of the Unitarian Universalist Association accompanied by a short overview of UUA’s global connections. The Chapter also examines the presence, roles and participation, issues and concerns of African-Americans in Unitarian Universalism, beginning with a brief overview on the black church as the founding source of resistance, the Civil Rights Movement, the second source of consciousness that shapes the fundamentalism of the black community. Chapter V presents the findings of the researcher and chronicles the UUAs response to clergy sexual misconduct since 1991. Chapter VI summarizes the research and concludes with a number of recommendations that can influence policy implications.
Definition of Terms

*Boundary* - refers to the physical and emotional space that acts as a symbolic force field that defines and allows an individual to have a sense of self.

*Boundary violations* - Clergy are bound by certain ethical guidelines that when violated constitute boundary violations.

*Clergy* - Individuals designated by faith communities to serve the laity and meet their spiritual needs.

*Clergy sexual misconduct* - Generally, a variety of terms are used interchangeably to refer to clergy sexual abuse: clergy misconduct, clergy malfeasance, clergy sexual abuse, clergy sexual malfeasance, clergy abuse and boundary violations. For the purpose of this research the term clergy sexual misconduct will be used.

*Gender* - refers to the attributes and behaviors shaped by culture to describe either males or females . . . it is a social construct and a major component of the power structure and ideology of many societal systems.\(^73\)

*Feminism* - Refers to a diverse collection of social theories and movements, and moral philosophies primarily concerned with the experiences of women.

*Feminist theology* - Is the discernment of the meaning of God for the full humanity of women. It is primarily concerned with the reading, interpretation of scripture, and other religious texts, traditions, experiences to life up the voices of women and the variety of theological perspectives that emphasize the experiences, needs and concerns of women in the quest for justice and liberation.\(^74\)

*Patriarchy* - refers to the "rule of the father" and denotes systems of legal, social, economic and political relations that validate and enforce the sovereignty of male heads of families over dependent persons in the household.\(^75\)

*Power* - denotes the ability to influence someone else.

*Sexism* - denotes a social relationship in which men are deemed superior to women who


\(^74\) McKim, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 104.

\(^75\) Russell and Clarkson, eds., *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 205.
are assigned roles that deny them rights or privileges based on their sex.

*Sexualized violence* - refers to the patriarchal sex ethic that commercializes and subordinates sex and eroticism, thus encouraging violent and coercive behaviors acted out as “sexual relations” that often victimize women as objects.\(^7\)

*Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)* - is an association of affiliated congregations in a covenental relationship. Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion with its original roots in Judeo Christianity. However, its 100,000 followers in the United States of North America currently embrace a diverse range of theologies and beliefs.

\(^7\) This is the researcher’s definition.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the relevant literature focuses on the following themes: 1) clergy power and status; 2) boundary violations; 3) effects of clergy sexual misconduct on victims, clergy and congregation; and 4) institutional accountability.

Clergy Power and Status

This section examines the literature on clergy and power as a context to understand clergy sexual misconduct and its link therefore to abuses of power and vocation.

Clergy in many traditions, including Unitarian Universalism, enter into a covenantal relationship with the laity to serve. In congregationally based denominations clergy are called rather than hired. Thus, they are not viewed as employees in the usual sense. This covenantal relationship between the board and clergy is often fraught with misunderstandings because of the unique role of clergy. Hence, this section seeks to clarify the historical status of clergy. In some religious traditions ministry refers to the services rendered to God by the church and clergy.\(^{77}\) Letty M. Russell and Shannon

\(^{77}\) McKim, Dictionary of Theological Terms, 174.
Clarkson note that traditional ministry is often described in terms of authoritative leadership and action done “for or on behalf of the community.” In many religious traditions ministers represent, not only themselves and society, but God as well. In some denominations clergy are called by God to act as God’s special representative on earth. Because their authority rests in God, their words become distinctive and binding.

While clergy may be viewed as men and women of the cloth, many of their tasks include very practical duties like preaching, teaching, counseling, visiting the sick and shut in, administrating, promoting, recruiting, worshipping, community service, marrying, burying and blessing new born babies. Today’s clergy engage in varied capacities and, yet, clergy’s traditional roles have been drastically altered over the course of time. While many of these duties are skills-based, a minister’s call in contemporary times is relational according to John C. Harris. The call to walk with the people and to be more fully human and to help them find their wholeness, while working for wholeness in society is the same for clergy today.

Changing Status of Clergy

John Harris asserts that the declining interest in religion has impacted clergy and left them with a sense of self-doubt about the usefulness of their role. Subsequently, the church is no longer a central part, of many citizens’ lives as it once was. While John C. Harris and Clarkson, eds., Dictionary of Feminist Theologies, 183.


Gary Funderson, Boundary Leaders: Leadership Skills for People of Faith (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Donald M. Chinula, Building King's Beloved Community: Foundations for Pastoral Care and Counseling with the Oppressed (Cleveland: United Church, 1997).
Harris’ research was generated, in the 1970s, his principle conclusion holds true today, that is, the roles of religion and clergy have weakened and society is less influenced by either factors.\textsuperscript{82} Consequently, more and more clergy are finding it a necessary prerequisite to win the trust and respect of laity. In contrast, their predecessors assumed their authority, trust and respect simply by virtue of their roles.\textsuperscript{83} This disengagement from religion, challenging clergy and the recent clergy sex scandals, indeed, has created a somber reality. This reality supports James J. Gill’s troubling comment, “research, along with clinical experience, repeatedly has shown that power is intimately and consistently related to sexual abuse.”\textsuperscript{84} Harris contends that in earlier times clergy had a psychological sense of importance that extended beyond the church. However, that power has significantly waned with the decline in church attendance and religion in general.

The disintegration of cleric roles and purpose was first noted some one-hundred years ago when differences between clergy and laity were almost always resolved in favor of the clergy who were perceived as right, therefore, endowed with the authority to manage and oversee the church unchallenged.\textsuperscript{85} Harris attributes the change to a number of factors: 1) laity is now better educated; 2) power has been redistributed; and 3) the complexity of administering any organization today, demands more imagination, knowledge and intellect than any one leader alone can provide.


\textsuperscript{83} Michael Gemignani, \textit{Spiritual Formation for Pastors: Feeding the Fire Within} (Valley Forge, PA.: Judson, 2002), 123.

\textsuperscript{84} James J. Gill, \textit{Priests, Power and Sexual Abuse} (Minneapolis: Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute); [internet] available from http://www.advocateweb.org/hope/articles_clergy.asp (accessed September 18, 2005).

\textsuperscript{85} Harris, \textit{Power and Ministry}, 46-47.
Harris names four major occurrences that have attributed to the changing role and identity of clergy. They include: 1) psychotherapists and behavioral science practitioners who have assumed tradition areas of pastoral care; 2) basic shifts in views of reality that have undercut traditional images of God, thus casting doubt on the basic worth of the clergy’s message; 3) clergy are ill-prepared for the stunning variety of values and ideology that have emerged in society and 4) concepts of congregational leadership taught by seminaries lost their applicability.\textsuperscript{86}

Power

Sociologists often define power as the ability to impose one’s will on another, even if those others resist in some way. Sociologist, Max Weber, similarly defined power as unilateral ability or potential to bring about significant change through the actions of one’s self or of others. Power in theory is neither good nor bad. It assumes a negative or positive connotation depending on how it is used. Whenever one individual exerts coercive behavior to control another for gain or self-interest, at the detriment of the other, then that becomes “misuse of power” or abuse.

Power in the normative sense often means power over, to have dominion or lordship.\textsuperscript{87} According to Pamela Cooper-White, this Darwinian approach to power is one of struggle, striving and competition that is linked to “virility, potency, masculinity, and biological male sexuality. Many feminists have popularized another notion of power with

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{87} Pamela Cooper-White, \textit{The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church’s Response} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 31-32.
rather than power over. This more conciliatory model is grounded in the belief that all individuals possess power that they can legitimately claim for good.

Fear of Power and Powerless

Our cultural conditioning has socialized many of us to fear power. If clergy and laity are confronted with challenges of power, they are also beset with a sense of powerlessness in an increasingly secular world. Some religions venerate powerlessness and equate humbleness with closeness to God. However, Harris attributes a negative connotation when clergy demonstrate these feelings of powerlessness. For example, 1) vague congregational direction and mission; 2) personal and social issues; 3) lack of motivation among members; and 4) inability to close gaps between how things are and the way they should be.

Relationships are not the only symbols of power dynamics. Images used in worship and liturgy reflect power dynamics in the culture and society. Similar to those images, the power imbalances in relationship to women and children has been continually supported by a complex system of social relations based on the status quo for a very long time. Michael Gemignani contends that (true) leaders lead not by demanding obedience to their directives, but by inspiring and enabling the laity to realize and exercise their own talents and gifts.

---

88 Harris, *Power and Ministry*, 44.

89 Gemignani, *Spiritual Formation for Pastors*, 123.
According to Patricia Hill Collins truth is “limited by the workings of unjust power relations.” Additionally, Collins’ insightful observations are noted in her comment, “power shapes what counts as truth.” Her statement would seem to add credence to assertions that church leaders have been guilty of abuses of power in their complicity to conceal the history and behaviors of sexually misconducting ministers. Thus, their actions were predicated on attempts to shape a truth of “male clergy privilege.” Further insights by Hill-Collins are somewhat more conciliatory and hopeful in noting that theoretically it is possible for members of privileged classes to... relinquish privilege and to participate in a collaborative effort to develop critical social theory.” Hill-Collins raises an important issue about the necessity of the privileged breaking ranks within institutions and standing with the less powerful and disaffected. Her recognition that power structures have always been imbedded in religious institutions is one that challenges clergy and religious leaders who are willing to dismantle corrupt institutions and reconfigure social relations.

Power Dynamics

Meanwhile, Carrie Doehring’s findings acknowledge that there are instances in which clients or parishioners transpose their needs into sexual desire and act on their feelings with seductive behavior in relation to the clergy. However, she very clearly insists, as do numerous other sources, that it is the clergy who needs to pay careful attention to boundaries and power dynamics and not the patients and clients who are


91 Doehring, *Taking Care*, 37, 19.
simply revealing their vulnerability. Marie Fortune, on the other hand, indicates that some clergy have been too preoccupied with wanting protection from seductive parishioners and seem less aware of the power they hold and their potential to harm others. Doehring contends that monitoring the interaction of power dynamics and relational boundaries is an important theological task. Further, she maintains that the only way to avoid being distracted from addressing clergy sexual misconduct and overcoming the tendency to identify with the abuser is through a relationship with God.

Power and Status

However, power is a component of all our interactions and according to Patricia Hill Collins, power relations permeate all aspects of everyday life. Religious life is no exception. Clergy derive their authority from different sources depending on whether their polity or the governance process is congregationally derived or institutionally derived. Unitarian Universalists, Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ are congregationally based, that is, laity is autonomous and confers the power to ordain and call their ministers. Michael Camenisch notes that professional power is itself a temptation and a seduction that clergy should be constantly on guard against. Power is realized through the production of certain forms of knowledge, and the careful deployment of this knowledge through public discourse, grants power and status to an

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 19.
96 Lebacqz and Driskill, Ethics and Spiritual Care, 42.
individual. What is considered proper or improper conduct, licit or illicit behavior, in society is communicated through discourse. For instance, no longer is it acceptable to look the other way if one has knowledge of clergy sexual misconduct. Yet, a pattern of institutional and individual complicity existed for many years in past times.

Whenever clergy use power in a destructive manner it, "destroys relationships and hurts people." 97 Marie Fortune articulates a similar sentiment indicating the risk of misusing ones’ power is not just about the clergy’s character, but that there is risk inherent in the very role of clergy. 98 Given this caution, it is worth heeding Fortune’s suggestion to, “acknowledge both the gift (of ministry) that it brings and the implication that the pastor is at risk to misuse that power.” 99 Traci Brown Douglas attributes the risk of misconducting to the unequal relationship that creates structures of domination. 100 Many of the sources in the literature cited the combination of power, isolation, naivété and lack of supervision as factors that raise the risks of misconduct and lowers the likelihood of accountability. 101 Thus, Fortune and others caution that the very nature of the ministerial role and its duties are fraught with the potential for abuse. 102 Moreover, in the twentieth century, leadership expectations have shifted from a power over, or an

---

97 Ibid.


99 Ibid.

100 Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 20.

101 Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*; Fortune and Longwood, *Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*; Lebacqz and Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care*; Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*.

asymmetrical, clergy-laity pattern of power to a symmetrical authority model that reflects our more egalitarian norms.\textsuperscript{103} Some of the research indicates that younger clergy and recently graduating clergy are more inclined to adopt democratic leadership than those who attended seminary earlier.\textsuperscript{104}

**Distinction Between Power and Authority**

The literature distinguishes between power and authority. Power is the ability to influence others. Authority is granted through a role or position. According to Donald K. McKim, ecclesiastical authority is the “right of the church body or duly constituted church leaders to exercise power and decision making for the church, its ordained ministers and members.”\textsuperscript{105} Similarly, religious authority connotes the “power to influence belief and action through the free decision of those who are willing to adhere to certain ways of religious understanding through church, scripture, religious experience and reason.”\textsuperscript{106} Contrasting McKim’s treatment approach, Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkston deconstruct the term. Not only do Russell and Clarkston affirm McKim’s definition, but they also provide a feminist perspective that considers the prevailing paradigm of authority in male-dominated religions. The emerging feminist paradigm suggests authority exists in community in the form of circles of interdependence. This paradigm challenges even the “divine order” of God that features


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} McKim, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 22.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
God at the top, then men, women and children. Russell and Clarkson join those scholars that caution against corruption and illegitimate use of authority and power.

**Institutional Accountability**

The literature that addresses institutional accountability and clergy sexual misconduct overwhelmingly supports the assumption that institutional responsibility has been lacking among religious institutions until fairly recently.\(^{107}\) Based on Fortune’s research findings, most denominational leaders fail to come to the aid and assistance of the victim/survivor and instead, their initial reaction is to protect the offending clergy member. Research findings indicate that this response often creates an adversarial relationship with the victim/survivor. This approach leads to contradictory notions and actions that cloud an otherwise objective approach to an individual’s behavior shrouded in a religious overtone – to protect the defined role of clergy and one that usurps the rights of the abused.

Hence, Sharon Welch's research findings help to clarify organized religion’s responses that appear inconsistent with its theology of supporting the oppressed. Welch notes that well-intentioned institutions often look the other way when faced with complex problems. She terms this common reaction "paralysis of will."\(^{108}\) Additionally, Rebeka Miles maintains that a "do-nothing-approach" is the most common response of non-

---


offending clergy to their sexual misconducting colleagues. Findings indicate that the church has been slower to respond to sexual misconduct than many other professional groups.

Nevertheless, it is usually assumed that there must be a designated institution to uphold the rights of citizens. In the faith community, that accountability usually resides with its denominational leaders. In far too many instances research findings indicate that ecclesiastical leaders have appeared to value secrecy more-so than justice at the detriment of victims/survivors. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune denounced the willingness of church institutions to “pay individuals off in order to preserve their public image.” Fortune’s and Adams’ research findings state that accountability is the responsibility of the institution that bears responsibility for the professional conduct of its clergy. Such responsibility entails maintenance of the integrity of the ministry and protecting those persons who are vulnerable to clergy. Donald Cozzens contends that the “systemic or structural crisis that threatens the current lines of (church) power have gone unchallenged for centuries.

The literature offered several insights into the wave of anti-religious attitudes currently prevailing in the country. One source cited the fact that fewer individuals are attending church and accompanied by a declining loyalty to church dogma. Some women have also become disenchanted by the continued resistance to the insights and full

110 Fortune and Adams, eds., Violence against Women and Children, 357.
111 Ibid., 352.
112 Marg Susan Thompson, review of Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church, by Donald Cozzens, Religious Ethics Newsletter, no. 642 (June 2003).
participation of women. For others, the authoritarian hierarchy of organized religion is less appealing than a flatter organizational structure. Some wish to be more involved as laity. The institutional defensiveness of religious institutions in response to the sex scandals has further alienated some individuals. Finally, the sexual repressiveness and the "persistence of a debilitating and counter productive clergy culture" have deepened the distance between adherents and church leadership.\textsuperscript{113}

Complicity

Likewise, accountability is a critical ingredient for the deterrence of clergy sexual misconduct. The revelation that a number of priests involved in sexual misconduct have in fact been "protected" by their superiors is supported in the review of the literature. Marie Fortune and Elizabeth Fiorenza contend that the complicity of the Catholic Church is the result of several factors: the lack of will, lack of courage and the fear that offending clergy might sue them.\textsuperscript{114} Adams and Fortune allege that the unwillingness to challenge the privilege of sexual access to congregations, staff, and students is all too commonplace within patriarchal institutions such as the Church.\textsuperscript{115}

Substantial evidence exists that a number of priests involved in sexual abuse had, in fact, been protected by their superiors. The first widely publicized incident in the Catholic Church occurred, in 1984, and involved Father Gilbert Gauthe who committed

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} Marie M. Fortune, "Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship" by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shan Copeland, eds., Violence against Women (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1994), 116-117.

\textsuperscript{115} Adams and Fortune, eds., Violence against Women and Children, 358.
repeated attacks on children over several years in Louisiana. Ecclesiastical authorities admitted knowledge of his incidents of earlier abuse, but consequently transferred him to new parishes where the pattern of abuse reoccurred.\footnote{116 Joel Best, ed., Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers), 107.}

Critics of the Catholic Church allege that leadership failed to respond adequately, thus, aggravating the misconduct and further revictimizing the victims/survivors. Research findings indicate that the primary interest of the Catholic Church was to avoid scandal and to protect its clergy rather than to assist the victims.\footnote{117 Ibid.} The victim-focused organization, BishopAccountability.org, contends that public records document the intentional transfer of “thousands of abusive priests into unsuspecting parishes and dioceses.”\footnote{118 Bishop-Accountability.org. “Who We Are?: What we Mean by ‘Accountability’ ” [internet]; available from http://www.bishop-accountability.org/WhoWeAre/ (accessed August, 17, 2005).}

One of the most visible cases involved Cardinal Bernard Law of the Archdiocese of Boston. Law was forced to resign after it was revealed that he had protected a number of priests that were guilty of sexual misconduct by allowing the predator priests to move from one parish to another even after their misconduct had been exposed.

**Effects of Clergy Sexual Misconduct**

Thus, the effects of clergy sexual misconduct are far-reaching and ultimately impact the lives of multiple victims.\footnote{119 Fortune et al., Clergy Misconduct; Fortune and Adams, Violence against Women and Children; Cooper-White, The Cry of Tamar; Patricia Hoerdtloerfer and Fredric Muir, eds., The Safe Congregation} Its tentacles reach beyond the individual
victim/survivor and extend to the victim’s family members and friends.¹²⁰

Victims/survivors often comprise entire congregations. The leadership of the
misconducting clergy that may have initially captivated the congregation now “wounds
the whole body” according to the findings of Rebekah Miles and others who identify
some of the well documented effects of clergy sexual misconduct on individuals that
include:¹²¹

• alienation from the church;¹²²
• loss of safety;
• distrust of clergy;
• disruption in faith that may lead to questioning God – “do I need to forgive
my abuser?” “Is my sinfulness the cause of the abuse?” “Where was God?”
“Why did god allow this to happen to me?” “What is justice and how is it
achieved?” “Whom can I tell?”
• may cease attending church;
• most victims do not report their abuse. But for many who do, they may not be
believed or they are blamed for the pastor’s misconduct; and
• isolation and shame are common reactions that are reinforced often by the
perpetrator and the vicious cycle of shame.

Findings indicate that feelings and emotions, including isolation and shame, may
linger for a life-time and that it is not uncommon to conceal the abuse over a life-time.
The following example, presented to Brenda Davenport, appeared to reflect a pattern in
the research findings. “I have an acquaintance (a Unitarian Universalist who does not
attend church) who told me a priest had sexually molested her when she was a teenager

¹²⁰ Cooper-White, The Cry of Tamar; Steinke, Healthy Congregations; West, Wounds of the
Spirit; Hoerdtorderfer and Muir, The Safe Congregations Handbook; and Grenz and Bell, Betrayal of Trust.

¹²¹ Miles, Pastor as a Moral Guide, 104.

¹²² I would like to thank Rebekah L. Miles for inspiring this original list which the researcher
edited. For her original list see: Rebekah L. Miles, The Pastor as Moral Guide (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 104.
(about 16). She never told anyone due to guilt. She was Catholic at that time. She is around 48 years old now." 123

Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell concur with Miles’ findings that identified guilt and shame emerge as only two of many emotions that impact victim/survivors.124 Grenz and Bell’s findings cite additional emotions that include: self-blame, shifting emotions (mood swings), suppressed rage, desperation, feelings of estrangement and possible suicidal feelings. The literature noted a number of serious symptoms impacting victims of clergy sexual misconduct including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a common occurrence among individuals which have encountered serious traumas characterized by flashbacks, insomnia, irritability and loss of concentration.125 According to Grenz and Bell, victim/survivors may also experience flashbacks that can be exhibited in obsessive behavior.126

Fortune’s research findings suggest that it is not unusual for an individual to initially feel flattered and even special as a result of the attention from a clergy member.127 However, these feelings may dissipate after more serious and inappropriate sexual behavior continues. When the individual who is the object of the clergy’s misconduct is an adult, oftentimes their “complicity” is viewed as consensual behavior


124 Grenz and Bell, Betrayal of Trust, 34-35.

125 PTSD became more widely assimilated into mainstream culture and vocabulary after veterans returning from Vietnam were diagnosed having exhibited these previously unidentified symptoms.

126 Grenz and Bell, Betrayal of Trust.

127 Fortune, Clergy Misconduct.
and labeled an “affair.” However, research findings indicate that the power dynamics do not really allow for a fully consensual relationship. Some research suggests that oftentimes when an individual recognizes that s/he is being denied a much needed relationship with their minister, they begin to realize they have been exploited.

The affects of clergy sexual misconduct on adolescents can be extremely traumatic. B.D. Compas and J.E. Epping assert that children have more difficulty than adults in coping with stressful events for the following reasons: 128 1) They do not have as complex and realistic a view of themselves and their world as they will have later; 2) They have less self-understanding; and 3) They have not yet developed a stable sense of identity or a clear understanding of what is expected of them and what resources they might have to deal with problems.

The unequal power dynamics render adolescents extremely vulnerable. Like an adult victim, an adolescent’s feelings may range from a sense of betrayal, fear and anxiety, victimization, confusion, embarrassment, and self blame. 129 R.E. Ingram and J.M. Price contend that children are especially vulnerable to psychological problems. 130

The literature further reveals that victims of clergy sexual misconduct are not likely to discuss their situation with anyone and tend to become isolated. When the anger finally surfaces, the individuals may be ready to break the silence and take some action. Frequently, victims seeking pastoral counseling may have some history of childhood


sexual abuse, which they may or may not have addressed. This history of abuse increases their vulnerability to further exploitation.

Re-victimizing the Victims of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Oftentimes, individuals are unintentionally re-victimized by the responses of others. Some of the typical responses that prove to be counterproductive include the following: 1) Not believing the victims/survivors; 2) Attempting to cover up the incident, therefore, invalidating the victim/survivor. Grenz notes that the most typical response is to protect the secret. When this fails the victim is then blamed; 3) Blaming the victim/survivor, that is, “you were provocative”, “you were asking for it,” “what were you wearing”; “You should not have been in his office so late” “You were in the wrong place at the wrong time”; 4) Using guilt to dissuade the victim/survivor from taking action such as reporting the incident. Do you want to be responsible for bringing a “good man down?” and 5) Using the victim/survivor’s personality or past history to condemn them and minimize the clergy’s conduct. For example, if there is a history of mental illness, sexual abuse or the victim/survivor is known to be a “good time girl/boy” who likes to party and is known to have sexual partners.

Effects on Congregation

Chilton R. Knudsen contends that congregational healing from clergy sexual misconduct includes a wide range of emotions which parallel those of individuals. He asserts that because individuals can enter at any point in the continuum of emotions, there

131 Fortune. Clergy Misconduct, 112.
is no difference in how things look and how individuals feel. This he refers to as “unity” and these reactions include:

- Shock
- Sense of betrayal and/or violation
- Denial
- Bargaining
- Initial stages of anger
- Depression/sadness
- Subsequent stages of anger with growing intensity
- Acceptance/integration

Moreover, Thomas Mickelson maintains that a single case of clergy sexual misconduct can trigger the propensity for future misconduct by the offending individual. Brubaker’s findings concur with Mickelson’s research findings. Mickelson asserts that certain structures and informal rules permit “incestuous conduct,” very much like a dysfunctional family. Like individuals, a congregation can suffer from the following: loss, betrayal, denial, anger, depression, and fear. Findings indicate that some church members fear that others will find out their shameful secret. In addition, some fear the misconducting clergy may sue the church if members intervene. Still others fear the congregation will fall apart if the misconduct surfaces. Karen McClintock cited congregational members’ comments that support the contention that a congregation as a whole can become depressed. The congregation’s minister had had several sexual affairs with members that were “unspoken secrets.” Thus, it is not unusual for an entire

---

132 Chilton R. Knudsen, Dimensions of Congregational Healing.


institution to suffer from the effects of depression. Mikelson’s findings note the
disruption imposed on the congregation as a result of clergy sexual misconduct in that
members’ demonstrate a sense of feeling “duped” after opening their hearts up to their
minister. Brubaker and Mikelson’s findings focus on the confused thinking of
congregants who may have had good experiences with their minister in the past. Some
members have a difficult time accepting the productivity of the minister and his
misconduct without invalidating the relationship they shared. Clergy sexual misconduct
often causes deep schisms in the congregation between those that support the minister
and those who are horrified by his actions. Thus, objectivity becomes almost impossible
at a time when it is greatly needed. Helen Baylies asserts that many congregations
erroneously assume that they can get through the experience and heal with little or no
outside help. However, research findings suggest that the misconduct becomes
generational and will tend to repeat itself especially if the congregation does not seek
help in healing.

Effects on Misconducting Clergy

In earlier years misconducting clergy, if they were caught, were pretty much
ignored and shipped on to other unsuspecting congregations. This was usually only if the
misconducting clergy was exposed and there was subsequent pressure calling for his
departure. Changing norms and times now mean that consequences are far more serious
since denominational leaders are actually exercising accountability of clergy for their

135 Mikelson, “Reflections toward a UU Theological Understanding,” 115-121.

136 Rediger, Beyond the Scandal.
inappropriate behavior.

Just as there are effects on the victim/survivor from misconduct, there are effects on the misconducting minister. Depending on the gravity of the misconduct, a misconducting clergy member might experience a range of consequences. As a result of increased awareness, a misconducting clergy person might be placed on administrative leave with pay until an investigation is complete. A misconducting minister may face any of the following: termination, rejection, abandonment, anger, disbelief, and disappointment. A misconducting minister often risks jeopardizing his career as well as his reputation. Gantz asserts that the misconducting ministers can lose their social network, financial security, and their sense of value and worth.\(^{137}\) One minister penned these desperate and poignant words upon reflecting on his past misconduct, “... I betrayed the covenants of my marriage. For the rest of my life I will have to live with the knowledge that I brought deep sorrow to my wife, to my children, and to friends and others who have trusted me for many years.”\(^ {138}\) Mikelson’s research findings note that the “circle of ministry” is damaged by clergy sexual misconduct.\(^ {139}\) Grenz and Bell note the possibility of lawsuits, loss of license, loss of face among church peers, disbarment from professional organizations. Oftentimes the misconduct destroys the family ties and friends disappear as well. With such a heavy toll, Grantz and Bell pose the question why anyone would glean a few minutes of personal gratification in the face of such dire losses.

\(^{137}\) Grenz and Bell, *Betrayal of Trust*, 30.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.

\(^{139}\) Mikelson, “Reflections toward a UU Theological Understanding,” 115-121.
Findings indicate a misconducting clergy member might experience a range of emotions including: rejection, abandonment, guilt, depression, shame, anger, self-loathing. Not only are clergy’s pastorates at issue but in some instances their vocation and calling as a minister. Clergy sexual misconduct exacts a heavy toll on other members as well as evidenced by the following member’s comments. “I feel like the congregation is suffering from depression.” Her congregation had within its history suffered through several instances of sexual misconduct between its pastor and some members. McClintock notes that “deep wounds result” when pastors violate their congregational trust by engaging in sexual misconduct. McClintock notes that it is not merely the victim/survivor that may leave after misconduct, but that church leaders often leave.

Boundary Violations or Breach of Trust

In a faith community individuals are open to risk and vulnerability relate to pastor-laity relationships. Thus their defenses fall away. Among friends one might assume safety whether it exists or not. When an individual clergy in a trusted role abuses his power, it constitutes a boundary violation and a breach of trust. Fortune asserts there are four ways that the violation of professional boundaries between clergy and member/staff is a betrayal of trust: 1) It is a violation of role, 2) It constitutes misuse of authority and power, 3) It takes advantage of vulnerability and 4) There is an absence of meaningful consent.

It appears that Fortune was one of the first to successfully frame the issue of

\[140\] McClintock, Sexual Shame, 11-12.
clergy sexual abuse as an ethical issue even before the advent of ethics classes. Fortune's ethical analysis views sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student etc. as a violation of professional ethics for any person in a ministerial role of leadership or ministerial counseling. While the concept of boundary's and personal space is not standard in all cultures, it is a widely held concept in American culture based on values that uphold an individual rights to personal and emotional safety and pace, body and ego integrity. Some behavior scientists believe that healthy boundaries are a feature of certain ego capacities.

Rediger's research findings note that eight percent of clergy affirmed the absence of written guidelines or policies regarding their sexual behavior. A survey conducted among forty denominations, in 1992, indicated that the majority of the participants still did not have policies and procedures or written materials on clergy sexual misconduct. Most denominations, due to liability issues, have moved to develop policies and procedures. Insurance companies such as Church Mutual, the largest underwriter of church insurance, offer a policy discount for congregations that provide training for their staff.

As a female and feminist theologian, Pamela Cooper-White addresses a question that others failed to ask, "Why don't women stop it (clergy sexual misconduct) or report it?" Cooper-White identifies several reasons why it is difficult for women to stop their abuse and/or report it: 1) the woman feels responsible and thus she diverts attention away from his guilty behavior, 2) the clergy's behavior may validate her, make her feel special

141 Rediger. Beyond the Scandals, 9.

if her self-esteem is low, 3) the deliberately confusing and crazy-making behavior of the misconducting clergy is designed to keep the victim/survivor off kilter and unable to act clearly 4) she may love him and does not want to hurt his career, and 5) fear that no one will believe her, fear that things will end badly, fear that she will not be able to function without him, fear of his retaliation, fear that she will be blamed and lose all her friends and the final fear – that it has all been for nothing.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Cooper-White, The Cry of Tamar, 138-139.
CHAPTER III

CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

A Nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is finished. No matter how brave the warriors or how powerful the weapons.

--Cheyenne Indian proverb

Gender Violence and Human Rights

This chapter describes the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct using the global lens of gender violence and human rights. Clergy sexual misconduct cannot be properly understood without reference to the larger global context of gender violence. This research documents the presence of clergy sexual misconduct in this country and the links between the victims/survivors of clergy sexual misconduct and other forms of gender violence. Gender violence takes many different forms. Some include: gangs trafficking in women; sexual torture, enslavement as political prisoners and honor killings. The human rights violations of victims/survivors of clergy sexual misconduct must be recognized alongside those women that are imprisoned and beaten in their homes. Otherwise, the silence serves to re-victimize these women and children.

Human rights in the last two decades has provided a significant framework for global women’s movements while advancing women’s rights as human rights. One of the primary issues impacting women regardless of their country’s gross national product or labels that designate their respective countries as developed and developing nations – the
common theme is gender violence. Globally gender based violence appears to be the primary cause of most violent attacks on women. As a result, gender violence has achieved global visibility due to its pervasive nature.\textsuperscript{144} According to Charlotte Bunch, a significant number of women worldwide are routinely subjected to “torture, starvation, terrorism, humiliation, mutilation and murder.”\textsuperscript{145} Grave human rights violations against women continue unabated. Unfortunately, many of these violations are often condoned and sanctioned by legal systems and government policies.\textsuperscript{146} Gender violence restricts women’s contributions in various ways including familial, societal and economic development. Additionally, gender violence often leads to the disintegration of families, medical problems, inability to fulfill employment obligations and even loss of life. Women’s abilities to live full and productive lives are restricted by gender violence. Male violence against women and children has been a focus of feminist research and activists in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe for four decades.\textsuperscript{147}

The crime of clergy sexual misconduct is just beginning to be acknowledged in developing countries and appears not to have surfaced on women’s agendas around the world. While most industrialized nations have established public policy to begin to address many forms of gender violence and to provide support services and interventions for the victims and perpetrators, clergy sexual misconduct has not yet surfaced. Thus, in


\textsuperscript{146} Bunch, “Recognizing Women’s Rights,” 13.

\textsuperscript{147} Desire Hanson and Diana Russell, \textit{A Bibliography on Patriarchal Force in South Africa} (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, Institute of Criminology, HSRC Publishers), 1.
most countries around the world, clergy sexual misconduct has not yet been perceived as a problem. Furthermore, it has been noticeably absent from the UN's definition of gender violence:

Gender violence refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women shall be understood to encompass but not be limited to: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State.148

Clergy Sexual Misconduct in the United States

Until recently, little attention has been paid to clergy sexual misconduct and few statistics exist. The few that are available are oftentimes generated from denominational records which tend to be suspect and are often underreported. Findings generated in a study published, in 1992, revealed that the majority of denominations do not yet have any written policies and procedures, nor written materials addressing clergy sexual

By 1995, a number of experts had emerged identifying clergy sexual misconduct as a serious social problem. Investigations of the Catholic Church sex scandals have resulted in a rather gloomy prognosis for the Catholic Church and the vocation of the priesthood. Father Norman Rotert, a priest of forty-two years forecasted the following pessimistic prognosis:

“The paternalistic attitudes, the increasing consciousness of women, the lack of appreciation for the value of celibacy, the large percentage of gay priests, the pedophilia crisis, all have so impacted our vocation recruitment efforts that I see no possibility of salvaging the priesthood as we know it today.”

It appears, that many, if not most religious institutions until fairly recently have acted with complicity and condoned clergy sexual misconduct by ignoring, denying and withholding information about the misconduct of its clergy. Overwhelmingly, religious systems as currently structured perpetuate the potential for such abuses of power against women and children. Thus, male privilege and power greatly impact the safety of women and children and compromise their quality of life. As a result critics were highly incensed by the church’s leadership reactions in the face of the scandal.

Thus, the rhetoric of contemporary social problems illustrates the fundamental importance of placing the interests of women and children in the forefront of clergy sexual misconduct. In the case of clergy misconduct, such a shift of emphasis can only


partially undermine theological positions naming the problem as the sin of the individual but the behavior of social systems organized around patriarchy and dominance. The behavior exhibited by the clergy and many of the excuses articulated bears a strong resemblance to domestic violence and child abuse. The similarities include:

- In earlier years the behavior was not perceived to be abnormal or criminal conduct
- The perpetrators of violence against women and children are predominately males and the victims predominantly females and children.
- Males represent a disproportionate number of individuals that commit acts of violence
- Males violence against women and children appears to bear a correlation with their beliefs in women’s and children’s inferiority
- Males violent behavior manifests a cluster of behaviors directed against women and children that include rape, wife abuse, incest, pornography, and global sex trafficking (to name a few)
- Differences in power and privilege among men and women are often acted out in ways deemed detrimental to the well being of women and children.

Hence, gender violence is a significant barrier to social and economic development. Its existence produces an unsafe and hostile environment that is counterproductive to achieving a quality of life for women. Likewise, clergy sexual misconduct creates an unsafe and hostile environment for women seeking the solace of their faith community.
CHAPTER IV
OVERVIEW OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Roots of Unitarian Universalism - The Historical Development of Unitarian Universalism (UUism)

This chapter briefly describes the historical development of Unitarian Universalism, its Jewish and Christian origins, the historic consolidation of Unitarians and Universalists, and the subsequent creation of the Unitarian Universalist Association accompanied by a short overview of UUA’s global connections.

Unitarian Universalist roots grew out of early Judaism and Christianity. Initially Unitarian beliefs included the notion of God’s oneness and Jesus’ portrayal as a mere mortal. Universalist thought perceived God as a kind and loving figure that proclaimed the good news that all are saved. This salvific message, like Unitarianism, was viewed as heretical in its day. However, Christianity did not become associated with either Trinitarian or Unitarian concepts until after Jesus’ death during the first two or three centuries.152

It was in 325 CE that the Trinity that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost were pronounced as the only acceptable Christian doctrine. Unitarians’ rejection of the

trinity ensured their continued persecution. In 381 A.D., a General Council was called in Constantinople where assembled bishops added an article to the Nicene Creed that affirmed the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. A religious movement of Unitarians emerged from the liberal thoughts of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). Socinus published a tract in 1579 that promoted the belief that Jesus was a man chosen by God, but not God himself. Socinus denounced the Trinity, an act considered blasphemous in his day. Another Unitarian, a Spaniard named Michael Servetus was martyred, in 1553, for his criticism of the Trinity and his rejection of the Doctrine of Original Sin. While persecution of Unitarians was particularly visible in the fourteenth century, it prevailed until the sixteenth century when the Protestant Reformation was beginning to emerge. Reformation spread in the isolated areas of Transylvania in central Europe as well as Switzerland, Hungary, Holland, Poland and Italy. Eventually, the Reformation found its way to the shores of England.

King Sigismund is held in high esteem by Unitarian Universalists because he was the first and only Unitarian King. He issued the first edit of religious tolerance, in 1568, in Transylvania. Although some scholars cite the early monotheism of Ahknaton, an ancient Egyptian Pharoah, as a precursor to King Sigismund that proclaimed the concept of “one God.” As a result of Sigismund’s efforts in Transylvania some of the first Unitarian churches were established in the sixteenth century. By 1599, the tiny town of

---

153 McKin, Dictionary of Theological Terms, 292.

154 Transylvania became a part of Hungary shortly after King Sigismund became King.

Rakow, Poland, had become the chief Unitarian center in Europe. Some of the early churches still exist in central Europe where their members worship and practice the traditional religion of Unitarianism in their historic buildings. One of the oldest Unitarian churches in the world is located in Koloszvar, currently known as Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania. Continued persecution in Europe plagued Unitarians. In England, in 1791, the laboratory of scientist and Unitarian minister, Reverend Joseph Priestley, was burned to the ground. Priestley’s precious books were destroyed and he was subsequently run out of England because of his Unitarian beliefs. Neither his notoriety as the discoverer of oxygen or his leadership role with two large churches exempted him from persecution. Priestley’s flight to America proved to be a gift to American Unitarianism. He established numerous churches in Northumberland, Pennsylvania in 1794 and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania two years later.

Most Unitarians and Universalists trace their roots in the United States back to Massachusetts settlers and founders of the Republic. Many of the early colonies were actually started by Puritans who immigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution in Europe. Episcopal King’s Chapel (EKC) was among the first of the already existing churches to convert to Unitarianism in Boston in 1784. John N. Booth contends that EKC eliminated all Trinitarian references from their Book of Common Prayer in 1785 and affiliated with the American Unitarian Association upon its formation. EKC exists today and continues to serve its small membership in the heart


of downtown Boston in walking distance from the UUA headquarters. In 1802, the oldest Pilgrim church in America, The Church of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, founded in 1620, converted to Unitarianism when its congregation cast a majority vote in 1800. An estimated 135 of 544 Congregational churches had converted to Unitarianism by 1840. Many of these according to William J. Whalen were the larger and more affluent congregations.\textsuperscript{158}

Universalism was primarily introduced in America through the efforts of John Murray, a former Methodist who preached the first Universalist sermon in America in 1770. Murray’s message was one of hope. His message differed significantly from the prevailing theology of Calvinism that promoted the belief that God saved a chosen few and thus, the fate of all others was helplessly doomed. Consequently, Murray’s message appealed to those excluded by Calvinism. The new doctrine of universal salvation began to spread in the late eighteenth century. The gospel of a saving salvation particularly appealed to rural and small-town folks. Thus began Universalism in America.

While some considered Unitarians and Universalists theologically similar enough to contemplate consolidation, class wise, they could not have been more different. Unitarians generally comprised the upper middle and privileged classes such as lawyers, doctors, educators and elected officials.\textsuperscript{159} The Universalists, on the other hand, primarily drew their followers from the ranks of the middle and working class that mostly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[159] Some high profile Unitarians included: Charles Spear (prison reformist); Clara Barton (founder of the American Red Cross); Susan B. Anthony; Dorothea Dix (advocate of mental patients); Samuel Gridley Howe (started a school for the blind); Lucy Stone, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911); Charlotte Forten (first black to travel south to teach blacks after emancipation); Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (Civil War Commander - 54th Union Regiment, the first black military unit to serve in the Civil War); Florence Nightingale (1820-1910); Margaret Fuller (1810-1850); Ralph Waldo Emerson; Henry David Thoreau; Alexander Graham Bell; Louisa May Alcott; Dorothea Dix; Thomas Jefferson; William Ellery Channing; Albert Schweitzer; P.T. Barum; Frank Lloyd Wright; Whitney Young; Viola Liuzzo; and Dag Hammerskol.
\end{footnotes}
consisted of farmers.\textsuperscript{160}

Between 1791 and 1820, Unitarianism was called "the faith of the well-to-do, urban New Englanders." Abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe noted in the 1820's that, "All the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarians. All the trustees and professors of Harvard College were Unitarians and all the elite of wealth and fashion-crowded Unitarian churches." While history did not bear witness to Thomas Jefferson's grandiose pronouncements, his words nevertheless speak volumes about the high regard for Unitarianism. He confidently stated, "I trust there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian."\textsuperscript{161} Unitarianism began to achieve institutional identity when many of the established churches split. Hence, many Puritan churches became Unitarian. In 1825, the American Unitarian Association was formed as a publishing and educational arm to enhance its infrastructure and to promote the availability of resource materials for its followers.\textsuperscript{162}

Abolitionists and the Civil Rights Movement: The Prophetic Voice of Unitarian Universalism

Social justice and reform have been a consistent priority of Unitarians and Universalists throughout their existence. The first organized Universalist church in America, began in 1779, in Gloucester, Massachusetts and included Gloster Dalton, an

\textsuperscript{160} Some well known Universalists include: John Murray, Hosea Ballou, Quillen H. Shinn, Benjamin Rush, Clara Barton, Clarence Russell Skinner, Thomas B. Thayer, Lydia Ann Moulton Jenkins, Maria Cook, George DeBenneville and Caleb Rich. Universalists founded Tufts, Akron and St. Lawrence Universities.

\textsuperscript{161} David Robinson, \textit{The Unitarians and the Universalists} (Westport: Greenwood, 1985), 23.

African-American freed slave among its charter members.\textsuperscript{163} Universalists, according to Whalen, were the first religious body in this country to oppose slavery in 1790.\textsuperscript{164} A noteworthy Unitarian personality lauded by many Unitarian Universalists is Reverend Theodore Parker. Parker was a prominent abolitionist who defended fugitive slaves and conspired with American abolitionist John Brown. Parker openly boasted of his efforts to help runaway slaves. However, these were not idle boasts, as Parker and Thomas Wentworth Higginson were involved in an aborted effort to rescue a slave, Anthony Burns. Not all Unitarian and Universalist ministers supported the abolition of slavery. Donald Robinson, a Unitarian Universalist historian, contends that Ezra Stiles Gannett was “one of the most conservative ministers on the slavery issue.”\textsuperscript{165} Gannett went so far as to mount a campaign against Parker’s theology and attempted to undermine Parker’s anti-slavery efforts.

The spirit of Theodore Parker and other such prophetic voices were recently affirmed when a crowd of over 125 gathered on February 1, 2002, to memorialize the contributions of civil rights martyrs Jimmy Lee Jackson and Reverend James Reeb and Viola Luizzo, both Unitarian Universalists. Several of the speakers at 25 Beacon Street, the headquarters of the UUA, had marched in “Selma” and were present to witness the unveiling of a commemorative sculpture. The sculpture was dedicated to these three individuals who paid the ultimate price for their devotion to the cause of equal rights for all Americans. Reverend James Reeb was beaten on the streets by white assailants as he left a restaurant. He died two days later. In response, the entire UUA Board went to


\textsuperscript{164} William J. Whalen, \textit{The Unitarian Universalist,} 16.

\textsuperscript{165} David Robinson, \textit{The Unitarians and Universalists,} 56.
Selma after the death of Reverend Reeb. Viola Gregg Liuzzo was a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Detroit. She was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan as she drove along the highway between Selma and Montgomery. Twenty-seven year old Jimmy Lee Jackson was beaten and shot by a state trooper as he tried to protect his mother and grandfather during a civil rights march in Marion, Alabama. The march from Selma to Montgomery was called to protest his death. His tragic murder led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Speeches and stories recounted events from the infamous Selma March. For many UUs the civil rights movement was clearly a defining moment heralding the public witness of UUs. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s book, *Letter’s from a Birmingham Jail*, contains a scathing indictment of white clergy’s failure to speak out and act against racism in general. However, UU ministers responded to King’s call by the hundreds.

Some detractors have criticized UUs for overstating their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and possibly resting on their laurels.

Consolidation

One hundred years before the actual consolidation of the two religious bodies, Unitarians and Universalists, there had been overtures leading to the historic moment. The rationale for consolidation included the following: 1) to maximize the existence of the many small congregations which was proving frustrating and not fiscally feasible; 2) to reduce the duplication of unnecessary organization, equipment and personnel and 3) to provide for the successful fulfillment of missions. As a result, the two faith communities consolidated, combining their liberal religious voices, memberships and influence to essentially double their influence. On May 11, 1961, in the city of Boston, these two liberal faith communities, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America, were consolidated as the Unitarian Universalist.
As was previously noted, the creation of the Unitarian Universalist Association was the result of a consolidation between Unitarians and Universalists. The Unitarian Universalist Association’s 160,000 members living in the United States represent diverse theological beliefs. The 1,039 congregations located in the United States range in size from thirty members to approximately two thousand. The average congregational membership is approximately 150 members. The largest number of congregations is still located in New England, where Unitarianism planted its initial roots. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) is an association of Unitarian Universalist (UU) member congregations. The UUA is a religious organization that combines the two traditions of Universalists, who organized in 1793, and the Unitarians, who organized thirty-two years later in 1825. The member congregations are autonomous and govern themselves. The UUA’s operating budget is almost six million dollars and is primarily derived from membership dues assessed on each congregation. The country is divided into districts staffed by individuals co-employed by both the UUA and District Boards of Directors. The UUA is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of District Trustees selected by the 21 district at-large Trustees that are elected to General Assembly. General Assembly is the annual business meeting where important resolutions are explored and brought to the membership for approval through majority rules. Recently the UUA elected its first African-American to serve as President of the Association at The Quebec City General Assembly in 2003. Reverend William Sinkford now carries the torch passed from seven previous UUA Presidents.

UUism is a creedless religion that espouses seven basic principles and practices in the United States. They include the following:
We covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Richard Carp, a UU lay leader and member of Boone UU Fellowship describes UUs as follows, “We do not have a uniform ritual practice, or a set of doctrines, or a creedal dogma or central authority that tells us what to do or believe. The principles to which we have covenanted comprise a religious center that is both solid and profound and provides guidance in our inner and outer, private and public, individual and social lives.” Many contemporary Unitarian Universalists view the Bible as one of many sources of knowledge and inspiration, subject to the same critical analysis and scrutiny of any text. Thus, like most religious liberals, Unitarian Universalists approach the Bible as a historical account of peoples struggling to make sense and purpose of their lives, recounting their remarkable stories of faith, celebration and struggle. Thus, the Bible is viewed as an ongoing revelation, whose interpretations are not sealed but fluid and open to diverse interpretations.

The primary purpose of the UUA is to serve the needs of its member congregations, organize new congregations, extend and strengthen UU institutions and implement its principles. Each of the 21 districts elects a Trustee to the UUA board. The

166 Richard Carp, UU lay leader and member of Boone UU Fellowship in Boone, NC.
three departments significant to this research on clergy sexual misconduct include: 1) Department of Congregational Services, houses Ethics and Congregational life. Congregational Life is the key structure that is the entry point for handling clergy misconduct in the UUA, 2) Ministry and Professional Leadership (MPL) houses Entry, Formation and Credentialing and Development and Transition and Settlement. These program areas are important because while Ethics and Congregational Life is the first respondent for misconduct at UUA, contacts with these subsequent departments is ensured if the allegations in question require follow up,\footnote{A description of the whole process is available on-line at \url{www.uua.org/cde/ethics/complaintprocess.html}.} and 3) Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC). The MFC is charged with significant ethical or conduct concerns which could lead to disciplinary action. Concerns about misconduct are addressed by the Executive Secretary of the MFC directly by a complainant, or may be referred by Field Staff. Field Staff/Districts have resources and information available, and also provide consultation. In many instances complaints are resolved directly with a minister, within congregational structures, or with assistance from Field Staff.

Local congregations are autonomous and have final authority in decision-making, calling, and terminating their ministers. Relationships between churches and denominational headquarters are voluntary. A 1997 denominational study showed that 90 percent of current members are converts to UUism. Overwhelmingly, UUs are European Americans with a very small percentage of UUs of color. According to denominational rankings in Barry Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman’s, 	extit{One Nation under God}, UUs are
ranked number one in education and number two in income. In the past two decades there has been “a shift in the center of gravity” with evidence of liberal Christian theology abounding according to current UUA President Bill Sinkford. John Buehrens Sinkford’s predecessor notes a common pattern that suggests many early Humanists in the 1950s have moved to a more theistic position. Until the late 1980’s humanism was the most prominent ideology shared among UU members. Buehrens attributes UUs theological diversity to its ability to attract diverse spiritualities. During the 1950s the three distinctly prevalent ideologies/theologies identified among UUs were humanists, theists and liberal Christians.

A brief explanation of these ideologies/theologies follows:

Humanists generally accept a scientific world view and emphasize reason and critical thought. They value human freedom to choose good, the quest for truth, love justice, compassion and beauty. Humanists believe it is through human will and human work that the ills of the world can be overcome to create a world of peace, justice and love.

Theists believe in one or more personal deities, that is a supreme being that is immanent in the world, that is, acts within the physical world and is able to influence events. Theists typically hold that God is almighty and all powerful and able to do things that are superior to humans.

Liberal Christians are characterized by the following concepts: focus on the here and now rather than the hereafter; emphasis on the development of character rather than abrupt conversions; prophetic action emphasizing social change and reform; inclusive fellowship that includes racial minorities, women, gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgendered (GLBT) and other historically oppressed groups; willingness to combine theology with modern scientific theories; openness to the new, values individuality and inquiry and reject biblical literalism.


UUs have often been at the forefront of many progressive changes. They were the first “main line” denomination to affirm services of union for gay and lesbian couples in the country. Among its ministerial rolls, females reflect fifty-one percent of UU ministers, the highest per capita number of women ministers settled in congregations of any denomination in North America. During the “Sanctuary Movement” in the 1960s, UU congregations represented the second highest number of “sanctuary congregations” for Central American refugees accepting political prisoners fleeing persecution.

Today, many denominations own publishing companies. Beacon Press is the UU’s publishing arm that specializes in established authors such as: Sonia Sanchez; James H. Cone; Howard Zinn; Robert P. Moses; Alvin F. Poussaint; Margot Adler; Cornel West; Thich Nhat Hanh; Octavia Butler; Viktor E. Frankl; Gayl Jones and James Baldwin. One of the most controversial books published to date was the Pentagon Papers. This book detailed the secret study of United States involvement in the Vietnam War that was allegedly leaked by military analyst Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo, Jr. The two men were charged with espionage, theft and conspiracy. Judge William Matthew Byrne, Jr. dismissed the case in 1973.\(^\text{170}\)

International UUism

Nine congregations affiliated with the UUA are located outside the United States. In the last three years the Canadian Unitarian Council voted to withdraw formal affiliation of its 42 congregations to focus its fiscal and human resources and its vision to more effectively serve its membership. Canadian UU’s felt their needs were not

adequately served in the shadow of the UUA’s United States identity, mission and vision. There is a large international population numbering approximately 100,000, that is not a part of the UUA, who recognize themselves primarily as Unitarians.

One of the most unique Unitarian communities, founded in 1887, is in the Khasi Hills in India. This Unitarian movement was founded by members of an indigenous people who had converted to Calvinism, but who questioned the beliefs. This community, comprised of several thousand members integrated some of their traditional beliefs into Unitarianism. Similarly, fifty years ago some indigenous members in the Philippines converted from Catholicism. In 1995 liberal religious movements including Nigeria, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Eastern and Western Europe founded the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU). ICUU links the national associations of Unitarians and Universalists that total 350,000 worldwide.

Unitarian Universalist Theology of Evil/Sin

Many UUs have conceded that evil is “a difficult topic for religious liberals such as UUs”. The purpose of evil was to survive it. Without ever knowing they had made their minds up to do it, they determined to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn’t stone sinners for the same reason they didn’t commit suicide- it was beneath them.

---

171 Mark Morrison-Reed, “A Global Faith” (sermon preached at First Unitarian Congregation in Toronto, ON on 10 November 2002).


Like the blacks Toni Morrison described in the previous passage, antebellum life while harsh, did not foster mass instances of suicide by blacks. Instead, if we ascribe to Morrison’s depiction of blacks, they perceived suicide as beneath them despite the harsh realities of slavery. While Morrison noted blacks’ refusal to indulge in suicidal tendencies in the face of slavery, Rev. Dr. Thandeka, an African American UU minister

[There is something valuable about life itself, and no matter how hard and difficult life is, people still hold on to life. That’s why the vast majority of persons in concentration camps or in the Middle Passage did not commit suicide. They held on, because there is something about life that is of ultimate value.]

Drawing from both Morrison and Thandeka’s observations permits a parallel examination of UU theologians’ failure to develop a strong doctrine of evil and sin. Perhaps, like blacks it was beneath UUs view of themselves or their image of God to even entertain the concept of evil. Paul Rasor, UU theologian, appears to concur with Morrison and Thandeka’s observations that, “there is something in life that will not allow life to be suppressed.” Perhaps one of the reasons UU theologians have not developed a strong theology of evil is the over-emphasis on the “good” as the “something in life” described by Thandeka that has held sway over the focus on evil. This is not so farfetched if one reviews the Seven Principles that many UUs embrace. The Seven Principles emphasize universal themes such as the good in “every person” as well as respect for “all existence.”

We covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations

174 Ibid., 1.
175 Ibid., 5.
• Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations
• A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
• The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
• The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
• Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

This emphasis on good in both God and humankind is noted in the pithy remark by Starr King, an early UU minister and pioneer. King asserted that the difference between the Universalists and the Unitarians was rooted in their two very different interpretations of Calvinism. King contended that The Universalists believe that God is too good to damn them, whereas the Unitarians believe that they are too good to be damned by God. This emphasis on good might have emerged at the detriment of UUs unwillingness to introduce and name evil as a possibility in their doctrine of human nature. However, this tendency to avoid the issue of evil has had long term effects for many UUs and their perceptions of the world. Lois Fahs Timmins, the daughter of well-known Unitarian religious educator, Sophia Lyon Fahs, challenged UU religious education for its failure to be more forthright in addressing evil with the following comments in 1996:

We spent 95 percent of our time studying good people doing good things, and skipped very lightly over the bad parts of humans... I was taught not to be judgmental, not to observe or report on the bad behavior of others. Consequently, because of my education, I grew up ignorant about bad human behavior, incompetent to observe it accurately, unskilled in how to respond to it, and ashamed of talking about evil.\(^{176}\)

If Timmins’ experiences are typical, and this researcher believes they are, then generations of UUs are “functional illiterates” about evil. Hence, the perception that

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 1.
UUs’ understanding of evil appears to be underdeveloped and inadequate is perhaps well-founded.

However, the Universalists in 1917, years before the consolidation of Unitarianism and Universalism proclaimed in the Declaration of Social Principles, which was drafted by Clarence Skinner and adopted by the Universalist General Convention, that evil is the result of “unjust social and economic conditions.”

Paul Rasor, UU theologian and director of the Religion and Social Issues Forum at Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center, lends his cautionary voice in a very different direction that deserves serious consideration. Rasor contends that UUs’ failure to develop a strong theology of evil has weakened UUs’ prophetic voices to resist evil. One of the concrete areas in which this is noted is anti-racism/anti-oppression and multiculturalism. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words enrich Rasor’s assertion and remind us what is at stake when, for whatever reason, prophetic voices are silenced. He contends, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

Rev. Dianne Arakawa reminds UUs of some of the failures of their anti-racism work:

Like most of you, I can recount the tragedies of the past that still plague our Association: from the settler Indian wars of the seventeenth century in Massachusetts, Puritan policies related to slavery, the mixed Unitarian response to abolition, the unjust labor practices at the turn of the century, and the racist statements of our denominational presidents in the first half of the last century to the slowness to engage in the civil rights movement on the part of some of our congregations, the derailing of the Black Empowerment movement in the sixties,

---


and the lack of support for congregations and clergy of color from Ethelred Brown’s time to our present...179

Compounded by the fact that many UUs do not embrace the concept of Original Sin, which states that humans are born sinful, UUs are further handicapped in their language and their abilities to articulate a theology of evil. Instead, UUs use such language as “missing the mark” rather than sin/evil. Rev. Kim Beach believes that UUs, “get worried when we talk about evil (because) we feel we’re dipping into dualism, and we’ve been taught again and again that dualism is bad and monism is good. But if there’s evil, there is a certain amount of dualism going on in the world.”180 Beach notes that James Luther Adams, a revered UU scholar, had much to say about evil and even resorted to terms like demonic which he used to reference “principalities and powers” of the New Testament.181 Adams referred to the satanic as pure evil and the demonic as the distortion of the good. According to Bach evil is seen as self-perpetuating and self-justifying.

As a result of 9/11 events, increased dialogue has been generated in UU circles about evil. Warren R. Ross, editor of the UU World Publication, recently surveyed dozens of the leading preachers, teachers, and theologians on the issue of evil.182 Their comments are helpful in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of UUs theology of evil. Reverend Gordon McKeeman believes that “evil comes into the world when our good comes into conflict with others’ good.” Rev. John Buehrens, is fond of quoting

179 Ibid., 160.


181 Ibid.

twentieth century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr on the nature of evil: “Evil is always the assertion of some self-interest without regard to the whole, whether the whole be conceived as the immediate community or the total community of humanity, or the total order of the world. The good is, on the other hand, always the harmony of the whole on various levels.”¹⁸³ Reverend Rosemary Bray McNatt, an African American UU minister serving a congregation in New York, witnessed first hand the evil of 9/11. As a chaplain that worked in the midst of the rubble of the World Trade Center, McNatt believes that “people are born good and people make choices and that along with our inherent goodness there is also an inherent capacity for evil . . . there are some people who have something wrong with them.” Reverend Parker, one of the few UU ministers with joint fellowship as both United Church of Christ and UU minister, is hesitant to label people who commit evil acts as evil people. She cautions UUs against the tendency practiced and engaged in by all faith traditions, “to numb or anesthetize our awareness of evil, . . . instead face(ing) it . . . fully and engage(ing) in troubling and deep questioning” about the nature of evil.¹⁸⁴

It is interesting to note that some UUs, such as John Buhrens, minister and former President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, use the term evil and sin synonymously. According to Buhrens, the problem of evil (and suffering) happens for a variety of reasons: 1) Because there is randomness, 2) Because there are the sins of others and those we ourselves are implicated in, and 3) Because there are costs in overcoming

¹⁸³ Ibid., 20.
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 4.
evil with good. Most UUs do not accept the commonly held belief that sin is a part of the human condition as viewed in the Gospel of St. Paul and further evidenced in the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but in which dwells within me. (Paul 7:1-20)

In contrast to Paul, some UUs believe that individuals are punished by their sinful actions and not for them. For UUs, sins are “wrong actions.” Thus, the evil that people do lives with them. Others believe there is no absolute good and evil. Ross’s findings indicate that most UUs believe that there are evil acts but not evil persons. In addition, for many UUs, humans possess freedom of choice and can decide between good and evil, and the doing of good or the doing of evil. However, many UUs would concede that humans have a propensity toward good unless other factors corrupt this tendency.

Furthermore, all choices bring costs as well as benefits. For UUs humans make the choice between good and evil. Process theologians, which include liberal theologians such as UUs, speak of a god that lures but does not coerce humans to good. Instead, they contend, God offers continually new possibilities. Ultimately, the final choice to choose good or evil belongs to humans. However, the process of choosing is not a one-time event, but a lifetime of choosing, and sometimes a moment-to-moment process. Process theologians believe that God, a creative energy in the universe, cannot force anything to happen, but

---


influences the exercise of universal free will by offering possibilities. Thus humans have free will to choose between good and evil with no intervention from God. It is this freedom and risk in divine creativity that brings the possibility of evil. Further, it is these choices that contribute to human suffering. Thus, suffering is an inescapable fact of the human condition. It is human’s failure to do good and their choices therefore of “evil” that create “wrong actions” and thus evidence forgetfulness of the fragile connection to God-energy and the earth. Much of what a theist would ascribe to the “devil,” non theistic UUs would assert is the result of humans acting on their “free will” and making bad choices that result in their feeling cut off, disconnected and unloved. This in turn places them outside the bounds of alignment with the creative energy of the universe and God consciousness. Humankind benefits and thrives when we are in right relations with the god energy in the Universe. The contrast might be what Rebecca Parker refers to as the social construction of heartlessness or numbness of feeling. \(^{188}\)

In the researcher’s opinion, a UU theology of evil can best be summed up not by a UU minister, though many have made excellent contributions, and not by a UU theologian, although extensive discourses exist. The UU theology of evil can best be captured by Reverend Marianne Williamson, a Unity minister, who believes evil is simply loveless behavior. Applying this definition to a UU theology of evil that in its most basic approach casts humans as “missing the mark” and its most complex as the result of freedom of choice, Williamson’s definition spans the continuum between these two approaches.

\(^{188}\) Reverend Rebecca Parker’s comments were made in the context of a discussion on racism and liberal theology’s challenge to racism in which Paul Rasor describes racism as a “profound social evil.” However, I believe Parker’s term is more than appropriate to use here in contrasting “god energy in the universe.”
Theological Groundings of UU Beliefs and Clergy Sexual Misconduct

“Our theology must name the sins and evils that surround us and the salvation that we are hoping for...” - Kairos Document, 4.1.

Christian-identified UUs embrace the concept of “imago dei” that is, the notion that humans are made in the image of God. Consequently, human lives are viewed as unique and sacred. This theology is consistent with many world religions. Furthermore, it is reflected in the first principle of UUism that articulates the “inherent worth and dignity of all human beings.” UUs principles view the creation of humans as sacred and encourage right relations among individuals. Acts of clergy sexual misconduct break faith with these beliefs. Furthermore, the breach of professional boundaries and breaking of trust denies authentic love or agape love, a concept associated with UUism and most of the major religions.

According to Cornel West, imago dei is radically egalitarian and radically universalist. And while he was referencing Christian theology, UUs strong social justice orientation is a result of their identification with the “downtrodden, the dispossessed, disinherited, with the exploited and the oppressed.”

Clergy sexual abuse is an affront to the Gospel or good news of UUism and goes against what it means to “honor the inherent worth and dignity of all.”

Brown Douglas affirms the assertion that to love God is to live out the fundamentals of what it means to be created in God’s own image. Because individuals reflect the image of God, nothing less than nurturing loving relationships is acceptable in Douglas’s opinion. Brown Douglas further purports that the body “can be a vehicle for

Divine presence and the means by which human beings can communicate agape (love). The body, she believes, is the physicality of sexuality, which signals the potential for one to be authentically human and hence to reflect the image of God in the world. “This theory appears particularly relevant to this research because it goes to the core of the theological grounding that clergy sexual abuse is contrary to the teachings of all major religions and the treatment of humans. The ministry of UU is to clearly hold its prophetic voice and “name violence as sin and take action to end it.”

A Rock in a Weary Land: The Historical Black Church and Unitarian Universalism

This section examines the presence, roles and participation, issues and concerns of African Americans in Unitarian Universalism, beginning with a brief overview on the black church as the founding source of resistance, the civil rights movement, a second source of consciousness that shapes the fundamentalism of the black community and the Third Revolution. The Third Revolution followed the civil rights movement and is characterized by its adherents activism, spirituality and creativity.

According to C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, eighty percent of all black Christians claim membership and affiliation in the seven major historical black denominations that comprise the traditional black church. They include: Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational, United Methodist, Roman Catholics, National Missionary Baptist Convention and the full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. The term, the black

---

190 Doehring, Taking Care, 19.

191 This researcher uses the term ‘African American’ and ‘Black’ interchangeably in this research.

church, is used here to reference the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States. The black church, since its inception, has embraced a strong social justice orientation as a result of the forced enslavement and racial injustices of its founding members. Black slaves found a deep and abiding message in the Christian stories of Jesus’ suffering and his triumphant resurrection because the stories related to their own lived experiences. Thus, they transformed the Christian religion into a message of hope, resistance and deliverance.

Lincoln and Mamiya contend that the black church has been one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery. Lincoln and Mamiya confirm that the black church was in fact, a focal point for Blacks before and after slavery:

After the Civil War the Black church was the main mediating and socializing vehicle for millions of former slaves, teaching them economic rationality, urging them to get an education, helping them keep their families together and providing the leadership for early black communities. \(^{193}\)

W.E. B. Du Bois identified the black church as the, “first form of economic cooperation.” \(^{194}\)

**Resistance**

Numerous slave insurrections took place in the South. \(^{195}\) Black preachers played a major role in resisting the institution of slavery. Slave insurrections and rebellions initiated by black preachers such as Gabriel Prosser, in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822

---


\(^{194}\) Ibid., 8.

and Nat Turner in 1831, depict the strong connection between religious calling and personal convictions that surfaced in the evolving liberation theology of the day. These events represented reverberations of a slave religion that had transformed itself into an emancipatory theology. These black religious insurrectionists embraced the belief that oppressed peoples are called by God to carry out special tasks of liberation, hence, the significance of black preachers’ involvement in slave revolts. Slave owners’ efforts to use Christianity to foster “obedient and docile” slaves were thwarted. Although over 250 slave revolts were documented in the United States. These slave revolts included ship mutinies, guerilla warfare and alliances with Mexicans and Indians.

If individual “renegade preachers” were a threat to the institution of slavery, then abolitionist clergy and their congregations posed an even greater one. One noteworthy example was Bishop Richard Allen and his congregation that risked their freedom and lives to aid escaped slaves. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church became known as the “freedom church” because it was the spiritual home to many of the key abolitionists Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. However, not every Black abolitionist belonged to the black church as deemed from the life of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a nineteenth century Unitarian. Between 1890 and 1906, the black church continued to increase its membership rolls. Conversely, this period also reflected one of increased repression of blacks. From 1890 to 1920, legislation passed throughout the south essentially disenfranchised African Americans and licensed legal lynching and other forms of racial terror.

197 Ibid., 28.
Nineteenth Century Presence of African-American Unitarian Universalists

While most African-Americans in the United States have historically remained in the folds of the black church there have been notable exceptions such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Fannie Barrier Williams and Florida Ruffin Ridley. While these three names are familiar to many in women's studies and black studies, their religious affiliation as Unitarians has not piqued much interest. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was just one of many amazing women of her day. She was able to devote her life to social justice work as well as to her writing:

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was born in 1825. She was involved in not one but five movements: the abolitionist, the suffragette, the temperance, the children’s and the literary movement. She was a member of First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. Harper was one of the first paid lecturers hired by abolitionist associations to lecture and represent anti-slavery organizations to lecture and represent anti-slavery organizations around the country. She was one of the first women, Black or White to speak to mixed gender groups. Harper spent two weeks with the wife of John Brown, the abolitionist that led the aborted uprising at Harpers Ferry. Harper provided emotional support for Mrs. Brown during her husband’s trial. Harper formed alliances with individuals such as Susan B. Anthony. She was one of the first African American women known to publish a short story, The Two Offers in 1859. She published a novel, Iola Leroy in 1892.¹⁹⁸

Fannie Barrier Williams was another high profile Unitarian “Negro Woman.”¹⁹⁹

Williams was a free African-American woman who lived in Brockport, New York, in the 1800s. Williams was born in an upper middle-class family and educated at the State Normal School in Brockport. She traveled widely and moved South to take a teaching


position. She was shocked at the awful conditions and mistreatment she experienced merely because she was African-American. Williams joined All Souls Unitarian Church in Chicago where she eventually met Celia Parker Wooley who later became a Unitarian minister. The women’s friendship spanned over forty years and Williams stepped up and delivered the eulogy at her friend’s funeral. Williams helped found two interracial benevolent institutions. In 1891, Williams founded the Provident Hospital and Training School of Nurses. In 1905, she and the Reverend Celia Parker Woolley founded the Frederick Douglass Center. Some of Williams’ accomplishments include her work with Jane Addams at Hull House. Her significant ties with numerous clubs and civic organizations such as the Chicago Women’s Club, the NAACP and the Chicago Library Board reflected her passionate civic commitment. Williams was an accomplished lecturer who spoke at both the World’s Parliament of Religions and the Women’s Congress of Women.

A final Unitarian, Florida Ruffin, was born and educated in Boston, Massachusetts. Ridley’s parents were politically conscious socialites and excellent role models. Her mother, Josephine, was an abolitionist, an anti-lynching crusader, club leader, editor, feminist, orator, and suffragist. Her father, George, was the first African-American to graduate from Harvard Law School in 1869. Ridley was the second African-American teacher in the Boston Public Schools. She and her mother later served as the editors of the Women’s Era, the first newspaper, owned and operated and published by African-American women in the entire country. The publication was the official journal of the Colored Women’s League later known as the National Association of Colored Women. In 1920, Ridley and her mother helped found the League of Women for
Community Service. They also raised funds and subsequently purchased a mansion that housed Black domestics and college students from the South. Florida and her mother were extensively involved in the Negro Women’s Club Movement, a movement dedicated to uplifting Black women.

Early Black Ministerial Pioneers

Rev. Joseph F. Jordan was the first African-American male to establish and pastor a Universalist church in the United States. He, his daughter, Annie Bissell Jordan Willis, and his wife, devoted themselves to the little school and church established in 1894 in Norfolk, VA. Annie became the principal of the school at the age of 36 upon the death of her father that simply became known as “Miss Annie’s.” Without her father to preach, the church closed. Annie devoted her attention to the school until her retirement in 1974. Even in retirement she continued to be involved. Always thinking about her children, the day before she died she spoke these poignant words to the newly appointed director of the school, “Watch out for my children.”

In 1908, another black pioneer emerged in the person of Egbert Ethelrod Brown who founded a Unitarian mission church in Jamaica. Later he founded another church in Harlem, New York in 1920. He was not successful in sustaining his efforts to grow a church either in Jamaica or the United States. Rev. William H. G. Carter was yet another Black minister to establish a church affiliated with Unitarianism. He established the Unitarian Brotherhood Church, in 1918, in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, all of Carter’s efforts to obtain support from Unitarians came to naught with the words of an American

Unitarian Association official, Reverend Lon Ray Call wrote the following words and sealed the fate of Brown and his fledging congregation, "I do not recommend Unitarian fellowship for Mr. Carter, or subsidy for his movement." With those words all hope of any possible funding or recognition as a credentialed Unitarian minister were squelched. Shortly after, the Unitarian Brotherhood Church closed its doors, never to reopen. Both Brown and Carter tenaciously struggled to be recognized as Unitarian ministers. Unfortunately neither was successful.

Two contemporary African-American Unitarian Universalists, Reverend Lewis Allen McGee and Marcella Walker McGee, were early pioneers in Chicago, Illinois. Marcella married Lewis Allen McGee, an African Methodist Episcopal minister in 1945. Lewis, long drawn to Unitarianism, entered then Meadville Theological School, a Unitarian Seminary. Upon completion of his studies McGee was told he would have to form his own church since no white Unitarian church would call an African-American minister. Consequently, McGee and his wife, Marcella along with a friend, formed an interracial group in South Chicago and named it the Free Religious Fellowship (FRF). Within the year the congregation had grown greatly. The Free Religious Fellowship finally received the full support and funding of the American Unitarian Association and Unitarians in Chicago. Mrs. McGee created numerous groups and activities that helped stabilize the membership. In 1960 Mrs. McGee was elected to the continental board of the joint Alliance of Unitarian Women. She was instrumental in bringing the two women's groups together, in 1961, from the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America for consolidation. Thus, the two groups merged and became the UU Women's Federation in 1962. Mrs. McGee later received the Clara
Barton Award, an annual award recognizing women over eighty years of age, who had made outstanding contributions to Unitarian Universalism.

The Civil Rights Era

Numerous scholars, among them, Maulana Karenga, cite the civil rights era as one of the most definitive and significant decades in the history of African-Americans. As history would have it, a quiet and dignified woman, Rosa Parks, galvanized the course of the entire nation and world. While much could be said about the “most definitive and significant decade in the history of black people” an examination of the accomplishments helps to substantiate the claim. In the years following the civil rights movement, African-American political thought was primarily dominated by two approaches. The first approach, an integrationist model, emphasized the achievement of legal rights. It was closely associated with Baptist leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who became the most prominent non-violent African-American leader of his times. The event that marked King’s prominence was the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The civil rights movement reflected an integrationist approach designed to “break down barriers to full participation in United States society and to remove the penalties and other negative consequences of racial distinctions.”\(^\text{201}\)

The second approach, nationalism, was associated with Muslim Minister, Malcolm X, later known as El Haj Malik Shabazz. Shabazz was initially a hustler who was transformed by the teachings of Islam while in prison. Later, as a member of the Nation of Islam and a student of Elijah Muhammad, his Black nationalism stressed black unity, pride, solidarity, self-determination and self sufficiency. These two

---

\(^{201}\) Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 126.
formidable religious figures, King and Shabazz, reflected a long and venerable tradition in the Black community that propelled religious servant leaders into the political contexts to create social change.  

The major accomplishments of the civil rights movement included: 1) drawing sustained national and international attention to the plight of blacks and claiming first moral authority and then achieving legal authority; 2) passage of major civil rights legislation; 3) mobilization and creation of black revolutionaries and conscious social movements and; 4) use of economic boycotts as a successful strategy to dismantle Jim Crow.

Third Revolution

Many scholars have noted the bold strides of movements such as the Civil Rights. However, it appears that less attention is paid to the radical shift in consciousness following the civil rights movement, which was equally transformative according to Asoka Barbara Hull. Hull describes the highly spiritual period in the 1980s as, “quietly gathering itself before expanding to encompass and enlarge spirituality in order to effect even more positive changes, in order to “do” politics at a higher, more spiritualized frequency.” Hull dubs this spiritual era the “third revolution.” The third revolution is characterized by a union of politics, spirituality and creativity. It is precisely this potent combination that allegedly holds great potential for both personal and collective

202 Ibid., 130-1.


204 Ibid., 6-7.
transformation. Three dimensions that Hull associates with the "third revolution" include: 1) heightened political and social awareness of movements such as the civil rights and feminist movements; 2) a spiritual consciousness that integrates black church rituals like Christian prayer and ancestral reverence with new age metaphysics and 3) enhanced creativity evidenced in literature reflecting the use of the supernatural.

Seekers

Many African Americans that were attracted to UUism were "seekers," and in this researcher's opinion reflected components of the "third revolution." They were looking for deeper meaning and purpose outside the confines of the traditional black church experience. Many were activists who deeply cared about the state of the world. Many were firmly rooted in their cultural identity, yet still embraced other cultures. Still others were curious about other faith traditions and had been exposed to some theological diversity in college and in their travels. Thus, seekers engaged in integrating their spirituality and their expanding cultural identities and awareness as a next step in their development. Reverend Michelle Bentley, the first black female called as a senior minister by a UU congregation when she became the minister of First Unitarian Society of Chicago, in 1998, recalls her observations after talking with other black UU ministers in the 1980s:

Theologically we were all on the same wavelength. I experienced intellectual comraderie, a common thread of activism and strong social

---

205 Ibid., 8.

206 Ibid., 1-2.
justice backgrounds. We were all around the same age, young, black and gifted. Many of them were from middle class backgrounds and represented what Dubois referred to as the “talented tenth” All (of them) were down to earth and conveyed a sense of hospitality. We were all spiritual seekers. Each of us felt some pain and suffering for people and the world and we wanted to address it.208

Reverend Yvonne K. Seon-Wood, was the first African-American female fellowshipped and ordained in 1981 and served as minister of a new start congregation in South East Washington, D.C. Reverend Seon retired to academia when she was unable to secure sufficient income as a minister to support herself and her children.

What may distinguish African-American UUs from African-Americans in general is what Morrison-Reed refers to as their “intellectual and emotional independence from the mores of the black community.”209 Many are “comeouters.” that is, they have departed from the black church seeking a different spiritual path that then opened them to a journey that leads to UUism. However, most still desire to maintain their cultural identity.

Unitarian Universalism has proven itself a viable religious alternative for the small minority of blacks that have sought out Unitarian Universalism. This is particularly true for those non-theistic Blacks who have experienced difficulty with traditional Christianity. The attraction of Unitarian Universalism for African-Americans may be explained in several ways. Many value liberal religion that, in fact, allows and expects


209 Mark Morrison-Reed, xiv.
inquiry. UU minister, John Gilmore describes the first time he walked into a Unitarian congregation:

About a year previously I had had my final split with the Pentecostal Church. I was very interested in liberation theology even as a Pentecostal. The Pentecostals seemed to be a bit too worried about personal salvation and taking care of themselves as congregations and a denomination. When I got to the Unitarian Society of Germantown it was a breath of fresh air. I remember speaking with the minister, who was also very interested in social change. We spoke about the condition of the world. She said that sometimes with all the pain and suffering she wondered if there was a God. This was shocking to me, having been a Pentecostal and raised around Pentecostals all of my life. They would never have said that, even in circumstances where they would have been justified in doing so. The fact that she was an honest, open, thinking individual is what made me stay to explore the faith.\textsuperscript{210}

Many African-Americans that have “found” Unitarian Universalism have been involved with other faith communities. They are not coming as “blank slates” but were already socialized in their own faith traditions and values and were often chafing under what they perceived as the narrow confines of the black church. The opportunity and permission to take the best of what they believe and leave the rest behind is a welcome invitation to many African-Americans attracted to Unitarian Universalism. Still another to African-Americans’ attraction is the theological diversity of Unitarian Universalism. While Unitarian Universalism is steeped in a rich Judeo-Christian history, its membership is very theologically diverse, including Christians, Jews, Humanists, earth-based religions and Buddhists. Liberal religion also strongly supports religious freedom, important to many African-Americans.

\textsuperscript{210} Reverend John Gilmore, Boston, MA to [researcher, Charlotte, North Carolina], August 2002.
Contradictions

In 1988, the Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed, an African-American raised UU since early childhood, preached a sermon in Detroit titled, “How Open the Door? How Loud the Call?” His sermon reviewed the history of UU congregations that had successfully integrated from the early 1900s to the 1970s. Morrison-Reed identified five common characteristics in successfully integrated congregations: 1) All were in large urban areas (New York, Chicago and Washington, DC) where religious preference could be pursued because family and group ties were less powerful; 2) The areas all had a large black middle class; 3) In each case the minister and congregation were “visibly and vocally concerned with issues of race relations and justice, thus the church became identified as one concerned with the African American agenda; 4) Each congregation took intentional and, specific actions to open their doors; and 5) It took time to achieve racial diversity.

However, Unitarian Universalism continues to experience challenges in successfully recruiting and retaining African-American converts. Michelle Murain, a seminarian that recently left Unitarian Universalism for the United Church of Christ talks about her spiritual journey and the decision to leave:

I became a Unitarian Universalist about five years ago and until recently was a first year seminarian at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. I grew up Presbyterian and then spent four years in a fundamentalist Christian denomination during my teenage/young adult years. I swore off organized religion for many years, and started a Buddhist meditation practice about fifteen years ago, which I continue today . . . One of my interesting processes lately is integrating my Buddhist practice with my reemerging exploration of Christian theology.” I benefited from my conversations with a local Unitarian Universalist minister of color, but I was “pretty disturbed” upon hearing about the history of racism that some UU ministers of color had experienced. I was originally drawn to UUism because it felt like a very non-threatening way to begin to be a part of a community of faith, that embraced all of the aspects of my varied spiritual
path, and honored my progressive views as an important part of my
spirituality.

I am no longer a UU and have become a member of the United Church of
Christ. I have discontinued my goal to pursue UUA credentialing, and I
am instead starting on the path toward credentialing in the UCC. I
attribute my departure to a combination of factors. My heart leads me to
identify strongly as a Christian, and within UUism, that is something that
is often a challenge. I didn’t want to have to worry about that, as well as
dealing with issues of race and class, which themselves loom large for me
personally. I have incredible respect for the way in which many faith
traditions are embraced and honored by Unitarian Universalism. I am
happy and thankful that UUism exists, but it’s not my path. I identify
basically as a Christian. I am mightily struggling with some of the core
aspects of the Christian faith (such as the divinity of Jesus). I do
fundamentally believe that there are many, many paths to the Divine, and
mine is just one path. ²¹¹

Despite the theological and ideological challenges that some African-Americans converts
experience and the exposure to racism, there are others who flourish in the UU culture.
Reverend Bill Sinkford, the first African-American President elected by the UUA and an
avowed theist is an example. His spiritual journey has taken him from atheist to minister,
and now to President of the small, but powerful movement of Unitarian Universalists.
Sinkford’s theism has been met with varied reactions. UUs are not primarily Christian.
Until the late 1980s, humanism, an ideology that preaches the ultimate authority is to be
found in the human experience was the most dominant theology among UUs. ²¹²

However, Sinkford does not apologize for his use of traditional religious language, even
though his campaign to coax the fiercely independent UUs into discussions on “reverent
language” was quite controversial.

²¹¹ I wish to thank Michelle Murain for this interview which she wrote and submitted. Michelle
Murain, Berkeley, CA written correspondence to researcher, Charlotte, North Carolina, summer, 2005.

Sinkford was exposed to UUism at age fourteen following the death of his father when he and his mother relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio. During the civil rights era, Cincinnati’s First Unitarian Church, where he attended, had a sizeable number of black members. Sinkford, in a recent interview with journalist, Neil Miller, recalls, “It was a place where it was comfortable to be black and also to be black in the company of whites.”

Sinkford’s increased involvement in youth activities catapulted him into the position of president of the national UU youth movement. Sinkford later attended Harvard University where their Unitarian roots provided a foundation for early Unitarian intellectuals such as Emerson, Parker, Channing and Longfellow. Once at Harvard, Sinkford and several UU friends were successful in converting former Roman Catholic, John Buehrens. Little did Sinkford and his friends realize at the time that the mutual friendship between Sinkford and Buehrens would endure over the years and subsequently produce two Presidents of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The Unitarian Universalists Black Empowerment Era

*Our history in regards to racial justice is brave enough to make you proud, tragic enough to make you cry, and inept enough to make you laugh once anger passes.*

For the Unitarian Universalist, there were many issues around the inclusion of Blacks as members, especially in the Southern black congregations. Despite their loyalty and proven leadership many Black Unitarian Universalists have encountered pain and adversity in their chosen faith of Unitarian Universalism. Most reports reveal the

---

213 Neil Miller, “Journey of Faith.”

214 These oft quoted words originated with Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed and have been attributed to a sermon by him as well as his book, Black Pioneers in a White Denomination (Boston: Skinner House Press, 1980).
subtle effects of racism and the unpleasant reality of simply being the “only one” or one of a few. The insensitivities and unwillingness to embrace change has in some instances created tensions between black Unitarian Universalists and white Unitarian Universalists. Two controversies involving Blacks highlight some of these tensions: 1) open membership, and 2) the Black Empowerment.

Open membership

At the 1963 General Assembly one of the issues addressed was the exclusionary practices of African-Americans in several rural Southern Universalist congregations. This proposal, intended to exclude the congregations that were excluding blacks and therefore guilty of racism, was defeated. Congregational polity, the right to self governance and autonomy, was at the heart of this defeat. The overwhelming majority of the UU membership opposed exclusion of blacks from southern congregations. However, there was a stronger belief in the free religious movement and therefore an unwillingness to excommunicate or take actions against individuals engaging in racism. To do so some believed, challenged congregational polity.  

The second controversy that challenged Black and White UUs was the period known as the “Black Empowerment Era.” In the opinion of many UUs, this period was one of the most painful times in the history of black and white relations. To this day, some individuals still recall this period with great pain. In 1970, Sinkford, along with a number of African American members, left UUism. Many never returned, thus causing

---

the demise of several inner-city UU congregations.\textsuperscript{216} Sinkford was among those who reconciled and returned ten years later. The external environment in October, 1967 in this country had been filled with “a summer of racially-charged riots and a perceived rending of American society.”\textsuperscript{217} In response, the UUA’s Commission on Religion and Race convened an, “Emergency Conference on UU Response to the Black Rebellion” at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. The Black UU Caucus (BUUC) was created during that conference. BUUC worked over the next year on a proposal recommending an annual budget of $250,000 to be allocated over a four year period. The proposal was designed to address racial injustices. The proposal was presented at the 1968 General Assembly in Cleveland and approved, despite the growing financial problems of the UUA. In hindsight multiple factors have been identified that contributed to the escalation of racial tensions within UUA. The 1997 Report of the UUA Commission on Appraisal noted several factors: 1) “the strong passions and competing ideologies about how racial parity should be approached, 2) self-empowerment strategies” of the stakeholders that included the Black Affairs Council (BAC), the Black Unitarian Universalist Caucus (BUUCC), and Black and White Alternative (BAWA); 3) “existing structures of governance and presumed consensus about how the business of the Association should be carried out” and 4) questions of power and control about UU identity and who speaks for the UUA.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{216} Victor Carpenter, “Black Empowerment-Oral History Project” (speech delivered at 43\textsuperscript{rd} General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Long Beach California, 24-28 June 2004).

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{218} Victor Carpenter, “Black Empowerment-Oral History Project” (speech delivered at 43\textsuperscript{rd} General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Long Beach California, 24-28 June 2004).
Efforts towards Racial Diversity

In 1994, over 500 UU’s, including 100 UU’s of color, were interviewed by telephone by UUA staff and consultants to gain an understanding of the attitudes and activities on congregational diversity. That study indicated that the attitude and support of the ministers are critical to congregation’s efforts to achieve diversity.

In 1995 just over 200 UU ministers were interviewed by telephone to gain insight into perceptions of their roles and responsibilities to achieve diversity. Over seventy percent of UU’s interviewed thought that it is possible for their congregations to become more culturally diverse, more racially diverse or both. The survey noted that intentionality is required to become more diverse. The research further indicated that for real change to take place, the congregation and the minister needed to work together to prioritize diversity in the life of the congregation and to place it on the congregation’s agenda. The research clearly indicated that it is critical for ministers and congregations to be intentional about doing diversity work together. In the same study fear was cited as the key factor that stops individuals from moving forward on diversity issues. Some of the specific fears that most often surfaced among ministers were:

- We would settle for a token level of diversity 44%
- We have not yet dealt adequately with our own prejudice 34%
- People will be uncomfortable with the possibility of conflict 31%
- We are all afraid of what we don’t know 30%
- We will lose our sense of being a safe and healing community if there is racial or cultural conflict 26%
- We aren’t really committed to knowing diverse people as human beings 26%219

Although roughly three in ten ministers indicated they had no concerns if their congregations were to try to become more racially diverse, ministers expressed the following fears:

- Fear of conflict/lack of understanding 19%
- Failure/lack of commitment/follow-through 15%
- Resistance to/fear of change 15%

In another survey Reverend Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, an African-American minister serving as a consultant to the UUA, interviewed twenty-eight individuals from five congregations started by African-American UU ministers. The survey identified the common profile of the African-American members as, “people in historically Black churches who are unhappy with a dogmatic theology; and authoritarian structures.” These same individuals, contended Bowen-Wheatley, were attracted to UUism because they “are in search of a place where spiritual or theological diversity is encouraged.” The two conditions identified by Bowens-Wheatley that would in fact contribute to the increased successful recruitment of African-Americans were the following:

1. a greater tolerance for theist perspectives and honoring the fact that the experience of Jesus has been a source of great inspiration in the African-American community and
2. an educational process on issues of polity – one that values the positive contributions of the Black church.

The lack of acknowledgement of a collective decision-making process within congregations is disruptive and unhealthy for congregational growth. Bowens-Wheatley noted the difficulties in building multicultural congregations. Training was clearly

---

220 Ibid.

indicated for clergy, lay leaders and the new start covenant congregations. Training recommendations emphasized valuing and honoring differences in context, worship and administrative styles, comparative polity, including the pros and cons of how UU congregations are governed and special emphasis on context that is racial, cultural and class differences in leadership.

Because of the lack of success in growing intentionally diverse congregations, the UUA has no further plans to pursue the development of intentionally diverse congregations. This same report cites the UUA/Congregation’s District and Extension Services staff in growing intentionally diverse congregations. This lack of experience helped to contribute to the demise of the racially and culturally diverse congregations. The UUA had little experience or programmatic support for how to build or sustain intentionally diverse congregations. As a result, they inadvertently contributed to their demise through their insistence on diversity of membership, as well as placing ministers of color in new congregation settings rather than considering other ministries where they might have been more successful. Finally, the inadequate financial support which may have inadvertently created a dependency relationship between UUA and intentionally diverse congregations was noted by the UUA. There was also a stronger interest in building multicultural congregations among European Americans than among African-Americans. There were competing perspectives about congregational focus and identity among clergy and laity about what it meant or how it would work to be diverse or multicultural. Some organizing ministers and/or the congregation felt disempowered.

---

222 The report failed to provide an explanation about why blacks had less enthusiasm about diversity.
and constrained by the decisions, attitudes and assumptions of others – either the covenanting congregation, the UUA or the District.

One of the critical strategies supported by UUA and the Veatch Program, a UU foundation, to promote racial and cultural diversity was support for persons of color moving into ministry, including transfers from other denominations. In 1998-99, financial support was provided for seven interns of color. UUA also supported two “first ministries” for fellowshipped UU ministers of color. These time-limited grants in settings which provided maximum professional formation opportunities, were tailored to the specific needs of the ministers. In previous years, the Department of Congregations, District and Extension Services offered support for congregations whose mission focused on ministry to persons of color. The focus was instead a “diversity of congregations” rather than merely racially diverse congregations. The six congregations that participated in this program at the conclusion of 1999 were:

- Tahlequah, Oklahoma – This congregation “graduated” from their ministry support program with a membership of 1/3 Native American located in the capital of the Cherokee Nation;
- Palisades, New Jersey – intentionally racially and culturally diverse; was the successful internship site for a minister of color;
- San Jose, California – two ministries – one English speaking, one Spanish speaking – in one congregation;
- Durham, North Carolina – intentionally racially and culturally diverse; previously served by an African-American minister and continues to be the only intentionally diverse congregation in that District;
- Rainier Valley, Washington – intentionally, racially and culturally diverse and;
- Chicago, Illinois – The ministry at the Church of the Open Door is inclusive and includes a focus on the bisexual/gay/lesbian community of color on the south side of Chicago. The congregation is served by an African American lesbian couple who have dual standing as UU ministers and United Church of Christ.  

---

Having experienced disproportionate failures in its intentionally diverse startups, Congregational District and Extension Services (CDE) began requiring proof of self-sufficiency, and strong district and covenanting congregational financial support before accepting congregations into its program. Financial support became time-limited and they have now moved away from creating small diverse congregations that inevitably were dependent on UUA for financial support and have instead invested in large startups. An early strategy intended to diversify the membership of UUism was the creation of congregations to be served by African-American ministers who entered the UU ministry during the 1980s. Although this approach proved to be successful in the creation of initial pulpits for ministers of color, it was not successful in creating self-sustaining congregations. Unfortunately, most of these congregations have either closed or are in nesting relationships with other UU congregations. At a UUA Field Staff, Big Complex Meeting in December 2000 in Boston, then UUA President, John Buhrens stated that there have been no strong successes (intentionally diverse congregations) except for the Church of the Open Door in Chicago, Illinois. He further commented that he was not sure that Unitarian Universalist know how to create intentionally diverse congregations. Sometimes, he said, our motivations are tainted by paternalism. Leadership and personnel issues are still a major limitation he further noted. He stated that diversity of ministry staff teams apparently existed at one point but had now been disbanded.

Unitarian Universalism as a denomination and movement remains ninety-one to ninety-eight percent European American. Sinkford contends that he is not, “trying to find a few more dark faces so the white persons sitting in the pews will feel better about
themselves.” Yet clearly the intent is to encourage more racial and cultural diversity within the ranks of Unitarian Universalism.

**Conclusion**

Lincoln and Mamiya contended that while blacks have primarily been members of the “Black Church,” they were also members of predominantly white denominations. Unitarian Universalism however, has drawn little attention, if any, from most scholars. African Americans have been among the early pioneers and voices of Unitarian Universalism, although their stories have not always been captured in the history of Unitarian Universalism. They nevertheless have had a distinguishing presence as early as the 1800’s. Many have come and remained at great emotional peril in the face of racism. Yet, they have remained because of a deep and abiding love for Unitarian Universalism, its principles and the fulfillment derived from its public witness and the ability to “build one’s own theology.” Like their fore parents when handed the slave religion of Christianity, Unitarian Universalists have transformed this creedless liberal religion into something that speaks to their unique spirituality, shaped by the African-American culture and their multiple identities.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Unitarian Universalist Association’s (UUA) Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct

A number of events and circumstances have been selected that chronicle the Unitarian Universalist Association’s (UUA) response to clergy sexual misconduct since 1991. These efforts reflect some of the most important ways in which the UUA sought to facilitate a culture change to address clergy sexual misconduct. This culture change reflected an increased intolerance of clergy sexual misconduct that began to include new language and knowledge to replace the institutionalized forms of knowledge that made women particularly vulnerable to clergy sexual misconduct. Additionally, the culture change in the UUA resulted in greater transparency and sensitivity for victims/survivors. There was an increased urgency in the UUA as a result of the mounting media coverage of Catholic church scandals, several incidents of high profile misconduct within UU circles, and the attention of many clergy and laity who were challenging the prevailing norms that appeared to tolerate clergy sexual misconduct.

The investigation of the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct, roughly approximated the following phases: Phase I – investigation, research and reconnaissance; Phase II – analyzing the findings and making recommendations; and Phase III development of a plan and implementation of same to address the reduction and
eventual elimination of clergy sexual misconduct. It appears that each phase utilized staff presence for oversight and employed a kind of “clearinghouse approach.” This approach essentially coordinated all the multiple stakeholders and their efforts. There were various levels of checks and balances achieved through reporting up a chain of command. It appears that currently all the decision-making and information flow are centralized. Ultimately, either the Executive Vice President/Recording Secretary or the President report and provide updates to the UUAs Board of Trustees.

The reaction of a small group of individuals galvanized the UU Women’s Federation and Women and Religion Committee to issue a joint call concerning this most recent incident of clergy sexual misconduct. This was a pivotal moment in the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct. In general, there were varied responses. The Task Force on Congregational Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct (TFCRSM) noted some of the reactions in its report. Initial reactions were varied and intense: many denied the Executive Vice President/Recording Secretary or the President reported and provided updates to the UUA’s Board of Trustees. In one such report Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President/Recording Secretary of the UUA Board of Trustees shared the poignant story of a victim/survivor that helped to keep the issue front and center with UUA Board of Trustee members, thus personalizing this troubling issue:

I want to tell you a story. A couple of weeks ago, David Hubner received a letter from a woman, not asking for retrospective justice but simply telling her story. The story of growing up in a complicated, difficult family and the church being her anchor. Of her Unitarian minister becoming a good friend of her family’s. And then another minister starting at her church and seeming to be kind and caring. He began to “counsel” in her adolescence and eventually turned the counseling sessions into sexual sessions that became more and more sexualized and, eventually, included verbal abuse. She tells of being filled with guilt and shame and the relationship going on until the minister died a few years later. She says, ‘I have lived as if I were a good person for almost thirty years, but my
shame is so much a part of me that it colors my whole life. I know, intellectually, that I was vulnerable and exploited to satisfy the needs of a pedophile [...] I have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars in therapy and will likely spend more to undo the damage.' She asks for anonymity personally but is willing for her story to be shared so that we can minister more effectively to people who have been exploited. This, I think, speaks for itself [...]224

Others were enraged at an apparent institutional unwillingness to confront the issues or to hold offenders accountable, and resolved to affect change. Others remained blissfully unaware of the problem in the UUA. 225 Others remained blissfully unaware of the problem in the UUA.226

Therefore, this chapter reveals the findings of the UUA's responses to clergy sexual misconduct via archival, interview and actual cases that demonstrate the relevancy of clergy sexual misconduct. The findings are presented in the following manner: 1) the emerging responses of UUA in thematic format including infrastructure initiatives, training, policy and procedures; educational material and public acknowledgement; 2) thematic findings from the interviews and archival searches; and 3) discussion of the linkages between the two thematic sets of findings. The thematic findings from the interviews are categorized as follows: 1) culture shift; inclusion of women; responsibility/accountability; power and control; sexual revolution; and ethics and 2) intersectionality of clergy sexual misconduct to these thematic findings.

224 Report of the Executive Vice President to the UUA Board of Trustees, by Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President (Boston: UUA).

225 Task Force on Congregational Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct (Boston: UUA, 1994).

226 Ibid.
Infrastructure Initiatives

Infrastructure initiatives refer to the creation of organizational structures established to begin the UUA’s systematic examination of clergy sexual misconduct. For example, a clearinghouse meeting was called for November, 1991 that brought together representatives from the following groups: the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), the UUA Board of Trustees, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), UU Minister’s Association (UUMA), Ministerial Sisterhood UU (MSUU), UU Women and Religion (UUWR), Women and Religion (W and R) and Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) that considered UUA’s responses and gaps to the overall picture of clergy sexual misconduct. This body of members became known as Task Force One and they have continued to meet three times a year until the present. Task Force One, now known as Unitarian Universalists for Right Relations (UURR), has continued its work of identifying gaps in the system and suggesting responses to clergy sexual misconduct. In January, 1992 Task Force “One” was created by the UUA Board of Trustees in response to the discussions held at GA in Hollywood, Florida in 1991. A joint call to action was issued by the UU Women’s Federation and Women and Religion that was prompted by the silence following disclosure around a specific incident of misconduct. The Call to Action invited attendance at an open hearing on the unspeakable subject of clergy sexual misconduct.

Moreover, a number of feminist-identified women rallied upon hearing about the latest incident of clergy sexual misconduct. In retrospect, their actions ushered in a new era and thus, became a pivotal moment in the life and culture of the UU community. It was if though women and their allies had taken a stand and declared, “no more.” The resolute tone of the call to action” communication served notice to UUA and sexually
misconducting ministers that regardless of the avoidance and fear engendered by the
issue, it would not be business as usual. The call to action statement read:

We recognize that many of us would rather avoid the issue of sexual misconduct
because it is a difficult issue that frightens and disturbs us. We join our voices
together with concern for the victims, families, congregations, and clergy.\textsuperscript{227}

Recently, Lynn Thomas, District Executive for the Clara Barton District of the
UUA reflected on the UUWF's and the Women and Religion Committee's controversial
call to action in 1991 when she stated:

What I remember was that at the Women's Federation (meeting) in Fort
Lauderdale . . . the issue came up and then some discussion from the floor. I
remember women speaking about having been abused by clergy and it (the
discussion) was deteriorating quickly and I remember Teresa standing up and
saying, “good-bye innocence.”\textsuperscript{228} And she probably said it far more theatrically.
There was some clear drama. And she said “good-bye innocence” about three
times and people started sitting down. Out of that the Federation began: a) a
newspaper clipping campaign to gather literature, any literature about sexual
assault (I believe); b) Taskforce One which was ultimately responsible for the
current Safe Congregations Handbook. They met a number of organizational
representatives . . . and, of course, the Women's Federation and there were
several more constituency groups.\textsuperscript{229}

Twenty-eight individuals responded to the Call to Action to share information
about the nature and scope of the problem to identify the gaps and to brainstorm
solutions. In 1998, Task Force One received funding to hold a Second Circle conference.
The Second Circle represented those individuals impacted by misconduct besides the
survivor and perpetrator that were harmed by the occurrence of clergy sexual misconduct.

\textsuperscript{227} Patricia Hoertdoerfer and William Sinkford, eds., \textit{Creating Safe Congregations: Toward an
Ethic of Right Relations - A Workbook for Unitarian Universalists} (Boston: UUA, 1997), 143.

\textsuperscript{228} The names were changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

\textsuperscript{229} Lynn Thomas, Personal interview by researcher, Palmer, MA. June, 2006.
The Moderator of the UUA, Denny Davidoff, attended an early Task Force One meeting that transformed her understanding about the seriousness of clergy sexual misconduct. Consequently, she helped develop the UUA Board of Trustees Task Force, which became known as Task Force Two. According to Reverend Elinor Artman, member of the UU Women’s Federation, Task Force Two spent two years intensively exploring all aspects of clergy sexual misconduct including, “interviewing ministers, congregants, victims, complainants and outside resources.” A major work of Task Force Two was the creation and training of “District Response and Renewal Teams” that were intended to serve as resources to the District staff around the country.

Meanwhile, another Task Force, the Task Force on Congregational Response to Ministerial Sexual Misconduct, was appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees in March, 1992. Their charge was to help congregations respond to incidents of clergy sexual misconduct and prevent further incidents. A preliminary work plan was developed at the September 1993 meeting that included the following:

1) a proposal to train District Field staff and lay leadership that would parallel those provided at UU Minister Association Chapters;
2) a statement for discussion and dialogue on the “Theology of Sexual Ethics” and
3) resources and recommendations to promote prevention, education and long term healing in congregations. 230

While the Task Force initially established strategic partnerships with UUA affiliate organizations, District Field Staff and District Presidents, they also wisely met with lay members of affected congregations, UUA staff, Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) and District Field Staff who had experience dealing with clergy sexual misconduct. The Task Force continued its information gathering at GA in Calgary to

gather comments and concerns regarding their critical work. They reported progress in mainly four areas: training programs, paper on theological reflections, workshop and study resources and congregational guidelines and resources. The Task Force encouraged “ongoing dialogue, input and coordination of efforts.” One of the Task Forces’ concerns was the potential for the difficult and complex topic of clergy sexual misconduct to polarize ministers and laity. Thus, they cautioned the UUA and its affiliate organizations to remember that the well-being of both ministers and congregations was intertwined.231

A consultation on the adjudication of cases of “Conduct Unbecoming” ministers was held in Boston, Massachusetts on February 20-21, 1995. The following representatives attended: Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association: Wayne Aranason, Doug Gallager, Paul Johnson; MFC Diane Miller, Midge Skwire, Milly Mullarky; UUA’s district and Congregational Services: Bill Linkford, Roger Comstock, Nancy Bowen-Martell; UUA Board Jean Kapuscik; UUA Task Force on Congregational Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct – Elinor Artman; Task Force on Sexual Abuse and Clergy Misconduct – Kay Aler-Maida; Board of Review – Deborah Pope-Lance; UUA Administration and Consultation Facilitator: Kay Montgomery. Their focus included the following:

1) Relationships and protocols among UU staff and UUMA Good Offices at the early stages of conflict that involved potential conduct unbecoming ministers;

2) Clarity on the current MFC rules and policies for adjudicating unbecoming conduct with special attention to unwritten policies governing the formalization of complaints and the process of investigating them in advance of an MFC finding that a hearing is necessary;

231 Hoertdoerfer and Sinkford, eds., Creating Safe Congregations, 106.
3) Follow up in the congregation during and after a complaint had been adjudicated and the role of UUA staff, district and UMA Good Offices in the follow-up.232

A Consultation titled, “On Procedures for Adjudicating Conduct Unbecoming a Minister” was held in 1995. Participants included: UUMA, UUA, MFC, Board of Review, UUA Board of Trustees, Task Forces I and II, Departments of Ministry and Congregation Services, the Executive Vice President of the UUA, and the UUWF. In response to a call from the UUA Executive Vice President, Kay Montgomery, at the 1995 GA in Spokane, Washington a Safe Congregations Resolution was passed that had been drafted by Task Force One.

In 1998 the UUA Administration created an interdepartmental team, Staff Coordinating Team-Sexual Abuse and Misconduct (SCT-SAM). SCT-SAM has continued its work and a version of it continues even today though the Panel no longer meets. Instead, the “Muir Panel” meets in its place. Their final report was issued in 2000. They included the leaders of Task Force One in their interviews, and reaffirmed the findings of Task Force Two.

Safe Congregations Landscape – Dialogue

A one-day dialogue on the current landscape and resources was held on September 17, 2004 by the UUA’s Safe Congregation Team. The Team was comprised of: David Hubner, Director of Ministry and Professional Leadership; Pat Hoertdoerfer, Director of Children’s Family and Intergenerational Programs; Kay Montgomery,

Executive Vice President; Betsy Stevens, UUMA Representative; and Tracey Robins-Harris, Director for Congregational Services and Team convener. Attendees included the following: Elinor Artman (UU minister); Marge Corletti (LREDA); Susan Manker-Seale (UUMA); Qiyamah Rahman (UUA/Thomas Jefferson District); Bill Welch; Fred Muir (Chair of Right Relations Task Force); Gini Courter (Moderator UUA); Mary Katherine Morn (minister); Tera Little (UUA/Pacific SW District); Toni Tollerude (UUMN); Susan Archer (LREDA); Beth Norton (UUMN); and Ken Sawyer (UUMA) and Denis Meacham (Addictions Ministry). Some of the discussion subsequently noted in the follow up communication from facilitator, Tracey Robinson-Harris suggested foci for future discussion that included:

- **Restorative Justice** - Focus on Restorative Justice with the intention of assembling a packet of materials to be available on line and offered to congregations;
- **Training** - Mentor training will be offered through LREDA along with ongoing training for religious professionals; role of training for District Staff;
- **Partnerships** - the involvement of UU seminaries was discussed; contact with UU Trauma Ministry to clarify their role and explore collaboration;
- **Resources** - attention paid at length to need for a response team for support of congregational staff in crisis.

Training and Education as a Prevention Strategy to Institute Change

Furthermore, Ronald Heifetz differentiates three situational scenarios that accompany changes requiring new information to institute new situations.233 According to Heifetz these situational scenarios are: 1) a technical situation where the problem is clearly defined and a solution clearly applied; 2) a technical/adaptive situation when the problem is clearly defined but the solution requires learning and 3) adaptive situation

when both the problem and the solution are unclear and new learning is required. The unsavory situation of clergy sexual misconduct that the UUA faced was clearly adaptive—both the problem and the solution were unclear and new learning was required. Successful training to affect institutional change required commitment from the top-level leadership and then systematic visioning and team learning. Once the UUA agreed upon an articulated analysis of clergy sexual misconduct they set about to systematically create an organizational environment that promoted a shared vision of safety in their beloved community. To accomplish this they utilized training methodology and written policy and procedures. They made what appeared to be sincere attempts to build trust and make amends for tolerance perpetuated by its “good ole boy network.”

Hence, November 1991 represented a significant event in the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct. It was significant because it was one of the first widespread national trainings undertaken by UUA since the high profile misconduct incident in the summer of 1991. Furthermore, the training was in direct response to Task Force One’s recommendation for training. The November, 1991 training that was solely devoted to ministers, the facilitator invited the participants to articulate their hopes for the event. Some of the following comments reveal the general tenor of the ministers as they prepared to embark on this important educational milestone addressing the difficult topic of clergy sexual misconduct:

- Engage in honest conversation about the complex factors that lead to or away from misuse of power by clergy and others;
- Come up with avenues to support ministers so they handle intimacy issues better;
- Learn about what others are doing about his issue;
• That we are able to have both emotionally and intelligently a greater understanding of what it means to women who are abused and congregations who are involved with clergy who have participated in sexual abuse;

• There will be honesty about this issue in our group which will reflect outward to the denomination. That lay persons (women’s) perspectives will be of utmost importance in how we deal with the issue. That this begins an honest exploration of power and power relationship in our denomination structures;

• That we find a process for dealing with people’s concerns, hurts and alienation in a positive way. That we find ways to strengthen our denomination – with clergy, and laity through the work that will ensue. . . That we’ll be able to put this issue into the context of the larger movement – to gain a perspective. To initiate and support concrete resources. . . That the day will be understood as a religious exercise. That, in a spirit of love and kindness, we will begin a process of transformation for us and the denomination.234

In addition, several other participants noted their fear that nothing would come of the day’s session. There were also some anxieties voiced about the potential to inflict emotional pain, and the tendency to simplify the issues, while aligning with the victim and being overwhelmed. Comments reflective of the concerns of ministers included the following:

• That people will get too hung up on sex and not pay enough attention to issues of power and control. That real feelings and fears can’t be expressed openly;

• Won’t be balanced in its compassion for the whole story – historical remembrance of inequality

• That anger and pain, instead of energizing reflection and insight may overwhelm compassion and logic;

• Scapegoating of any particular group (for example, older males) rather than seeing the problem with realistic inclusiveness;

• That I will cry. That we’ll run out of time. That we won’t go deep enough;

• That anger and pain block our creative energy rather than unlock it.235

While many ministers acknowledged the complicity of some of their colleagues’ “unbecoming behavior”, others like the following quoted minister chose, instead, to take issue with women that were erroneously perceived as “innocent and vulnerable victims”

234 Minutes from November 1991 ministers training.

235 Ibid.
and that all the bother is simply a “misdirected overreactions to alleged clergy sexual misconduct. The minister perceives efforts to address clergy sexual misconduct as “reactionary Puritanism.” The minister clearly takes issue with women being cast as “victims”:

What appalls me as I read the expose in the UU World is the underlying perpetration of the oppressor/victimization model. The women are depicted as vulnerable and tenuous in their own decision-making. The dynamics of human sexuality cannot be really categorized into moral exhortations. In the real life, the situation is far more complex and egalitarian. There are resourceful women who initiate, call and control the shots. What worries me most is a misdirected over reaction to alleged clergy sexual misconduct. It can spawn a dangerous and pernicious type of McCarthyism in the form of a reactionary Puritanism that undermines all spontaneity of embracing and verbalizing this quasi-religious form of cleansing our ranks through forced sensitivity sessions before we fully understand what we are doing may prove more harmful and restrictive to our professional leadership. Whereas liberal clergy do not take the vow of chastity, poverty or obedience, we are then expected to be on the frontier of new knowledge, expanding the range of human sexual options from our pulpit. The gender lines of demarcation keep changing, almost imperceptibly, which complicate our role in counseling, teaching and preaching. Until we have a clear and uniform consensus on sexual ethics, an unequivocal standard of more procedure, we cannot cast stones at one another.  

In correspondence dated November 20, 1992, a minister that had participated in a training conducted by Reverend Marie Fortune wrote a letter to the UUA expressing his dissatisfactions about the video shown to ten clergy teams trained by Fortune. This initiative was a multi-group effort with significant funding from the UUA that represented a major institutional commitment. These clergy teams subsequently served as train-the-trainers in many UU Minister’s Association chapters and theological schools. The reactions to the training revealed that:

In the videos used in (Marie) Fortune’s workshop, a woman who bakes pies for a minister and looks at him with cow eyes is seducing him, whether she realizes it or not . . . Nor is this blaming the victim rather, it is denying that a woman can be reduced to a mere victim. It is insisting that she always remains a human being, a moral agent, and it is insisting that all moral agents bear some of the responsibility when they get undressed and have sex with someone else – or even when they bake pies from mixed motives. To assume less is to demean and dehumanize these women.\textsuperscript{237}

The Meadville Lombard Theological School (MLTS) in Chicago, Illinois, one of two UU identified Seminaries in the country, prepared two Midwinter Institutes for its faculty and students on clergy sexual misconduct in the mid 90’s. Fortune, on another occasion was the featured speaker at the 1993 Institute for Religious Professionals. The 1996 Institute’s theme, “Turning Back the Tide of Violence” was presented by Geoffrey Canada and Thandeka, a UU minister and faculty member at MLTC.

As a result, in 1994 a series of Congregational Strategies Workshops were held to increase the level of knowledge about how to help congregations prevent, respond to and recover from incidences of clergy sexual misconduct. The UUA believed one of the most important ways to accomplish this was to assist District Field staffs in developing their district resources. The clergy teams leading the training had been trained by Marie Fortune as part of a project sponsored by the UUMA and by a member of the Task Force on Congregational Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct.

**Policies and Procedures**

In a diverse and changing world, increasingly, policies and procedures offer practical and ethical guidelines that govern conduct and appropriate interactions between

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
the parties involved and UUMA. In the mid 1980s several UUMA chapters seriously grappled with incidents of clergy sexual misconduct, shaping responses, and suggesting revisions of the UUMA guidelines. Records from the UUA reveal that only one incident of clergy sexual misconduct occurred between 1968 and 1978. However, a dramatic rise was noted between 1984 and 1994 when there were 22 complaints of clergy “ethics issues” Thirteen of these incidents took place between 1990 and 1993 according to John Weston, Settlement Director for the UUA.238

One significant strategy to change the institutional response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct was a review of the UUMA guidelines that govern professional conduct. From 1985 to 1987, the UUMA Guidelines were revised to include several statements of sexual ethics as part of their standards in regulating minister’s ethics and establishing new protocols. The cultural norms that had previously promoted a more permissive culture and were subsequently challenged, in 1991, continued to demonstrate the need for ongoing reevaluation and revisions. The fact that the MFC, the UUA body that credentials and provides oversight for ministers, took no action based on a misconduct case based on the rationale that there was no official complainant so there was nothing they could do. However, the local UUMA chapter lodged a complaint with the UUMA and the minister was “reprimanded” by the UUMA Executives.

The MFC adopted a Professional Code as early as 1951. After consolidation of Universalists and Unitarians, in 1961, a new Code of Professional Practices was developed. However, the specific language addressing clergy sexual misconduct did not occur until the mid-1980s. In 1988, a new Code was adopted that identified ministers

238 Notes from John Weston, UUA Settlement Director, Boston, MA to researcher, Charlotte, North Carolina, Summer 2003.
“as sexual beings in the practice of ministry.” Almost all of the 23 Districts in the UUA have developed covenants that address ethical conduct and relations. Similarly, all of the mid- to large-sized congregations have “safe congregations” policies and possess a range of education and training on said topic. Family-sized churches, fifty or less, often do not have the fiscal or human resources to spare for training. Furthermore, because of their false sense of safety based on their perception of themselves as a church family, they tend not to be safety conscious about clergy sexual misconduct.

Creation and Dissemination of Educational Materials

On the other hand, creating new learning opportunities about clergy sexual misconduct required sophisticated curricula and other educational publications for dissemination among clergy and laity. The UUA World Publication devoted an entire issue to clergy sexual misconduct. Collegium, an association of liberal religious scholars formed at Meadville Lombard Theological Center, published their “Occasional Papers Number Three.” In 1993, it was devoted exclusively to Feminist Thought on Sexual Ethics, and addressed some of the key concerns on clergy sexual misconduct. The UUA’s extensive website on Restorative Justice utilizes electronic technology to

---

239 The UU World, is the official publication of the UUA. It is sent to voting members of UU congregations.

240 Collegium is an association of liberal religious scholars that was formed at Meadville Lombard Theological Center in 1975. It is comprised of academic and independent scholars that meet once a year to discuss works in progress.
display and disseminate information about clergy sexual misconduct accessible to its members and District Staff. 241

UUWF sponsored a publication in March, 1992 titled, Finding Our Way: Responding to Clergy Sexual Misconduct that surveyed 40 religious and professional organizations and denominations were surveyed about the existence of policies on clergy sexual misconduct. Research findings indicated that most faith communities did not have specific policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct. UUA had developed very comprehensive policies that some considered cutting edge for the times.

A worship resource packet was developed for congregations using an integrated “head and heart” approach. The packet’s content included worship materials intended to provide ritualistic healing for congregations recovering from clergy sexual misconduct. Additional congregational guidelines and resources have since been developed. Two of the major publications produced by UUA include: “Creating Safe Congregations Workbook: Towards An Ethic of Right Relations” and “The Safe Congregation: Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in Our Faith Community.” Four of the six essays in the former document were written by Task Force One and Two members. 242

Public Acknowledgement – Institutional Shift

Less public, but even more challenging to the UUA’s historic pattern of non-response to clergy sexual misconduct, was a letter from Kay Aler-Maida and Natalie W. Gulbrandsen, both executive members of the UU Women’s Federation. On March 10,

242 Patricia Hoertdoerfer and William Sinkford, eds., Creating Safe Congregations; and Hoertdoerfer and Muir, eds., The Safe Congregation Handbook.
1992 Aler-Maida and Gulbransden penned a letter to Bill Schultz, then President of the UUA. The letter expressed their concerns about the pervasive culture of mistrust that characterized the denomination/movement as a result of the UUA’s failure to respond appropriately to the disclosure of misconduct at the 1991 GA. Aler-Maida and Gulbransden’s solution called for disclosure of clergy sexual misconduct to restore the broken trust brought on by the crisis. Eight years later a public apology was extended at the 2000 General Assembly.\textsuperscript{243} Kay Montgomery, the Executive Vice President of the UUA, with tear-filled eyes extended a heartfelt apology witnessed by thousands of UUs. Montgomery essentially stated that the Association had largely failed the people most hurt, the victims and survivors, and pledged to implement the Muir Report – Restorative Justice. Excerpts from her historic speech follow:

Cases of clergy misconduct continue. Although they are few, the damage they leave is far greater than we can even suppose. The Department of Ministry and the MFC continue to refine their understanding and responses. Many recommendations of Task Force Two (the UUA Board Task Force) remain unimplemented. First steps have been made towards an advocacy program for complainants. The UUMA is officially involved only when there is a minister-minister complaint, or a request for Good Offices support. The UUMA guidelines have not been revised to reflect the learnings of the past 15 years. It is the congregations that remain essentially uninformed, and deeply wounded by past silences about and mis-management of misconduct. This is where the future work lies.\textsuperscript{244}

Montgomery commented hopefully on the Safe Congregations Panel Report chaired by Fred Muir and offered the following vision:

\textsuperscript{243} According to Fred Muir, Chairperson of the Right Relations Committee, the apology was in response to the Clergy Sexual Misconduct’s Panel recommendations. Questions evidently still remain about actions taken by the UUA regarding the other recommendations.

\textsuperscript{244} UU Committee for Right Relations, “UU for Right Relations Minutes,” Unitarian Universalist Association, 16 October 2000, (www.uua.org); available from URL (accessed summer, 2005).
It (Safe Congregations Panel Report) offers hope, rather than retributive justice. But for victims and survivors, the commitment of trust was often illusive and missing. Fulfilling our promise as a dream unfulfilled, The Association, "has largely failed the people most hurt by sexual misconduct in our congregation. Other denominations have done better than we have. The brave and the hurt have been left unministered to... I am profoundly sorry... and Iledge that this gap, this failure, will be remedied. This last year, we have tried a nascent approach for victims and survivors. Based on this report, we will change and we will bend toward justice... (for) there is only us."245

Institutional Accountability

Rebeka Miles maintains that a "do-nothing-approach" is the most common response of non-offending clergy to other misconducting colleagues.246 Likewise, the UUA, like other denominational organizations, was initially slow to respond to clergy sexual misconduct. This was especially true when the perpetrator was a charismatic high profile clergy such as a senior minister. Almost without exception the responses to cases involving such clergy in earlier years were either completely ignored or dismissed. A female minister respondent recalls one of the first such cases:

The first case that went before the MFC that pushed people’s understanding was

The _____ case. The problem with the _____ case was it all kind of fell open at General Assembly (GA). I think it was the _____ it was Minneapolis actually. Purportedly, David Pohl said to _____ after discovering this case of a woman he counseled that he then had sexual relations with, “Is there anything else we need to know before dealing with this unregrettable circumstance?” No, she’s the only one he said. Within an hour or two at GA there were one or two others. What roasted the socks of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee that time, not that there were multiple victims who could be substantiated. _____ had something like 24-25 women that came forward and the belief is that there are many more. _____’s issue was he was narcissistic and had a compulsive behavior. A vulnerable

_____________________________________________________

245 UU Committee for Right Relations, "UU for Right Relations Minutes," Unitarian Universalist Association of America, 16 October 2000, [www.uua.org]; available from URL (accessed summer, 2005).

Woman would come into his office and ask for counseling as her minister and he was unable to not intimate and sexualize that encounter.\textsuperscript{247}

Less there be any confusion or doubt, accountability is the responsibility of the institution that bears oversight for the professional conduct of its clergy. So while aspersions might be cast on those ministers that looked the other way, ultimately, it is the institution that sanctions the ministry of its clergy and is, therefore, responsible for their professional conduct. In this instance, that oversight entity is the UUA.

Charges that the UUA’s earlier responses to clergy sexual misconduct were biased in favor of high visibility senior ministers appear to be confirmed from this female minister respondents report:

\begin{quote}
’s misconduct happened while David Pohl was Director of Ministry at UUA . . . It was in the newspapers . . . magazines . . . He got involved with a married parishioner. The husband came in for counseling. Later wrote a letter advising him how to improve his marriage. When the husband found out he was furious. The husband did not file a complaint and ’s wife did not want to file a complaint. So nobody sent a complaint. There was a lot of head-in-the-sand behavior. So on one did anything.
\end{quote}

Upon investigation, the issue according to UUA staff was not bias show toward high profile senior ministers, so much as there imply was no “complainant.” According to past policy, the MFC must have a complainant to act on allegations of misconduct. This problem has been addressed so that actions can be taken by the UUA as the complainant so that the onus is not on the victim/survivor to come forward.

Failure to disclose information about a misconducting minister’s history has been a problem in the past with the Settlement Department and congregational search committees. When seeking new minister to call to their congregations, information was

\textsuperscript{247} No attribution is made due to the sensitive content.
oftentimes being withheld about past misconduct. One respondent describes how upset a congregation was that learned about their minister's past misconduct after the fact:

The congregation was miffed. He had done this previously. The congregation was pissed at the UUA because they didn’t tell He had engaged in this behavior previously. He was still in the pool (of qualified UUA minister). He was supposed to et 25% of his annual compensation and severance if he was terminated. They were so pissed that they voted to reduce his annual compensation to zero. He called in the UUA to defend him against the “horrible” people who would not give him his severance. His contract stated he had to conduct himself in accordance with the UUA guidelines. If I fail to conduct myself in accord with UUA guidelines this contract is null and void. This is what ministers contracts should say but it doesn’t.248

Even John Weston, the Settlement Director at the time, raised questions about past practices as he assured his constituency that the problem was under control:

. . . Should information be withheld from a committee with a “need to know” Out of compassion for the (misconducting) minister or because a person in authority “knows better”? . . . Is there any question that a search committee that asks a direct question – “is there any evidence of sexual misconduct by this minister?” deserves a direct answer. What about the committee that fails to ask such a question: should the committee be allowed to identify its candidate publicly, and the congregation perhaps to call its next minister, only to receive through backchannels disturbing information the department could have provided earlier? And should the Department then conclude that past sexual misconduct, though it may not disqualify a minister for ministry in theory, in practice disqualifies the minister from being listed by the Department? . . . But there must be consistent practice, widely understood, that allows enlightened ad temperate decisions to be made in a context of trust by search committees and congregations.249

To its credit, the Settlement Office has been able to use its new communications technologies to compile a “Ministers’ File” that is forwarded to the search committee. The file contains a brief interpretation of the contents of the ministers’ file kept at headquarters in Boston. The file content will already have been viewed and possibly

248 No attribution made due to the sensitive content.

249 John Weston, untitled interoffice memorandum to Field Staff. 2000. Photocopied.
corrected by the minister who is entitled to include comments. This practice eliminates the past practice of withholding information. Furthermore, this system opens up the process between minister and congregations and removes the Settlement Office from its past practice of withholding information. Furthermore, this system opens up the process between ministers and congregations and removes the Settlement Office from its previous role of “middleman.” While, the Settlement Department still interprets and conveys the information it has about ministers, it views the search committee as the authoritative interpreter of the information. The Department is obligated to convey information that it has in its possession and its further required to inform the minister. The minister in turn, has the right to include any commentary he or she desires. Recently, some very celebrated misconducting ministers have recovered their fellowship status according to one respondent. It appears this checks and balances implemented by the Settlement Department will be tested.

In still another instance, UUA staff handled an exit interview process with a minister and congregation dissolving their mutual ministry. The respondent recalls how the UUA withheld information about the minister’s misconduct in order to transact a generous severance package. While this is surely an exception, there were instances noted by this researcher that suggests that there might have been a conflict of interest in the past to represent both the congregation and the minister:

______ went in and advocated for a generous separation packet. The misconduct process was just beginning. The church was furious once they found out about the misconduct. They didn’t know about the misconduct (at the time the separation packet was negotiated). ______ got a very good separation packet (for the minister) and then left. He knew about it but
didn’t tell them (the congregation) about it (the misconduct).\textsuperscript{250}

The establishment of a neutral point of contact for congregations and victim/survivors centralized the complaint process and eliminated the possibilities for cronyism. Moving the task of handling complaints from the Director of Ministry and Professional Leadership/Executive Secretary of the MFC to the Director of Congregational Services as recommended by the “Restorative Justice for All Report” and the Ad Hoc Task Force on Ethics in Congregational Life accomplished the following: 1) neutrality, 2) a sense of safety and 3) a show of good faith to those appointed bodies that recommended the change. The changes were part of the larger effort to address structural deficiencies in the existing process for adjudicating clergy sexual misconduct complaints to ensure a safer experience for the victim/survivor/complainant.

However, upon close examination of the UUA’s Programs and Services: Ethics and Safety document produced by Congregational Services, it appears the description of the process for handling complaints of misconduct disavows any responsibility and accountability. Instead, it disappointingly lays responsibility on the individual congregations. Thus, it reads like a disclaimer in its statement:

Unlike many other religious bodies, the UUA is an association of member individuals and independent congregations. The role of the UUA is to provide support to its member congregations. It does not govern them. In our tradition of congregational polity, each member congregation has the power to ordain, call/hire, supervise and dismiss ministers and other staff; and to do so independently of the UUA. It is the congregation, not the Association that takes responsibility for regulation of its own policies and staff.

In the same document, District Offices are listed as resources for issues of sexual misconduct and boundary violations.

\textsuperscript{250} No attribution is made due to the sensitive content.
Some archival searches indicate that UUA should pay more attention to instances where laity are guilty of sexual misconduct. The following letter from a female minister cites examples of the kinds of harassment that some clergy experience at the hands of laity. And while it appears that the majority of instances in fact involve male clergy perpetrating sexual misconduct, it is important to acknowledge that laity are not exempt from sexual misconduct. However, the onus, should always be on the minister because she is the professional that has covenanted with God and their chosen faith community and congregation to serve in the sacred role of minister and spiritual leader. While laity accountability is a worthy futuristic goal to strive for, most laity do not formalize their relationship in such an intentional and dedicated way as clergy are doing. Nor have the laity chosen a career to be in service as a spiritual leader as has the clergy. However, the following letter reveals the extent to which appropriate boundaries can potentially be violated by laity:

I feel that there also needs to be some examination of the congregations’ (in general) responsibilities when it comes to sexual ethics and boundaries . . . I think it is important for the laity to focus on ways in which they have been remiss in terms of setting appropriate sexual boundaries . . . I am certainly sensitive to the issues of blaming the victim: but in religious congregations such as ours, where power is a non-hierarchical partnership, and where ministers are called and dismissed by vote of the congregation, the lay leadership in a congregation is not in a one-down or victim stance in relationship to a minister. A great many ministers have themselves been victims of sexual harassment by members of their congregations. For example, 1) a male parishioner who pursued a new, young female minister around the room at a welcoming party attempting to feel her up, 2) female parishioners offering a male minister sexual “comfort” shortly after his wife died, 3) bets being made by female parishioners as to who will be the first to bed the new male minister, 4) a male minister whose wife is called and propositioned whenever members are aware he is out of town, 5) a single woman minister whose boyfriend received three propositions from married women parishioners shortly after they first appeared publicly as a “couple,” 6) a male minister who was told that if he did not submit to a woman’s sexual advances she would say that he seduced her, 7) numerous
ministers of both genders who have to avoid being alone with a certain sexually aggressive parishioners and are then rebuked for being “unpastoral” for not visiting. In our polity, it is the laity in local churches that have the power to impose sanctions on other ministers or laity who misbehave . . . I feel that a focus on helping laity learn to set appropriate sexual boundaries is equally important, particularly since the laity, unlike the clergy, have so far not been addressed as to their responsibility.251

UU Culture Shift

Some common themes are evident upon close examination of UU culture that impacts the issues of sexual misconduct by both clergy and laity. UUism is a movement of come-outers, that is, the majority of members have come from some other faith tradition or no faith tradition at all. 252 Despite their best efforts to retain young people the statistical fact that the vast majority of UUs are come-outers has not changed very much over time. In addition, most members appear to be alienated from their past religious upbringing and practices. David Bumbaugh, a faculty member at MLTS in Chicago, contends that people who have orphaned themselves from the communities in which they were reared possess an ambivalence about that fact.253 UUs want to be recognized as part of a valid religious movement, but do not want that movement to be confused with the kind of religious community from which they escaped. There exists among UUs a growing need for common structures in which to affirm, assure and confirm UU identity. There exists what Bumbaugh poignantly describes as a “deep and underlying fear of the community’s power

251 Letter written in 1993 by a female UU minister and accessed by researcher in the UUA files in Boston. Due to sensitive nature of the content, no attribution is made.


253 Ibid.
to expose and reject UUs as pretenders and impostors who desire but who are not actually a community of like-minded people who share common values.\(^{254}\) UUs tend to avoid any conversation that has the potential to expose significant differences lest it is discovered that the community does not actually effectively serve its members who have sacrificed everything. UUs tend to “circle the wagons” because many view themselves as beleaguered and misunderstood. As a result they possess a sense of distress that surfaces about being unacceptable and being outcasts. They demonstrate an underlying fear of exposure, of inadequacy and of the concomitant need to know, “how are we perceived by the larger community.”\(^{255}\) Bumbaugh asserts that this is a dynamic that is seldom examined but that is constantly at work in UU congregations, shaping how they do religion. It often determines how they hear each other.\(^{256}\)

As majority “converts” UUs refuse to be defined by their communities of origin, but at the same time Bumbaugh asserts they are unable to rid themselves of their communities of origin and therefore long for acceptance. This fierce determination to be true to themselves forces them to live in a kind of spiritual duality. According to Bumbaugh, UUs are “an anti-establishment movement with roots deep in the establishment. Bumbaugh identifies UUs as a high-achieving people with an abiding fear of failure. “We are a counter-cultural movement which owns and claims a rich culture. We are individualists who dream of a blessed community. We live in boundary zones; move

\(^{254}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{255}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{256}\text{Ibid.}\)
between our worlds, embodying . . . an ongoing critique of each (world), precisely because of their marginal status.\textsuperscript{257}

**Women in Ministry**

Almost without exception respondents, when asked what caused or created the change in the UUAs response to clergy sexual misconduct, overwhelmingly attributed the change in the UUAs institutional response to the increased numbers of female ministers. Primarily, women's inclusion in the bastion of male ministry inevitably changed the cultural norms of UUA and of the ministers. The influx of female clergy ultimately produced a critical mass that individually and collectively challenged the permissive culture that had accommodated the misconduct of ministers over the years. One individual likened it to the "fox guarding the roosters."\textsuperscript{258} In 1875 a woman complained that among almost 700 Universalist ministers, only ten were female.\textsuperscript{259} If female clergy were almost nonexistent among the Universalists then they were practically invisible among the Unitarians who were even more reluctant to ordain females. Hence, a smaller number of Unitarian clergy claimed the right to be called Reverend. Unitarian Universalist records show that between 1957 and 1978 the Unitarian Yearbook showed that among its 538 ministers only nine were female, and of those women none were

\textsuperscript{257} Bumbaugh, "Beyond the Seven Principles, Internet.

\textsuperscript{258} Identity of this individual is intentionally withheld by researcher.

settled or called as parish ministers.\textsuperscript{260} By the 1980s female clergy surpassed males in being ordained and called to UU churches.\textsuperscript{261} According to Tucker, in the mid 1990s, of 1200 ministers, one of every four was female. Currently, female clergy comprise fifty-one percent of fellowshipped ministers in the UUA.\textsuperscript{262}

Drawing her conclusions from the larger societal context, UU Historian, Cynthia Grant Tucker, linked the remarkable and rapid progression of female clergy to the 1963 debut of Betty Friedan’s \textit{The Feminine Mystique}. While most scholarship addresses Friedan’s impact on dissatisfied homemakers, Tucker draws an astute observation. That is, church women, specifically UU church women, were impacted by Friedan’s feminist revolution which resonated with their activist/woman centered values. Just how did the presence of female clergy make a difference in the response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct? Several respondents noted the change in the ministerial culture as a result of the presence of female clergy that often included heavy drinking and dirty jokes, characteristic of minister’s gatherings prior to women’s inclusion. One respondent noted the following:

\begin{quote}
Birth control, women coming into the ministry changed things, for example, dirty jokes ceased after women were present. Another changing norm was the heavy drinking. When I first arrived in the 70s ministers would sit up all night drinking. In a couple of years this heavy drinking ceased (because of women).\textsuperscript{263}
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 25.
\item Ibid., 48.
\item Fellowshipped ministers are credentialed by the UUA and thus receive the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” that they are in good standing with the UUA and all the requirements. Thus, making them eligible to be called “Reverend” and they enter the pool of qualified ministers to be called UU congregations and to community ministry.
\item Due to the sensitive nature of this content no attribution is made.
\end{enumerate}
Thus, women’s presence changed the norms governing interactions and established more appropriate boundaries and guidelines and how ministerial colleagues engaged one another. Sylvia Howe, UU minister, noted the highly “sexually charged” ministerial gatherings that many of her female colleagues encountered in their early years based on her study on power, sexuality and ministry. The respondents observed that being “hit on” was the generally accepted norm at that time. Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President of the UUA, noted the difference of the increased presence of women on the UUA staff and on the MFC. She posited that, “so that the habit, that is, “old boy behavior” was no longer acceptable... I used to regularly meet with clergy chapters and large church ministers and the change in those groups was quite dramatically different (as a result of women coming into the ministry.).”

Thus, women’s presence changed the norms governing interactions and established more appropriate boundaries and guidelines and the ways in which ministerial colleagues engaged one another. Sylvia Howe, UU minister noted the highly ‘sexually charged” ministerial gatherings that many of her female colleagues encountered in their early years. The respondents observed that being “hit on” was the generally accepted norm at that time. Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President of the UUA, noted the difference of the increased presence of women on the UUA staff and on the MFC. She posited that, “... the habit, that is, “old boy behavior” was no longer acceptable... I used

265 Kay Montgomery, interview by researcher, Boston, MA. August, 2005.
to regularly met with clergy chapters and large church ministers and the change in those
groups was quite dramatically different (as a result of women coming into the
ministry).267

Another way that women created institutional change in the UUA, though not
specifically related to clergy sexual misconduct, at that time, was through the use of their
organizational machinery and political clout which they used to galvanize their collective
voices to take effective action at the 1991 GA. As early as 1977 a small group of UU
feminists crafted a resolution to the 1977 GA in Ithaca, NY calling for a “search within
the UUA for the religious roots of sexism.” The resolution was unanimously adopted as
the “Women and Religion Resolution.”

Years later, the UUWF and the Continental Women and Religion Committee used
their formidable influence to call together Task Force I on Clergy Sexual Misconduct.
Their actions would prove to be far more significant than anyone could have realized at
the time. Their actions essentially challenged the institutional norms that had permitted
clergy sexual misconduct to go almost unchecked except within the most egregious
instances. Furthermore, this incident involved a Senior Minister. Research findings
indicate that high-ranking ministers that engage in clergy sexual misconduct in the past
tended not to face the same consequences as other ministers who were engaged in clergy
sexual misconduct, if they faced any at all. Meanwhile, the UUMA, the professional
organization for UU ministers, began a much needed revision of its guidelines. In an
effort to affirm the UUMA’s good work the UUWF Board passed a resolution in

February 1992 that recognized the UUMA for the newly revised “Ministerial Codes of

267 Kay Montgomery, interview by researcher, Boston, MA. August, 2005.
While the UUWF was congratulatory of the UUMA’s progress in establishing appropriate guidelines they were not pleased that the update was only sent to Presidents of District Boards, ministers and seminarians. Essentially UUWF perceived ignoring some of the guidelines that provided leadership initially. Then UUWF President, Phyllis Rickter, wrote a letter pointing out the UUMA’s exclusionary practices and reminded them that their silence about the misconduct could lead to continued damage among the constituency.

Ethics

Moreover, traditional ethics involves the study of human conduct with a focus on attitudes and actions considered to be “right” or “wrong.” Christian studies trace its discourse on ethics back to the sixteenth century. Ethical teaching describes ways in which one should make choices and decisions and take actions. Contemporary ethical theories include natural law, biblically based theories of neighborly love, human rights theories, and patterns of ethical reasoning as well as ethical assessments of individual actions and social structures. The range of sub-specialities includes medical ethics, social ethics, sexual ethics, ecological ethics and others. Therefore, this section focuses on sexual ethics pertaining to clergy sexual misconduct.

---

268 Betty B. Hoskins, Comforting the Bystanders and Cleansing the Religious Community in Unitarian Universalism-Selected Essays 2001 (Chicago: Collegium, 1993), 34
269 Ibid.
270 McKim, Dictionary of Theological Terms, 94.
Changing mores and norms in society created the need for a fresh look at specific guidelines and protocols in the UUA to remove any gray areas of behavior within the ranks of ministerial conduct. Examination of the UUMA’s “Code of Professional Practice” (CPP), the document that seeks to set appropriate boundaries for all UU ministers, reveals a very solid and well-written document that touches on the essentials while leaving some areas totally open for interpretation. For example:

As a sexual being, I will recognize the power that this profession gives me and refrain from practices which are harmful to others and which endanger my integrity or my professional effectiveness. Such practices include sexual activity with any child or with an unwilling adult, with a counselee, with the spouse or partner of a minister or person in a congregation in our District, with interns, with students for the ministry, with other field staff in my District, and in any other such exploitative relationship.272

It appears that the UUMA leaves a very definite gray area in its “Code of Professional Practice” in the following statement:

I will not engage in sexual activities with a member of the congregation who is not my spouse or partner, if I am married or in a committed relationship. If I am single, before becoming sexually involved with a person in the congregation, I will take special care to examine my commitment, motives, intentionality, and the nature of such activity and its consequence for myself, the other person, and the congregation.273

While the Code of Ethics is very clear about married ministers indulging inappropriately with anyone other their partner, there appears to be a definite gray area for single ministers. The UUA and a number of other faith communities have granted its single clergy the option to date eligible congregational members. This rationale is based


273 Ibid.
on the compassionate notion that ministers are just like other healthy human beings with
the same kinds of needs for love and affection and a social life. Herein lies the problem;
ministers are not like laity. When a minister begins to date a congregant, the parishioner
relationship no longer exists. Is the ministers’ goal to satisfy their needs for intimacy and
romance or to past to the spiritual needs of their congregations? “The Code of
Professional Practice” specifically states, “I will not abuse or exploit that trust for my
own gratification.” Furthermore, it restates the same theme in the very next paragraph
using almost identical language, “I will not exploit the needs of another person for my
own.”

While a minister has sexual feelings, the implications of acting on them are far
different from those of an individual who is not a minister. Encouraging ministers to act
on their attractions with members can lead to disastrous results. The boundaries get too
blurred and the power dynamics do not disappear simply because the UUMA decrees it is
acceptable. Such power dynamics exist whether they are named and acknowledged or
not. Most laypersons dating ministers assume they are “consenting adults” entering into a
relationship with another consenting adult. However, their consent does not change the
power dynamics nor their vulnerability. It appears that the UUA is providing adequate
training and awareness for ministers to negotiate the “troubled waters” of clergy sexual
ethics. In a system when one of its most powerful members, the minister selects one or
two or three or whatever member of individuals to date, they are risking disrupting
congregational dynamics and focusing attention on the minister’s social life. This
approval leads to two concerns. It is not possible for the minister to single out someone as
special and therefore worthy of attention from the minister without affecting the other
members. This creates tensions and problems for members vying for the minister’s time and attention.

Rights, without responsibilities and training are a setup for failure. Many workplace protocols have been devised because it has been determined that it is not wise for co-workers to date. While workplace protocols have changed somewhat, the original rationale for such norms has not. When a serious dating relationship begins in a workplace setting, ideally one of the individuals transfers. The same, it seems, would apply within the church setting. Perceptions of the church, and relationships between single clergy and eligible church members vary.

Correspondence from a minister to a District Executive reveals the shared concerns about ministers dating “eligible” members and the recognition that the UUMA Professional Practices were written “nearly twenty years ago.” The writer more than insinuates that the guidelines are outdated:

[Y]our experience as a District Executive makes your reflections about ministers dating compelling and important. Over the last ten years I too have pointed out as frequently as the opportunity presented itself to do so that guideline ambiguities about ministers dating those whom they serve has generated numerous regrettable situations as has the guideline which stipulates the marital status of the congregant determines their eligibility for an intimate or sexual relationship with a single minister. These guidelines were written nearly 20 years ago; two decades of experience shows they need to be rewritten. Thanks for offering your thoughts to the committee charted with doing so.274

The development of codes of ethics included not only ministers, but field staff (individuals co-employed by both the UUA and District Boards who were primarily comprised of clergy with a few laypersons). In addition, young adults sought to and successfully developed codes of conduct.

274 Deborah Pope-Lance, Correspondence to researcher, Charlotte, North Carolina, 31 January, 2005.
As clergy, field staff was bound by the UUMA Code of Ethics. However, additional ethical guidelines, while almost identical, were developed that forthrightly addressed issues of sexuality, power and boundaries:

As a sexual being, I will recognize the power that this profession gives me and refrain from practices which are harmful to others and which endanger my integrity or my professional effectiveness. Such practices include sexual activity with any child or with an unwilling adult, with a counselee, with the spouse or partner of a minister or person in a congregation in our District, with interns, with students for the ministry, with other field staff in my District, and in any other such exploitative relationship.275

The document further elaborated what course of action field staff should take upon discovering evidence of clergy sexual misconduct:

If, in the course of consulting with a congregation, I find that there is evidence of "conduct unbecoming" on the part of a UUMA member or a member of LREDA, I will not first discuss such matters in a public report. Instead, I will inform both the minister involved and the governing board of his or her church of the evidence, outlining to them the possible actions that could be taken, such as filing a complaint with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee or the UUMA and then allowing the church leadership to decide if this is what they want to do.276

This research revealed ample evidence of written ethical guidelines for UUA staff that included not only religious leaders that is, ministers and religious educators but UUA staff in general. Young Adult and Campus Ministry had developed Code of Ethics for Peer Leaders that outlines very specific guidelines. The issue of consent, power and control and abuse of power are only some of the issues addressed in the four page "Code of Ethics" created by the Continental UU Young Adult Network. The document defines a

276 Ibid.


“healthy” relationship as, “consensual, non-exploitative, mutually pleasurable, safe, developmentally appropriate, caring, based on mutual expectations and respectful.” 277

In an effort to revamp its protocols addressing clergy sexual misconduct, the UUA established the Ethics in Congregational Life Program (ECLP). The Program is headed by the Director of Congregational Services. Its stated purpose is to, “develop and/or make available to congregational leaders education, training and other resources and services.” The goals of the Program are to support leaders in creating safer space within their congregations, encouraging right relations among persons who are part of the congregation, and encouraging just relations between the congregation and the larger community. The primary responsibilities of the ECLP are: 1) receive and investigate complaints; 2) coordinate support services to affected individuals and congregations; 3) present cases for adjudication by the MFC; 4) involve a corps of volunteer investigators and volunteer liaisons to provide pastoral support and process information and advice to the complainant and 5) include an education and training component for congregational leaders.

Power and Control

This research revealed that a deep ambivalence about authority exists among UUs. According to David Bambaugh, many UUs long for an authority that has the power to affirm their acceptability and yet they resent and fear any authority that might have the power to define them as unacceptable — whether that authority emanates from Boston headquarters, some historic formulation of the faith, the preacher in the pulpit, or the

277 Ibid.
committee on social concerns. This tendency to challenge authority coupled with UUs emphasis on individualism sheds some light on why the continued gray areas in ministers codes of ethics. Many UUs do not want anyone telling them what to do. They tend to ignore any authority, including their own. Howe noted the varied approaches to power that minister’s assumed during the 60s and 70s as well as offering some personal insights:

There was a belief that we could move from hierarchical structures and power inequalities to an undifferentiated, level playing field with little or no recognition of the inherent power differences between ministers and lay person, between men and women, which did, in reality, continue to exist. A parallel attempt to reduce hierarchy led many ministers to deny the inherent difference and healthy boundary between clergy and laity. A question discussed among colleagues at the time (1960s-70s) was, “Why should ministers be expected to conform to a higher moral standard than the members of their congregations? During a time when ministers were considered “just one of the folks,” it was a reasonable question.

Sexual Revolution

According to Howe, before the mid-1970s behavioral norms were clear, at least in theory – sexual relations were only for married couples. And while the “rules” were clearly ignored in many instances, one respondent revealed a common ground bottom line and the rationale for secrecy, “Of course, we knew that the rules were broken, but it happened (infidelity) in secret so that the appearance of sanctity of the family was maintained.” A number of respondents noted that the sexual revolution influenced

---


280 Ibid., 73.
inappropriate behavior on the part of UU ministers. The following respondent took note of the long-term effects of misconduct on congregations even years later:

I know ministers in the 60s when you indicated you were having trouble in your marriage they arrived at your house the next week with their massage oil and incense sticks. That is not competency. That is some kind of perverted sense of ones privilege in the world. What shifted the sexual revolution? I was talking to an elder colleague... He reminded me that one of my predecessors in this congregation I am serving was notorious and eventually was encouraged to move on to bigger and better pastures as well. When he was serving a church in the area at least five women came to her and told her that clergy sexual misconduct was going on. This is a minister who was there in the 60s who went on elsewhere and misconducted as well. Eventually he was encouraged not to pursue parish ministry.281

Several comments obtained from interviews also confirmed that some UU clergy succumbed to the sexual acting out that characterized the sexual revolution:

General Assembly hospitality suites in the late 60s and early 70s were reserved for UUA districts to get together with other members. This very legitimate use was distorted with a lot of drinking and hooking up. It was a cultural thing this involvement with other persons was joked about and common behavior among ministers. The culture was a very free kind of culture. It was like adolescent boys acting out. It was the time of Hugh Hefner. Liberal ministers were more vulnerable because they didn’t have the ethical context of other denominations. (misconducting minister’s name) marked the end of this era and such behavior. It dealt a death blow to the old norms that reflected a, “why don’t we just love one another”. The case of (misconducting minister’s name) was very tough on some staff.282

Another respondent’s comments again reinforce what others have already said, that is, the sexual revolution was a real phenomenon that clearly had an impact on some UU clergy:

281 Deborah Pope-Lance, interview by researcher, Boston, MA September 2005.
282 David Hubner, interview by researcher, Boston, MA. September 2005.
Many UU clergy were very much in the midst of the sexual revolution. While some of the sexual acting out took place in many denominations I maintain that there was more visible acting out among UUs.\textsuperscript{283}

Another minister confirms the fact that the sexual revolution took its toll on some ministers. Additionally, this particular respondent/minister provides some insights into the rationale of some sexually acting out ministers:

Let us not forget that we UU ministers back in the 1970s were in the forefront of the sexual revolution, liberating our congregations, supporting trendy, societal fads as open marriage, the joy of sex and “do your own thing.” We played with fire and some of us got burned. One generation of UUs knoweth not what the previous generation advocated.\textsuperscript{284}

On the average it takes a congregation ten years to heal from clergy sexual misconduct. This interim minister/respondents’ comments allude to the long-term effects of clergy sexual misconduct. Fourteen years following the original misconduct the interim is seeking ways to chip away at the denial and other lingering emotions of the members. Understanding the long term effects of clergy sexual misconduct and second circle fall-out are essential to any pastor of a congregation where there has been a history of misconduct:\textsuperscript{285}

My presenting the larger historical overview of the sexual revolution in the sermon proved a good indirect way of addressing the issues of ministerial sexual misconduct that occurred here in the 60’s. (that minister is now deceased). Some of the congregation had retreated into denial of the past abuses, apparently because they thought it might sully their reputation with perspective candidates in their current search. I had been looking for individuals who were here in the congregation at the time of

\textsuperscript{283} Kay Montgomery, interview by researcher, tape recording, Boston, MA November 2005.


\textsuperscript{285} Second circle refers to those individuals, including congregational members and family and friends of the victim/survivor and misconducting minister that are affected by the misconduct.
the abuses who would be willing to make private confirmation of the widely rumored abuses. This sermon led one such individual to confirm & share extensively about the abuses, and gave me leads to several more. Where do I go next with all this?\textsuperscript{286}

Hearing numerous accounts of sexual acting out during the so called sexual revolution one might speculate whether the behavior was a result of the changing societal norms, UUs liberal theology and/or UUisms emphasis on individualism. While there is some merit to each hypothesis, Sylvia Howe’s theory casts a different light on UU culture that she asserts influenced UU ministers. UUism, she contends, has a tendency to “leap ahead without the support of its roots.” She cites the civil rights movement, the anti-vietnam war movement and the sexual revolution as times when UUs leaped because they were strong on “wings” that is, personal and institutional convictions that led to public witnessing against injustices. Conversely, UUs are weak on roots she maintains, that is, foundation, be it theological and/or ideological. Howe noted the tendency of some UU toward sexual experimentation in her comments:

[M]any wanted to be on the cutting edge of this free and casual exercise of sexuality. Experimentation of all sorts occurred in our congregations. Boundaries were set aside. Open marriage, specifically understood as meaning sexually open marriage, became quite prevalent. General Assembly became a meeting ground for those wanting an opportunity to explore away from home. As Paul was registering for GA one year, he heard one of the volunteers at the registration table quite openly ask another, whom had apparently just met, I see that you are wearing a wedding ring. Do you have an open marriage? Professional leaders of congregations, ministers were not exempt from being swept up in this sexual tide, and sometimes were in the forefront. Boundaries were not part of the dialogue, but clearly boundaries were being torn down, and those who attempted to maintain clear boundaries were often derided . . . Sexual acting out by male colleagues seemed at times to become a sport. The consequences of this game were widely ignored.\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{286} Interim minister. Personal correspondence.

\textsuperscript{287} Sylvia Howe and Paul L’Herrou, \textit{The Law and the Spirit}, 75-76.
Another respondent noted a very troubling realization that many misconducting ministers early on felt they were awakening women’s sexuality. This same individual came in during the early years of female ministers and indicated she was sexually harassed by both ministers and lay members. She eventually had to change her phone number to an unlisted number because an alcoholic church member was harassing her.

The following minister’s comments allude to the commonly held “fifty mile rule” that is still practiced by some UU ministers today who strive to maintain a social network outside of their congregations:

When I entered the parish ministry in 1960, sexual ethics were not explicitly addressed. If you could not control your libido or go into therapy, there was the 50 mile radius rule. (That is) you conducted your “affair” 50 miles from your parish, the guidelines were: be discreet, be careful and be incognito.288

Another respondent, Diane Miller contended that the “50 mile rule” was an absurdity and that it was the wrong sort of guidelines to encourage. Her comments echo others about the “anything goes” attitude of the 60s and 70s:

In the 60s and 70s there was a permission granted: “it was all good” “more was better” “a way to related to people and express love.” All the things in the general culture were in UUism. If you slept around, swore, then you were hip. It was the whole era. The constraining ethics that would have been adhered to in other traditions didn’t apply. Our ministers had failed do their thinking around the sexual revolution. So, the legacy of that remains. So many people involved in “open marriages, a relationship with a parishioner” today would be called misconduct was simply having a relationship (then).289

288 Minutes from the November, 1991 minister’s training conducted by UUA. No further information available.

Legal Considerations

A legal issue highlighted by Reverend Lucinda Duncan, a member of the Sexual Ethics Seminar, had to do with the UUA’s legal guidance. Lawyers, given who they are, tend to watch closely for issues of liability. Duncan noted that the UUA’s legal advice has sometimes influenced the UUA’s response in favor of the institutional well-being rather than victim/survivor. To provide any funds for the victim/survivor would indicate guilt according to UUA’s legal advisors, and thus, the UUA’s protocols did not allow financial support for the victim/survivor. However, in at least one instance, a misconducting minister and his wife were provided funding for marital counseling. This example points out a fundamental failure of the UUA to center its response in a victim/survivor focus that utilizes the values of feminist theology that places the woman or victim/survivor at the center of its analysis. Advocacy for victim/survivors appeared to be one of the weakest links in the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct.

Duncan’s statement clearly addresses similar concerns and she aligns herself with the victim/survivor in her observation that expresses her concerns that the UUA’s legal counsel, holds as its first priority the protection of the Association from law suits. While this may not be the intent of the UUA, the fact that the recommendations to implement an advocates program and provide funds for victim/survivors was not implemented, questions the nature of the UUA’s support for victim/survivors. Along the same lines, the Safe Congregations Panel sent a letter on January 20, 2006 inquiring about the status of its recommendations. One of its concerns was the treatment of victim/survivors and complainants and whether justice and restoration are possible for victims. The Panel has been supportive of the UUA and appears to have enjoyed a favorable and mutually supportive relationship to date. However, it is the contention of this researcher that
victim/survivors and their advocates have cause for concern. The conceptual framework that the UUA operates from can at the most produce some basic policy and procedural changes over the short term. Furthermore, it has created a few structural changes that make it more difficult for misconducting clergy to retain their fellowship once convicted of clergy sexual misconduct. However, without an analysis that questions the very foundations of power and reflect on a theology of power as a faith community, it is not very likely that the UUA can shift the UU culture toward a vision of justice. Such a culture instead thrives on individualism, challenging authority, denial of institutional and personal power and a distrust of rules and guidelines.

**Adjudication**

It costs the UUA approximately $50,000 to $100,000 to adjudicate a misconduct case. “They are passing on those costs,” contended one respondent. “I am waiting for someone to hold a misconducting minister accountable for the expense as a result of their misconduct, she stated half in humor and half seriously. According to this same respondent, the expenses are a result of the investigation process, that is, the cost of sending people out to conduct an investigation and interview people. “It is the cost of pulling everyone together. It is the cost of attorneys and feeding everyone. It is expensive,” she stated.

**Identifying the Theological Foundation That Guides the UUA’s Institutional Response to Clergy Sexual Misconduct**

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*  
-Isaiah 58:6.
As a covenanting community, UUs champion the sacredness of human life and honor the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.” This widely held belief is embraced by most UUs and is articulated in the first, second and third Principles and Purposes of the UUA that identify the belief in: 1) the inherent worth and dignity of every person; 2) justice, equity and compassion in human relations and 3) acceptance of one another. These declarative statements clearly express primacy for the sanctity of life.

This section focuses on the second research question: What theology/ideology guides the UUA’s institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct? The researcher will describe the findings and conclude with an analysis of those findings. The researcher has already noted the UUA Principles and Purposes that guide many UU’s values and behaviors. However, in a creedless religion such as UUism there is an even greater need to be grounded in theology/ideology to provide clarity. The emphasis in UUism is on the community of believers and their covenantal relationships with one another. When individuals are in integrity with one another and honoring their covenants they are said to be in “right relations.” When the trust is broken or the bonds of friendship are broken due to some rift then they are out of right relations or out of integrity. The word covenant means promise. One promises to hold one another in the bonds of friendship. UUism is a covenantal religious community. Thus, violations of the covenant constitute broken-ness in integrity and in the community.

There are several factors that explain the failure of the UUA to center its response to clergy sexual misconduct in a theological perspective: 1) diversity of theologies poses

---

290 Excerpted from the Principles and Purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association.
challenges; 2) UU’s inadequate response to sin/evil; 3) reluctance to engage reverent language and 4) congregational polity.

Background

The paper trail of research documents testified to the longevity of the issue and the UUA’s historical efforts to address clergy sexual misconduct beginning most noticeably in the early 1990s. The incident that enraged a sufficient number of UUs eventually challenged the UUA to change the institutional and thus the individual norms that governed clergy sexual misconduct. So while there was a proliferation of documents and infrastructure initiatives that reflected the UUA’s efforts there did not appear to be parallel efforts signifying a theological perspective. Using a simple definition of theology to frame this discussion, the researcher will guide the reader through the analysis of the findings: “Theology—the study of religion and of religious ideas and beliefs; a branch of theology treating God and God’s relation to the world; reflecting on the ultimate meaning and value of life.”²⁹¹ Ultimate meaning and value are approached differently depending on the theology embraced. The researcher’s findings suggest that the UUA has not, for the most part, used a theological grounding to inform its institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct.²⁹² While the UUA stepped up with considerable commitment and resources to address the issue of clergy sexual misconduct after the 1991 GA incident their institutional response has been almost exclusively guided and framed from a “secular” or humanistic perspective. Extensive efforts by the researcher only uncovered

²⁹¹ Henry Bosey Woolf, ed., The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974) 707. This definition was also augmented by the researcher.

²⁹² These statistics were taken from a report conducted in 1998 as part of a campaign called, Fulfilling the Promise.
two documents generated through the UUA that explicitly addressed clergy sexual misconduct using a theological foundation and approach. The first, a six page document written in April, 1994 by Reverend Lucinda S. Duncan, titled, *The Role and Purpose of Our UUA Principles as Language, Framework, Ground and Guide*. This document emphasized the role of UUA as a “religiously centered, rather than a legally self-protective, Association.” It essentially addressed the needs of emotional systems with conflicting priorities and claims and encouraged these systems, that is, the UUA, ministers, MFC and families to seek guidance in their Principles and Purposes. Duncan highlighted a problem that this researcher noted with the UUA’s legal guidance that sometimes fails to address the needs of victims/survivors in favor of the institutional well-being. On at least one occasion several years ago when the researcher inquired about counseling for a victim/survivor this researcher was told that to provide any funds for the victim/survivor would indicate guilt and thus the UUA’s protocols did not allow financial support for the victim/survivor. However, the misconducting minister and his wife were being subsidized to attend marital counseling. This example points out a fundamental failure of the UUA to be victim/survivor focused. Advocacy for victim/survivors appeared to be one of the weakest links in the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct. Duncan’s statement clearly addresses similar concerns and she aligns herself with the victim/survivor in her observation that expresses her concerns that the UUA’s legal counsel, holds as its first priority the “protection of the Association from suit.” Duncan consistently grounds her discussion and arguments in theological language with the constant reminder, “we are a religious association that values open and responsible access to information” and she consistently places her decision within a theological
framework. She articulates the purpose for using religious language as follows: “If we cannot discuss, mediate and decide about alleged violations of clergy sexual ethics in the language and framework of our religious heritage and future, then we cease to function as a theologically grounded religious association.” The other document, a seven page discourse written by Reverend Thomas Mikelson and published in 1995 was the only other report that analyzed clergy sexual misconduct from a theological perspective. Mikelson chaired the Sexual Ethics Seminar (SES) and the paper focused on fourteen points that primarily addressed the following: 1) the congregation as a place of safety that is inherently vulnerable by virtue of its openness as a spiritual community; 2) the roles of ministry including that of sexually healthy religious professionals; 3) the presence of power dynamics and awareness of appropriate boundaries and 4) naming sexual relationships and/or sexualized behavior between a minister and a congregant as abuses of clergy power and authority. Duncan and Mikelson, as members of the Sexual Ethics Seminar began meeting monthly in the fall of 1990 with its members comprised of: Lois Ames, Charles Reinhart, William “Scotty” McLennan, Deborah Pope-Lance and Rita Van Tassel. For two years the SES gathered materials, read and reviewed information and most importantly, engaged in rigorous theological reflections. Why the emphasis on the UUA grounding its response to clergy sexual misconduct in a theological perspective? If the UUA was a non-profit as opposed to a faith based organization it would not be necessary or expected that the institutional response would reflect a

293 This fact was confirmed by Mikelson who acknowledged there was no follow-up to his knowledge. One other document that reflects on clergy sexual misconduct from a theological perspective is a one page document contained on the Restorative Justice website.

294 Upon retirement, Charles Reinhart resigned and was replaced by Richard Fewkes. In addition to these members, Donna DiSciullo and Pat Sheppard spent considerable time reading and commenting on the final document.
theologically grounded response. But it is faith based, and while it is comprised of
diverse theologies that are an integral part of who the UUA is and this researcher feels its
theologies ought to rightfully inform the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct.
Reverend Susan Pangrel, Dean of Student Affairs at Meadville Lombard Theological
School contends, “If we are a religious tradition then we need to be able to think
theologically.” So what prevented the UUA from thinking theologically about the issue
of clergy sexual misconduct?

Diversity of Theologies

While the diversity of theologies within UUism reflects a richness of voices that
contributes to the breath and depth of UUism it can also pose some challenges. In a 1997
campaign titled, “Fulfilling the Promise” survey findings from over 9,000 respondents
reflected the following theological demographics: humanists comprised forty-seven
percent; earth or nature-centered comprised nineteen percent; theist comprised thirteen
percent and Christians comprised nine percent of UUs. In a more recent study, James
Casebolt devised twenty theological labels from which respondents were invited to
choose. The respondents selected the following: humanist (fifty-four percent); agnostic
(thirty-three percent); earth-centered (thirty-one percent); atheist (eighteen percent);
Buddhist (seventeen percent); pagan (thirteen percent) and Christian (thirteen percent).

The theological diversity alone is enough to intimidate the faint hearted. While others
might find such theological diversity chaotic many UUs thrive on it, taking full advantage

---

295 Tom Stites, “New Survey of UUs Shows Theological Differences, Common Values in The
World” (Boston: The World Magazine, May/June 1998) or Tom Stites, New Survey of Theological
of the worship experience to influence liturgy. Worship services typically include diverse rituals and sermons drawing from many theologies. Worship experiences routinely include animal blessings, water communions, “talk backs” and experiential worship. In smaller congregations guest speakers from the community assume the pulpit to talk about topics ranging from their travels abroad to quantum physics relationship to spirituality to theology. And while one can appreciate the richness that these diverse theologies reflect in congregational life, this researcher would be remiss not to make passing mention of the tensions between such groups as the humanists and Christians or the pagans and Christians. These conflicts have been known to surface between the minister and the congregation, but most likely emerge between members. In one instance, the minister was a Christian UU and his congregation was primarily humanist. The minister eventually resigned after his Committee began to request his sermons in advance for the purpose of editing the “God talk” in them. The situation deteriorated to the extent that the Committee was editing the minister’s sermons with a red pen and returning them. UU ministers are actually entitled to “Freedom of the Pulpit,” that is, the right to freely express themselves from the pulpit. Clearly this Committee violated this ministers’ right to freedom of expression. The point of this story is to acknowledge that diversity of theologies is an important part of UU community and yet it comes with its challenges.

This researcher believes that UUA did itself an injustice by not emphasizing theology more and inviting participants from its major faith traditions to espouse its reflections on this troublesome issue—clergy sexual misconduct. This in itself would be a learning experience because of the soul searching that some of the faith communities would be forced to engage. For example, one interpretation from the Buddhist
community is reflected in the controversial comments of Stephen Butterfield, an English professor. Though not a UU, Butterfield asserts that the purpose of adopting rules is to learn awareness and not to invoke sanctions for wrongdoing. The “sin” or violation is a “lapse of awareness” which can then be transformed into an occasion for honesty and further mindfulness by the confession. Butterfield views the power disparity between the teacher and student as nothing more than an illusion. Buddhists apparently have very different ideas about spirituality and sexuality. Some faith communities and theologies might speak of “sin.” UUs tend to name the misconducting behavior of ministers as broken-ness and “missing the mark.” Perhaps the failure to more forthrightly address the concept of evil and sin has prevented the UUA and other UUs from using such language. Has there been a time that the UUA and has named an action as “evil?” Yes, one of those historic moments was documented in the recently published book, Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue in which thirty-two participants explored the spiritual dimensions of UU’s anti-racism work. One participant argued for viewing racism “not only as a matter of institutional structures and social power disparities, but as a profound evil.” Some of the participants perceived their work as “soul work.” This researcher contends that without a theological component to end clergy sexual misconduct the UUA’ work may remain shallow as one participant asserted about anti-racism efforts. Reverend Dianne Arakawa, the first fellowshipped Asian-American UU minister, reminded the


298 Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer, Soul Works. 110.
participants of the following:

[R]acism will not be dismantled with one rational methodology... but when “we as a community of faith exert our moral and ethical persuasion for the Common Good [...] We need to consider what is salvific, redeems lives, and makes them as holy as the stars that are set in the heavens [...] We need to look at and to lift up feeling, faith, and religious community.299

One explanation for why the UUA’s stronger and more advanced anti-racism efforts may have more to do with the having been on the “Journey toward Wholeness” for a much longer time than their commitment to safe congregations.300 Therefore the UUA has internalized a greater understanding of the dynamics needed to address racism. Perhaps the study of history has also helped many UU’s to claim its prophetic voice that can often be recovered through a prophetic understanding of history and religion. Apparently the stakeholders felt comfortable exploring anti-racism from a theological perspective.

James Luther Adams, one of the great contemporary UU theologians, refers to the watered down version of liberal religion as “chronic theological thinners of liberal religion.” It is the failure to engage in rigorous theological reflections that possibly has produced the watered down version of liberal religion that Luther Adams speaks about. Luther Adams went abroad and met concentration camp survivors and activists fighting against facism. When he returned to the United States of America he, in fact, came to view white racism as “our Nazism”. Luther Adams believed theology is a living tradition


300 This is the actual name of an anti-racism training.

and not the study of a “fossilized doctrine.” Clearly Luther Adams viewed theology and practice as two different matters. During World War II many theologians worldwide failed to lift their voices, individually or collectively to address Hitler’s genocidal attacks against the Jewish people, gays and Roma, also known as Gypsies. This moral stumbling that caused the designated leaders of God to ignore such blatant atrocities was more recently repeated in Rwanda. The genocide in Rwanda claimed the lives of over 600,000 individuals. Thus, the same cultural climate that allowed the institution of slavery to flourish in this country, allowed genocide in Rwanda. The same cultural climate that allowed the institution of slavery to flourish in this country, allowed genocide in Rwanda. The same cultural climate that allowed the genocide against the Jews, that permit modern day slavery here and abroad is the same moral stumbling that institutions can so easily fall victim and prey to if not being constantly vigilant. Thus, clergy sexual misconduct is a moral stumbling block for UUA, for all ministers and all UU’s. The failure to name the evil in its midst is nothing short of moral stumbling.

Evil

Unlike some UUs, Luther Adams did not appear shy about his use of the term “evil.” He even talked about “satanic forces” independent of human moral control which he believed was simply a “demonic distortion of human relatedness crying out for a change of heart, mind and will.” But Paul Rasor, UU theologian and director of the

---

302 I thank M. Shawn Copeland for the use of the term, “moral stumbling” which allowed me to name the paralysis of will that many denominational leaders initially succumbed to, resulting in a failure to act. I am terming their inaction, “moral stumbling”.

Religion and Social Issues Forum at Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center, lends his cautionary voice in a very different direction that deserves serious consideration by UUs. Rasor contends that UUs failure to develop a strong theology of evil has weakened UUs prophetic voices to resist evil. One of the concrete areas this is noted is in the area of anti-racism/anti-oppression and multiculturalism. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words enrich Rasor's assertion and remind the reader that what when prophetic voices are silenced. "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."304

Rev. Dianne Arakawa reminds UUs of some of their failures and moral stumblings around anti-racism work:

Like most of you, I can recount the tragedies of the past that still plague our Association: from the settler Indian wars of the seventeenth century in Massachusetts, Puritan policies related to slavery, the mixed Unitarian response to abolition, the unjust labor practices at the turn of the century, and the racist statements of our denominational presidents in the first half of the last century to the slowness to engage in the Civil Rights movement on the part of some of our congregations, the derailing of the Black Empowerment movement in the sixties, and the lack of support for congregations and clergy of color from Ethelred Brown’s time to our present [.]

Compounded by the fact that many UUs do not embrace the concept of original sin UUs are further handicapped in their language and their abilities to articulate a theology of evil. Instead, UUs use such language as "missing the mark" rather than sin/evil. Rev. Kim Beach believes that UUs “get worried when they talk about evil (because) they feel they’re dipping into dualism, and they have taught that dualism is bad and monism is good. Beach notes that Luther Adams had a great deal to say about evil


305 Ibid., 160.
and even resorted to terms like demonic which he used to reference "principalities and powers" of the New Testament. Adams referred to the satanic as pure evil and the demonic as the distortion of the good. Thus evil was seen as self-perpetuating and self-justifying.

The diversity of theologies within UUism simply makes it challenging for the denominational leadership, UUA, to speak with one voice. While this feat is seldom achieved within denominational ranks it is noteworthy when it does occur. So it would be too easy to lay the absence of theological reflections at the feet of UUs theological diversity. If this is the case, why have UU Christians not generated a body of scholarship that explains clergy sexual misconduct?

What does it mean to be Gods human creatures who are the objects of others oppressive behaviors or the perpetrator of such behaviors or worst still the perpetrator? While many UUs have rejected notions of women's inferiority and women as evil seducers of men they have failed to generate thoughtful reflections that provide a theological grounding that informs a UU specific response to clergy sexual misconduct. Thus much remains to be explored in UU generated literature in the context of UU traditions and theology on the topic of clergy sexual misconduct.

UU's strong social justice orientation is a result of their identification with the "downtrodden, the dispossessed, disinherited, with the exploited and the oppressed."307

UU's principles view human life as sacred and encourage right relations among individuals. Acts of clergy sexual misconduct break faith with these beliefs. Furthermore,

306 Ibid., 119.

the breach of professional boundaries and breaking of trust denies authentic love or agape love, a concept while usually attributed to theism can be applied to UUism. UUA's failure to grapple with the theological underpinnings of its response to clergy sexual misconduct points to a serious deficiency in moving forward with a visionary and prophetic voice. It also pointed out a number of long standing concerns: 1) theological diversity 2) reluctance to tackle language of reverence; 3) failure to produce contemporary theologians possessing prophetic vision and voices; and 4) their resistance to internalizing and naming power as a crucial ingredient in clergy sexual misconduct. This researcher believes that inviting reflections amongst the laity and clergy representing the dominant theologies and eventually all the theologies within UUism will go a long way in getting at the core beliefs that represent some common theological grounding for UUs. So while this process maybe time consuming and certainly will not eliminate clergy sexual misconduct in our lifetime it will create some common language and bonds across the vastly diverse theologies represented in UUism. By doing so this allows UUs to stand as allies with victim/survivors while holding perpetrators accountable through a model using Restorative Justice. Clergy sexual abuse is an affront to the Gospel or good news of UUism and goes against what it means to “honor the inherent worth and dignity of all.”

The ministry of UU is to clearly hold its prophetic voice and “name violence as sin and take action to end it.”

Christian identified UU’s might embrace a concept of “imago dei” that is, the notion that humans are made in the image of God. As an integral part of their theology,

---

308 Doehring is a liberal Christian feminist theologian who has written and spoken extensively on clergy sexual misconduct.
Christian identified UUs and other theists might also recognize concepts of good and evil - right and wrong. In contrast, many non theist UUs would not embrace what they perceive as binary thinking that appoints a God figure to symbolize all that is good and a devil that symbolizes the bad in the world. Many humanist identified UUs while holding no notions of God, do profess belief as a covenanting community that champions the sacredness of human life. Humanist identified UUs like most other UUs honor the bonds and closeness of community although they may not share common theologies. Theologies that promote the sanctity of community is a commonly woven thread that is consistent with many world religions. Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.'s theology of oneness that recognized humankind as one family ultimately produced the concept of “Beloved Community.” Given UUs dedication to social justice issues and public witnessing it was not surprising that there would be a justice paradigm guiding the efforts to address clergy sexual misconduct. What was surprising was the lack of a theological framework. Yet the “chronic theological thinness” of liberal religion that James Luther Adams references suggests the validity of his observation.309

The Transformative Power of Social Action – Standing with the Oppressed: Prophetic Voices and Social Witnesses

We will not solve the problems of the world from the level of thinking we were at when we created them. – Albert Einstein

Institutions are slow and cumbersome to change. UUA is no exception. Assuming moral responsibility is an important and necessary approach to changing the institutional

culture that determines the response to clergy sexual misconduct. Such an approach maintains the institutional vision for transforming cumbersome institutions and naming clergy sexual misconduct. To that end, UUA has kept faith with its vision of social justice by claiming the inherent worth and dignity of each and every individual. While UU’s distinctive faith claims should not make them morally superior to others it should encourage their prophetic voice in standing with the oppressed.

Advocacy groups have had a major role in moving institutions toward living out their missions and purpose. The UUA has not been without its own committed passionate groups that have helped stay the course in its witness efforts of justice seeking and accountability. While this research has addressed some of the institutional endeavors to shift the culture toward a zero tolerance of clergy sexual misconduct, the research focus now shifts to victim/survivors.

UUA’s definition for survivor identifies several stages of healing that include: 1) personal safety, 2) reconciliation of the victim/survivor’s story and 3) restoration of the community. What is missing from this model is the recognition that part of the individual healing is the opportunity for the individuals to transform their individual suffering and trauma into empowerment through acts of social activism. The telling of women’s stories is a powerful way to break the conspiracy of silence and give voice to victim/survivors. However, stopping short of activism, that is, efforts to create institutional change, sanctions and creates an individualistic approach to the problem rather than naming it as a societal problem reflective of models of dominance and power. Thus, the intervention then assumes a counseling and empowerment model for the women and misconducting ministers. While that is an important component, it begs the issue for social change that
evolves out of social activism. Hence, treatment of the experience as opposed to the r of social change, reduces the solution to a matter of social services. Developing survival mechanisms that challenge gender oppression addresses the spirit of the conceptual framework of feminist theology. While the option to engage in social activism should always be voluntary, it must be presented as part of the woman’s education and the institution. Victim/survivors involvement in speak-outs, rallies, support groups, and court advocacy is an extension of the empowerment model that testifies to the belief that the “personal is political and the political is person.” Likewise, individual and institutional change must be viewed using a similar conceptual framework, that is, the dialectical relationship between the two provides a dynamic tension juxtaposed one against the other.

So what would accountability to victim/survivors look like utilizing feminist theology? Since UUA has not utilized feminist theology this researcher draws on examples outside of UUA. In the battered women’s movement, batterers programs that seek to address violence against women using an empowerment model, solicit the wisdom and accountability of battered women’s advocates. What does this accomplish? By do so, male allies demonstrate their willingness to take leadership and directions from women and thus begin a process of publicly letting go of some of their male privilege and power. This small effort to redistribute power challenges the socialization of male activists that have oftentimes internalized notions of female misogyny and thus male power. This process of examining power dynamics forces an internal and external confrontation within male allies as they begin to reflect on male privilege and reconfigure and dismantle power dynamics in their lives. From the very beginning this dismantling of
male privilege sets into motion a paradigm shift that provides a different model for institutional and individual power. The societal norms granting males power and privilege are so pervasive that male activists can come up in women’s spaces such as women’s movements and expect to assert their power and privilege because that is what they are used to doing. They are quickly checked. Thus, those individuals that are not sincere do not stay around because it is simply too much trouble to do all the necessary work to be accountable to women and keep one’s ego under control and in check.

Controlling male ego around women is an important intervention in male privilege for males who have been socialized to believe they are more intelligent and therefore, more capable leaders. The process can be likened to peeling an onion layer by layer.310

Is Nothing Sacred? The Voice and Story of A Victim Survivor

While there are countless and nameless individuals that deserve equal attention the following individual portrayed in this research symbolizes the courageous ability of victim/survivors to transform from the soul threatening experiences of clergy sexual misconduct. The individual in question was able to heal, continue to grow and develop and most important, to love again. She moved forward to help countless others through their courage and grace:

UNITARIAN GUILTY ON SIX CHARGES. Northboro, Massachusetts Minister Mack W. Mitchell, 56 at the time, was convicted on six of twenty-three charges of sexual assault involving a Tibetan woman who testified he sexually abused her as a teenager after offering to sponsor her education in this country. “I came here with a lot of wonderful dreams, and my dreams were shattered,” said Kim who is now 37. With the conviction, “I can dream again and become a whole person

310 For one of the best examples of males that have been doing this work over time and are genuinely committed to the process contact: Men Stopping Violence, Inc.
again.” Rape and assault-battery charges are still pending against him by another Tibetan woman.\textsuperscript{311}

The victim, Kim was 16 years old when she left a Tibetan refugee camp. Reverend Mitchell had served approximately 27 years at the UU church. Kim, in a recent interview on the Oprah Show contended that, “My life was hell.” One week after she arrived the inappropriate touching started that eventually escalated to rape. When Kim realized what was happening to her she tried to make the minister cease his abuse. Instead, he threatened her. He made her believe her parents would go to prison. Mitchell tried to intimidate her into believing that no one would take her word over a respected minister like himself. Kim recalls that over the six years things got worse. “He started to use foreign objects to penetrate me. He got sicker and sicker. I didn’t understand how a man of God could do this.” Kim recounted her feelings as she prepared to testify against her rapist, “A week before he bought my two cousins over two members of the congregation approached (me) with suspicions they had that something was going on. I testified against him. It was very scary and frightening. I came out with the story because he was going to victimize my cousins.”

For many years Kim attempted to put the past behind her. In 1995 she attended the World Conference on Women in Beijing as part of the Tibetan delegation. She shared these poignant words, “I found strength and solidarity with women from around the world who shared their struggles and vision in a way that made many of our cultural and ethnic differences secondary . . . I started to see the connections between my own experiences and that of many others. I discovered I had buried so many feelings and

beliefs and as they emerged I was able to express myself with a sense of authority I never knew I had. I was able to move through the anger I was holding and use that energy for positive change . . . It has fueled my activism for Tibetan human rights . . . I now co-direct the Massachusetts-based Trafficking Victims Outreach & Services Network.\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{312} For a complete description of Kim Phuntsok Dolma Meston’s story see http://www.uswomenwithoutborders.org
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS – RECOMMENDATIONS – ANALYSIS

The purpose of this research was to explore the institutional response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct between 1991 and 2005. As such, the research topic, clergy sexual misconduct, is merely one aspect on a continuum of gender-based violence that women experience globally. The grave consequences of clergy sexual misconduct are worth repeating here because of the enormity of the emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual impact on the victim/survivor and secondary victims. The impact of clergy sexual misconduct is in part due to the perpetrators’ role that grants them access to the inner sanctums of individuals and family members’ lives and, represents the ultimate betrayal of trust and intimacy. It is status and power of clergy as spiritual leaders and pastors that produces such long-term “soul wounding” and herein lay the egregious nature of the crime. While this social problem has gained visibility due to the recent Catholic scandals, it is still not as widely understood as other forms of societal violence such as child and woman abuse, elder abuse and other forms of sexual assault.

Summary of the Research

The literature findings were categorized into four themes: 1) clergy power and status; 2) boundary violations; 3) effects of clergy sexual misconduct on victims, clergy and congregations; and 4) institutional accountability. The examination of the literature
on clergy power and status revealed very different perceptions about power among UU clergy and non-UU clergy. All of the traditional research sources tended to address mainstream denominations and clergy.

The researcher was only able to obtain UU generated literature and research through denominational publications or directly from denominational headquarters. Working against these limitations, the researcher ascertained that many mainstream denominations are experiencing a declining interest in religion that has impacted their growth and the perception and role of ministers. This declining interest is due in part to 1) changing values of individuals that no longer view religion or a personal relationship with God as important; 2) scandals associated with the faith community; 3) the rise of materialism and secularism and 4) women’s reaction due to the church’s resistance to women’s full participation. However, even with all these factors mitigating against religious affiliation, Americans still appear to demonstrate a strong propensity for religious practices such as church attendance and church giving. As “representatives of God” the church still holds power and sway but in some instances the research indicated this is declining with the changing roles of the church and the clergy.

Among UU clergy, the boundaries tend to be more easily blurred because of the appearance of non-hierarchical relationships and sometimes flat congregational structures. This is particularly evidenced in the interpersonal relationships between the minister and laity in the following ways: 1) laity tend to call clergy by first names and vice versa; 2) clergy seldom wear cleric robes except for “high church” occasions; 3) single/eligible ministers are permitted to date single/eligible members; 4) sexual intimacy is viewed as a natural part of human relations and is therefore, not considered immoral,
sinful or “evil” and 5) UUism is non-creedal and, therefore there are not commonly held beliefs and theologies that create a unifying identity and a sense of connection. Non UU scholarship does not address these differences in values and perceptions, which clearly have powerful implications in the congregational culture and interpersonal relationships between clergy and laity. Many of the sources cited the combination of power, isolation, naiveté, poor training in power dynamics and lack of supervision as factors that raise the risks of misconduct. The fact that clergy’s power and status tends to be equated with God creates the potential for the abuse of power and a tension between spirituality and sexuality that can be reverent and/or seductive. None of the literature addressed this although some of the feminist theologians touched on it. However, this is not as much as factor with UU’s because of the diverse theologies that do not embrace the Christian notion of “God.” Furthermore, because some of the research analyses only examined power as the root cause of clergy sexual misconduct they may be less inclined to look at issues of sexuality. In addition, in hindsight, since this research focused on the institutional response of the UUA to clergy sexual misconduct it might have benefited this researcher to conduct a more rigorous examination of institutional power dynamics and theories of organizational culture.

The researcher’s review of the literature identified six frameworks that explain clergy sexual misconduct: 1) individualist; 2) social-structural; 3) theological; 4) 

---

313 UU’s are not required to adhere to any system of beliefs or opinions in order to become a member of a congregation. In contrast, Christianity is a creedal religion that adheres to the Apostles’ Creed that begins, “I believe in God the Father Almighty.”

314 Marie M. Fortune et al., Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship (Seattle: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1997); Cooper-White, The Cry of Tamar; Grenz and Bell, Betrayal of Trust; and Rebekah L. Miles, The Pastor as Moral Guide (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).
dominant-feminist and 5) systems theory. The individualist framework locates the source of the violence within the individual. The implications for treatment would suggest long term therapy. The social-structural framework locates the source of the misconduct in the larger social context that predisposes individuals to violent and predatory behavior. The obvious interventions are to work to change the social conditions of society. One example of the cultural framework contributes promiscuous pastors' behaviors to those of plantation culture during slavery. This framework considers particular cultural nuances that might explain such a phenomenon. The theological framework explores the moral choices of the individual. While, basically, these choices have to do with right and wrong there are variations that examine issues of alienation and materialism. The dominance/feminist framework locates the source of the problem in gender aggression. Males choose to use violence against women because they can. The final framework is systems theory that maintains that clergy sexual misconduct is a reflection of the larger systems acting out its needs in a symbiotic relationship. This researcher chose the dominance/feminist framework although there are aspects of all of these frameworks that could logically explain clergy sexual misconduct. However, the use of violence against women as part of their male privilege reveals the oppression of women and patriarchy. This framework is equally applicable when the perpetrator of clergy sexual misconduct is female. In the few instances of female aggressors this researcher contends that the female minister is simply using the power and privilege of her ministerial role to violate others in a less powerful role. In this instance the emphasis is on the power dynamics and not necessarily the gender. With male ministers, power is conferred to them as males and as ministers which they misuse to victimize women and children.
The literature on the effects of clergy sexual misconduct on individuals, congregations and clergy was remarkably consistent in its findings. The literature depicted the grave effects of clergy sexual misconduct on not only the victim/survivor but on the second circle, that is, the family of the victim/survivor, congregational members, the larger community, the clergy member and his family and friends. The fact that it takes on the average of ten years for a congregation to heal from the ravages of clergy sexual misconduct speaks volumes about the soul wounding that takes place. The literature review surfaced some of the most significant scholars associated with the topic and the versatile roles that many of the clergy/scholars/practitioners play. Their scholarship provided a particular richness other lacking in some disciplines.

The in-depth data analysis of this case study revealed that the UUA has taken seriously its primary commitment to ensure the provision of safe congregations. To this end the UUA has garnered its fiscal and human resources to address clergy sexual misconduct within its ranks. It has established a formidable, though loosely assembled infrastructure since the early 1990s that primarily consists of volunteers from around the country with UUA staff providing monitoring and oversight. The various established bodies described herein have compiled an impressive array of documents investigating the problem from almost every dimension, except theologically. At a time when other denominations had made little in-roads on the problem, UUA had already developed policies and procedures and established protocols that provided guidance primarily on a national, District and congregational level in the 1990s.\footnote{315} Many districts also took the

\footnote{315} Mary Moore, \textit{Finding Our Way: Responding to Clergy Sexual Misconduct} (Boston: UU Women’s Federation, 1992).
initiative to develop resource materials and training. While training and experience were key factors for District Field Staff, others learned by trial-and-error in providing effective consultation support for congregations impacted by misconduct. Early in the process, the UUA contracted with Reverend Marie Fortune, then Executive Director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, now known as Faith Trust, Inc. to provide training utilizing a train-the-trainer model. Various bodies, appointed by the UUA to address various aspects of clergy sexual misconduct were usually comprised of industrious and competent individuals with good organizational skills that produced admirable outcomes. In most instances the UUA appeared to maintain its integrity and credibility in following policy and acting on the recommendations of these bodies. Failure to act on certain key recommendations was noted by this researcher. With infrastructure in place, the UUA was able to develop, publish and disseminate educational materials and training curricula intended to educate its constituency about clergy sexual misconduct. From its emphasis on training it appears that the UUA believed that providing information and new competencies would bring about a change in the clergy. It was difficult to assess how successful these training efforts have been. What the research on institutional change indicates is that change of such a magnitude requires a long-range plan that incorporates multiple approaches. This use of a coordinated and systematic approach to bring about the desired outcome can be witnessed in the Battered Women’s Movement and the Rape Crisis Movement where such efforts over a long period have made impressive inroads to provide services to victim/survivors even though the statistics do not suggest “success.” It was not clear how strategic the UUA was in its response to clergy sexual misconduct. It appears this may be a critical period as it seeks
to shift its paradigm from “Retributive Justice” to “Restorative Justice.” The implications of this new paradigm cannot be adequately assessed at this time.

The UUAs “staff liaisons” often served in the role of facilitator, accountability person and holder of sacred reports and documents were an important one given the number of individuals and committees convened to address clergy sexual misconduct. Some of these groups and individuals have diligently served since the early 1990s while others have reinvented themselves in different but equally needed and relevant groups. Yet, in spite of an infrastructure and the proliferation of groups and bodies addressing clergy sexual misconduct the UUAs current developmental efforts are more challenging to identify. This current phase appears to lack the strategic approach that characterized UUAs earlier phases in previous years, or it may simply be that there are less archival documents that the researcher was able to track. Restorative Justice appears to be the agreed upon vision and, therefore, the next growing edge for UUA. The UUA has erected an impressive web page that is accessible to all congregations with resources that include pamphlets, reports, literature and resource materials as well as links to related web sites.316 The Congregational Services Administrator has set up an “Ethics and Safety” web site that is updated regularly.

Women’s Inclusion and Activism - Analysis

Moreover, gender issues were forced to the forefront of national politics in this country in the 1960s because of the entry of women into the labor market, women’s activism, the availability of birth control that loosened family forms and granted women

greater role flexibility, and ushered in an era of cultural permissiveness. Within the UU context ministry experienced equally dramatic events. The fact that now, one in four UU ministers are females has changed and expanded the world of ministry as well as the range of problems confronting clergy. The outpouring of stories by female members of violence and abuse in pastoral counseling sessions surprised male ministers when it was reported across faith communities that had courageously opened its doors to female ministers. This marked change was due to now having female ministers available and females’ comfort level with telling them about sexual abuse. Inclusion of rituals and introduction of women’s leadership styles changed congregational life forever. By the 1980s UU women were being ordained in greater numbers than their male counterparts.317 This pattern continued into the 1990s. While most women were called to small congregations that were serving one hundred or fewer members, since 1980 women have been called to some of the larger churches in about the same numbers as their male colleagues.318 Marked increases in the numbers of female ministers offers new opportunities for ministers and lay persons to work together on issues particularly affecting women such as reproductive rights, violence against women and sex education.

The findings of this research revealed that the UUA stepped up its efforts considerably once women advocates challenged the history of male privilege that had permitted clergy sexual misconduct to continue. This is an important dynamic because it identifies women’s voices and organizing efforts as one of the critical sources of power


318 Ibid. 49.
among UUs. While the UUWF and the Women and Religion Committee were the “kick-ass” contingent within the UU community. That same power and militancy does not appear to be present today among women activists and more diplomatic strategies have replaced the “in-your-face” modus operandi of earlier years. The Women and Religion Committee is no longer a national body although several districts have very strong and viable district-wide Women and Religion Committees. The UUWF remains the sole, and by far, strongest voice for UU women. Besides providing funding to feminist/womanist activists and scholars, the UUWF’s primary foci today includes: reproductive rights, violence against women and sex education. However, it is strategically poised to wield organizational power for women. The power from the periphery is oftentimes more powerful than the institutional power held by institutions such as UUA. Activists on the periphery remain free to draw strength from numerous resources. Furthermore, they do not have to worry about jeopardizing their livelihood. Those in the center, such as UUA, are dependent on its power for their strength. UUWF draws its strength from the periphery and multiple constituencies. They can be appropriately outraged and engage in advocacy without having to consider the effects on their livelihood. Becoming financially astute and generating fund sources that are not strictly tied to UUA provides a financial base.

The UUA’s appointment of Reverend Diane Miller in 1993 as the Director of Ministry, an influential position also brought a feminist theological perspective to UUA along with other colleagues at a time when it helped to emphasize the changing cultural norms that had for some time included more women. Another female minister, Reverend Carolyn S. Owen-Towle, was the first woman to run as a candidate for the Presidency,
the highest office in the UUA. While she ran unsuccessfully against Reverend John Burhrens, another woman candidate would not run again until 2000 when Reverend Diane Miller resigned her position as Director of Ministry to run against the first African-American candidate, Reverend William Sinkford. Along with a gay white male minister, UUA members were polarized around issues of race, gender and sexual orientation. One can draw interesting historical parallels to the era of Susan B. Anthony when she and other women suffragists withdrew their votes from Black males to support the vote for white women’s emancipation. Unfortunately, the timing and politics created some strong polarizations among key constituents that under other circumstances would have supported any one of these capable candidates. At the 2001 GA the members spoke and Reverend William Sinkford was elected the first African-American President of the UUA.

While women provided the accountability and oversight to push the UUA toward addressing clergy sexual misconduct, neither the UUA nor UU women have embraced a conceptual framework that centers its work in the reality of victim/survivors lived experiences. While the UUWF and some committee members have championed the cause of victim/survivors they have failed to bring victim/survivors into leadership in a critical mass. The token victim/survivor is usually included on Committees and their voices are added to panels and other critical venues. While this takes nothing away from the efforts of individual women advocates, the overall leadership of the UUAs efforts is still pretty much in the hands of staff, a few advocates and in general non-victim/survivors. The only places where this researcher noticed a considerable gathering of victim/survivors was a weekend retreat for women who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct called, “Is
Nothing Sacred?” This retreat grew out of the experience of two survivors of UU clergy sexual misconduct. The other was at “Second Circle” gatherings that provide safe space for victims of clergy sexual abuse and their supporters.

UUAs definition for survivor identifies several stages of healing that include: 1) person’s safety, 2) reconciliation of the person’s story and 3) restoration of their community. What is missing from this model is the recognition that part of the individual healing is the opportunity for the individuals to transform their individual suffering and trauma into acts of social activism. The telling of women’s stories is a powerful way to break the conspiracy of silence and give voice to victim/survivors. However stopping short of activism renders a very individual treatment of the experience as opposed to the power of social change that comes with social activism. Developing survival mechanisms that challenge gender oppression addresses the spirit of the conceptual framework of feminist theology. While the option to engage in social activism should always be voluntary it must be presented as part of the woman’s education. Victim/survivors involvement in speak-outs, rallies, support groups, and court advocacy is an extension of the empowerment model that testifies the personal is political and the political is personal. Likewise, individual and institutional change must be viewed using a similar conceptual framework, that is, the dialectical relationship between the two provides a dynamic tension juxtaposes one against the other.

So what would accountability to victim/survivors look like using a feminist theology conceptual framework? Since UUA has not utilized feminist theology this researcher draws on examples outside of UUA. In the Battered Women’s Movement, batterers programs that seek to address violence against women using an empowerment
model solicit the wisdom and accountability of battered women advocates. What does this accomplish? By doing so male allies demonstrate their willingness to take leadership and directions from women and thus begin a process of publicly letting go of some of their male privilege. This small effort to redistribute power challenges the socialization of male activists that have oftentimes internalized notions of female misogyny and thus male power. This process of examining power dynamics forces an internal and external confrontation within male allies as they begin to reflect on male privilege and reconfigure and dismantle power dynamics. From the very beginning this dismantling of male privilege sets into motion a paradigm shift that provides a different model for institutional and individual power. The societal norms granting males power and privilege are so pervasive that male activists can come up in women’s spaces such as women’s movements and expect to assert their power and privilege. Those individuals that are not sincere do not stay around because it is simply too much trouble to have to do all the work necessary to be accountable to women and keep ones ego under control. Controlling male ego around women is an important intervention in male privilege for males who have been socialized to believe they are more intelligent and capable leaders. The process can be likened to peeling an onion layer by layer.319

While this researcher saw evidence of understanding about power dynamics in UUAs institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct there did not appear to be any understanding about institutional power. A feminist theology conceptual framework goes beyond an affirmative action model that would simply require an institution to hire a

319 For one of the best examples of males that have been doing this work over the long haul and are genuinely committed to the process contact: Men Stopping Violence, Inc. msv@menstoppingviolence.org
victim/survivor as an advocate and fill a quota. This is a more systematic attempt to begin to address and dismantle (male) hegemonic power in ways that is so uncomfortable that it disrupts up old power paradigms, sometimes precluding many organizations ever engaging this process.

Power and Control - Analysis

"Who holds the power in this congregation?" While it was a simple enough question, almost without exception UU board members struggled, often unsuccessfully, to answer this question posed by the researcher. Very seldom did they name themselves without extensive probing. This researcher believes that UUs' reluctance to name and claim their power originates in the desire to be non-hierarchical, honor the democratic process and their emphasis on equity. UUs' in proportion to their total numbers possess a disproportionate amount of power and privilege derived in part from their socio-economic status. While these factors alone are glaring indicators of privilege, the final, and in this researcher' opinion, the most important indicator of privilege is many UUs' apparent lack of awareness about their power. Such unawareness about white skin privilege, class and other privileges is a red flag. With historically marginalized populations, such as people of color, there is almost a hypervigilence about these factors. The lack of awareness among people of color can carry negative consequences that potentially can impact their very survival.

Thus, the model is flipped for people of color and whites. It is a luxury not to be aware of these privileges or the lack of them. This lack of awareness fits with the general unwillingness to address internal class issues. In order to forthrightly address these issues UUs would have to acknowledge their privileged status and the implications of wealth
redistribution. These are difficult issues for white liberal middle class Americans. And they are made more difficult for white middle class American UUs who want to genuinely view themselves as the champions of the poor and oppressed. Thus, power dynamics will remain the last frontier of understanding for the UUA and its ministers since clergy sexual misconduct is about power and the misuse and abuse of power. Thus the UUA would benefit in its efforts to shift from viewing the problem as one “out there” to looking “in side.” Uncovering the dynamics of power and privilege related to race, class and gender within the context of UUism is no easy task nor are they solely relegated to the issue of clergy sexual misconduct. It is believed that based on analysis of the interviews and archival documents that clergy sexual misconduct is a problem deserving the UUAs attention and requiring a systematic approach to eradicate. Linking gender and class in a manner that does not reduce gender to class involves a challenge that could inform the UUAs institutional response to clergy sexual misconduct.

Findings about Process

Research findings about the process that is triggered upon identifying suspected clergy sexual misconduct appears to have undergone many changes over the years. In earlier years there was no point person to track down responsibility for the portfolio of clergy sexual misconduct. That has been corrected. The Director of Congregational Services is the institutional point person for complaints on clergy sexual misconduct. Similarly, there was no crisis response in place. Now the Director of Congregational Services follows protocols to initiate a process. Institutional protocols are still not standardized and greatly depend on the resources of the district and the experiences or lack of same of the District Executive.
Another factor that affects the response is who the clergy sexual misconduct is reported to. A congregation may report the clergy sexual misconduct to the District or to the UUA. Most typically, either of those two parties notifies the other. But in earlier years there have been times when the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. A more coordinated response is evidenced on the national level and on the district level. However, there is certainly room for improved coordination between the two which has been evidenced in recent times. However, depending on the resources of the individual District the protocols may still vary on the District level and be district driven.

Another previous protocol that complainants sometimes found distressing involved the resignation of misconducting ministers. Why would everyone be disappointed if the minister chose to simply resign? In the past, once a misconducting minister resigned before their hearing they could not be charged. Such protocol has since been changed and the UUA will in fact proceed with charges whether the individual resigns or not.

Legal Considerations

A legal issue that Reverend Lucinda Duncan highlighted has to do with the UUA’s legal guidance. Lawyers, given who they are, tend to watch closely for issues of liability. Duncan noted that the legal advice has sometimes influenced the UUA’s institutional response in favor of the institutional well-being. To provide any funds for the victim/survivor would indicate guilt and thus the UUA’s protocols did not allow financial support for the victim/survivor. However, the misconducting minister and his wife were provided funding for marital counseling. This example points out a fundamental failure of the UUA to center its response in a victim/survivor focus that utilizes the values of
feminist theology that places the woman or victim/survivor at the center of its analysis. Advocacy for victim/survivors appeared to be one of the weakest links in the UUA’s response to clergy sexual misconduct. Duncan’s statement clearly addresses similar concerns and she aligns herself with the victim/survivor in her observation that expresses her concerns that the UUAs legal counsel, holds as its first priority the “protection of the Association from suit.” While this may not be the intention of the UUA the fact that the recommendations to implement an advocates program and provide funds for victim/survivors was not implemented questions the nature of the conceptual framework that the UUA is operating from. The safe Congregations Panel sent a letter on January 20, 2006 inquiring about the status of its recommendations. One of its concerns was the treatment of victim/survivors and complainants and whether “justice and restoration are possible for victims.” The Panel has been very supportive of the UUA and appears to have enjoyed a favorable and mutually supportive relationship to date. However, it is the contention of this researcher that victim/survivors and their advocates have cause for concern. The conceptual framework that the UUA is operating from at the most can produce some basic policy and procedural changes over the short term. Furthermore, it can and has created a few structural changes that make it more difficult for misconducting clergy to retain their fellowship once convicted of clergy sexual misconduct. However, without an analysis that questions the very foundations of power and fails to reflect on a theology of power as a faith community, it is not very likely that the UUA can shift the UU culture toward a vision of justice. Such a culture instead thrives on individualism, challenging authority, denial of institutional and personal power, and a distrust of rules/guidelines.
Recommendations

Three key recommendations emerged from this research project. Several other recommendations, too important to dismiss, will be discussed following the primary recommendations. The primary recommendations, offered for possible consideration in addressing the UUA's efforts to eliminate clergy sexual misconduct, roughly fall in three categories: restorative justice, theological reflections, and victim/survivors empowerment:

1. Restorative Justice - Conduct a follow-up session with the “think tank” on “Restorative Justice.” Invite some scholars and practitioners that have a well-developed grasp of the concepts. Have them present and pick their brains. Develop a plan of action on training the think tank, UUA staff, District Field Staff, ministers and seminaries;

2. Theological Reflections - Reconvene the Sexual Ethics Seminar to initiate theological reflections and invite feedback from laity, clergy, and seminarians for the purpose of compiling collections of theological reflections on clergy sexual misconduct. Representation should be solicited from the diverse theologies comprising UUism, beginning with the primary theologies, humanism, earth-based religions, Buddhism, and Christianity. Invite sermons and papers on power dynamics and engage in theological reflections on said topic with the intention of understanding how to place victim/survivors at the center of an analysis of justice that allows the UUA to break ranks and stand with the victim/survivors. This will begin a different conversation and allow the UUA to reconfigure social relations. Possibly this conversation and the one on Restorative Justice are one and the same.

3. Victim/Survivors Empowerment – Provide funding to victim/survivors and congregations that experience clergy sexual misconduct. Provide funding to encourage leadership opportunities for victim/survivors to assume ownership around advocacy in the larger network of victim/survivors. Encourage and provide networking with other faith communities and activist organizations working to eradicate clergy sexual misconduct.

Additionally, other important areas for consideration include: education and training, interventions, and transparency. Education and training – While the laity was not the focus of this research, future research focused on laity might be helpful in examining the role and responsibilities of laity in helping to set appropriate boundaries to prevent clergy sexual misconduct. Funding and convening an interdisciplinary national
conference on clergy sexual misconduct in the next two to five years allow the UUA to expand its understanding of clergy sexual misconduct and explore what other faith communities are doing about this serious issue that saps the fiscal and human resources. Invitations to key feminist/womanist scholars, theologians and activists from the faith community and seminaries to present papers and workshops would create the opportunity to generate theory and praxis. Extending invitations to all the denominations and faith communities promotes collaborative efforts to eradicate clergy sexual misconduct.

Providing district wide crisis teams to conduct education and provide support in conjunction with District Field Staff during and after misconduct is an important protocol that currently exists but must be reinforced. Finally, trust is the first casualty in clergy sexual misconduct. Thus, promoting transparency between the UUA and congregations through publicizing annual statistics on clergy sexual misconduct and the status of said cases will serve to nurture a culture of trust.

This researcher agrees with the words of Kay Montgomery, Executive Vice President of UUA, and so this report concludes with her simple and telling words, “Our work in this area (clergy sexual misconduct) is far from complete.”

*For those among us who have experienced abuse*
-- we are truly sorry
*For those among us who have inflicted abuse*
-- may new learning and grace redeem us
*For those of us who have stood by in silence*
-- give us the courage of our voice
*From this day forward may we be creators of safe and sacred space.*

- Donna DiSciullo, a leader in the Unitarian Universalist campus ministry and a retired minister wrote these words for the religious community.


Buehrens, John, *Understanding the Bible: An Introduction for Skeptics, Seekers, and


Chinula, Donald M. Building King’s Beloved Community: Foundations for Pastoral Care and Counseling with the Oppressed. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997.


Davenport, Barbara. Sexual Victimization Among Unitarian Universalist Women in


Hansson, Desiree and Diana Russell. A Bibliography on Patriarchal force in South Africa. Cape Town, South Africa: Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town.


“..."A Global Faith” sermon preached at First Unitarian Congregation in Toronto, ON on 10 November 2002


O’Toole, Laura L. and Jessica R. Schiffman, ed. *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary*


Thompson, Marg Susan, Religious Ethics Newsletter, June 20, 2005 E642.


