

ABRAHAM LINCOLN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

LAY OFFICIANT POLICY 2011

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I. OFFICIANT GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

The Officiant Program is the outcome of decisions made by the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Springfield (ALUUC) in response to local needs. The decision to create a Lay Officiant program was made at the Congregation's Annual Meeting in June 2006.

The ALUUC may appoint one or more of its voting members as an Officiant empowered with the authority to officiate at weddings, civil unions, and commitment ceremonies to the extent permitted by this policy. The Board of the ALUUC may expand the duties of the officiant to conduct funerals or other rites of passage at some future date.

WHO MAY BE AN OFFICIANT

The ultimate decision as to who may be appointed as an Officiant rests with the Board of the ALUUC. The Board shall act upon the recommendation of the minister and the Committee on Ministry.

The following profile is presented as a guide:

The Officiant should be a mature person of either sex, over 25 years of age, and a voting member of the congregation. Personal characteristics are more important than professional qualifications, though some background in professions working directly with people is helpful. It is important that the officiant is able to communicate easily with people in a spirit of empathy, helpfulness and concern, and that he or she be a person whose public image will enhance the reputation of the congregation. It is important, however, that in situations where a professional level of counseling is called for, the Officiant must be aware of local resources to which referrals may be made.

The officiant's role challenges the appointee to reflect on and clarify his/her Unitarian Universalist values. It will provide experiences which encourage the individual's spiritual growth, and which will, in turn, contribute to the strength of the congregation. For this reason, there is benefit to the congregation in some rotation of the role of officiant among its members.

Any member of the congregation who is in good standing may express an interest to the minister about entering the Officiant training program. The minister will discuss the program with that person and assess his/her level of interest and suitability. The minister will recommend persons to the Committee on Ministry who will in turn interview the applicant. If the Committee on Ministry endorses that person, his/her name shall be forwarded to the Board of Directors. Next, the Board will meet with the applicant and then vote on whether to accept that person as an "Officiant in Training."

TRAINING FOR OFFICIANTS

All persons accepted as “Officiants in Training” will receive training and mentoring from the minister. Workshops for the training of officiants are to be scheduled as needed, and information about these will be circulated to congregation members. Training shall be the responsibility of the minister and shall deal with all aspects of the work of the “Officiant in Training.” Training is considered mandatory in advance of a person formally being appointed as an officiant. The importance of training workshops as a part of the program cannot be stressed too strongly. They provide the necessary background for new officiants and a forum for discussion of experiences and ideas among existing officiants. An outline of training topics is provided in Section III of this policy.

When the “Officiant in Training” has satisfactorily completed the training sessions, the minister will recommend to the Board of Directors that that person be appointed as an Officiant. The Board of Directors has the sole authority to officially approve such appointment.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE OFFICIANT PROGRAM

The Minister and the Committee on Ministry of the ALUUC are responsible for the administration of the program. The minister shall act as the direct supervisor of the officiants. No wedding, civil union, or other service shall be conducted without the permission of the minister (or without the permission of the Committee on Ministry in the absence of the minister). Each applicant shall meet with the minister and Committee on Ministry before training to discuss why he or she is interested in becoming an Officiant. The Committee on Ministry shall periodically evaluate the program and the performance of the officiants.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE OFFICIANT TO THE ALUUC

The Lay Officiant shall be a voting member of the congregation, and may or may not have other roles in the congregation. The Officiant shall be responsible to the congregation and its Board of Directors.

As mentioned previously, the Officiant is to be appointed by the Board of the congregation and shall meet the requirements established by the Board. Such appointment shall be recorded in the appropriate minutes. An appointed Lay Officiant shall not be considered an employee of the congregation.

CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT

There shall be a contractual agreement between the officiant and the congregation. The following topics shall be included in this agreement:

- (a) Tenure - The appointment is for two years, renewable upon agreement of the parties.
- (b) Installation - It is recommended that there be a formal ceremony of installation of the Officiant at a Sunday service.
- (c) Attendance at Training Workshops is expected.
- (d) Role and Function - The officiant program was established to serve the needs of non-congregation members and as an important community service that will promote our religion in a positive manner.
- (e) Dress - For formal weddings or civil unions, a robe is recommended attire. (The robe may be purchased or handmade.) For less formal occasions, a suit or dress is suggested. For informal ceremonies, the choice is left to the officiant.
- (f) Termination of Agreement - Violation of any part of the code or guidelines may be reason for revocation of his/her authorization. The officiant's authorization may be removed by vote of the Board or the congregation for such violations or for other reasons that the Board or congregation finds justify termination.
- (g) The Officiant shall place a copy of the wedding/civil union license in the office of the ALUUC for all ceremonies conducted.
- (h) Rotation - Rotation among officiants is fair practice and is anticipated.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

The Committee on Ministry and the Minister are available for consultation in relation to specific concerns that may come up from time to time.

If the couple has specific ideas of a ceremony they prefer, and that form does not contravene the officiant's or congregation's integrity, then it is acceptable to follow and implement their wishes.

Officiants are not to become involved in any ceremonies that appear to be designed as publicity stunts. A religious movement like ours can easily gain notoriety of a kind that will detract from our ability to be of service to the people who are genuinely in need of the services we can offer.

Officiants should not overtly solicit weddings or civil unions or formally advertise their ability to perform such services.

Ceremonies involving polyamory, polygamy, polyandry, or other arrangement involving more than two parties shall not be conducted.

If the ceremony is to be conducted in another state, the minister will request special authorization on behalf of the officiant from a UU congregation in that state.

II. CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIANTS

As an officiant appointed by the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Congregation, I give full assent to this code of behavior as a statement of my serious intent and as an expression of my concerns and loyalties.

1. SELF AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT

I fully commit myself to the tasks of the being an officiant. I will try to understand my own weaknesses and strengths. Knowing my limits, I will not hesitate to seek help when in difficulty.

Because the religious life is a growing life, I will try to keep my own religious growth alive. I will sustain in my own mind a decent respect for our religious tradition. I will refrain from words and actions that degrade our religious tradition or are destructive of congregational life.

Because the demands of others upon me may be many, I will try to keep especially aware of the rights and needs of my family.

2. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER OFFICIANTS AND THE MINISTER

I will do my best to stand in a supportive relationship with my fellow officiants and those who supervise my work, and I will keep for them an open mind and heart.

I will strictly respect confidences given me by my colleagues, and I will expect them to keep mine.

I will not speak scornfully or in derogation of any colleague in public. In private conversation critical of a colleague, I will speak responsibly and temperately.

In sharing officiant duties with others, I will do my work in co-operation and consultation with them and in accordance with clearly defined responsibilities, which I will clarify in the beginning of such a relationship.

3. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONGREGATION

I will respect and uphold congregational life. I will hold to a single standard of respect and help for all members of the congregation of whatever age or position.

I will respect absolutely the confidentiality of private communications.

I will not invade the private and intimate bonds of others' lives, nor will I trespass on those bonds for my own advantage. In any relationship or intimate confidentiality, I will abide by the Safe Congregation Policy of this congregation, and I will not exploit the needs of another person for my own.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LARGER COMMUNITY

I will live and speak in a way to represent the best of Unitarian Universalist traditions.

III. OUTLINE OF OFFICIANT TRAINING

It requires that all who conduct weddings and civil unions be familiar with the license protocols for weddings and civil unions, congregation calendar process, and ceremony materials. Training should take about six hours and can be done over several weeks, or all on one day, depending upon the schedules of the participants.

The training culminates in an official appointment at a congregational board meeting and an installation service during Sunday worship. Ongoing meetings after appointment are helpful as the customary odd situations present themselves in requests. The minister shall be responsible for training and meetings. The following topics are covered in the training, along with others topics as they are raised:

- Marriage license protocol
- Civil Union license protocol
- Congregation calendar process
- Handbook for Weddings and Civil Unions
- Congregation fees
- Honorarium for Officiant
- Mileage compensation
- Janitorial service
- Congregation sound system
- Process for rotating among officiants
- Illinois law as it relates to weddings and civil unions

- Safe Congregation Policy
- Counseling
- Discussion topics sheets for couple
- Wedding/Civil Union arrangement form
- UU Congregation pamphlet
- Candles, aisle runner, pew bows, etc.
- Appropriate attire
- Receptions
- Seating of divorced parents
- Rehearsals
- Role playing
- Weddings & Civil Unions at other sites
- Officiant guidelines
- Wedding/Civil Union request protocol
- Sexist or inappropriate requests
- Illegal requests
- Music
- Qualities in a officiant
- Boundaries on the Officiant (appointment term, other congregations, out of state)
- Back up in the event of death in the family, illness, crisis
- Polyamory
- Other