

Balancing Act
by the Rev. Ann Schranz
Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation
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Last year, a man approached me after a Sunday service. “I was in jail for a sex offense,” he said. “I just got out. I have to register as a sex offender for the rest of my life. I plan on attending Sunday services here, so I wanted to tell you where I have been.” With that disclosure, the Committee on Ministry and I began a crash course to learn how to balance the wellbeing of the congregation with the wellbeing of this person.

I consulted with experienced ministers and reviewed paperwork related to his conviction. The Committee on Ministry and I reviewed the excellent document on the Unitarian Universalist Association website entitled “Balancing Acts,” and we crafted what is called a “Limited Access Agreement” for this man to sign. The Limited Access Agreement was based on best practices and tailored to his situation. As it happened, he declined to sign the Limited Access Agreement and has not returned. If he does return, he will be welcome if he signs the agreement.

When it rains, it pours. At the same time that the sex offender wanted participate in the congregation, a separate situation was under way which required the setting of some behavioral boundaries for a former member. The Board and I worked our way through the latter situation in a messy, contentious process. To be frank, I felt angry that the congregation had no functional covenant regarding behavior and had apparently given no thought to integrating sex offenders into the congregation. I

would have given my eye-teeth to have had such policies in place prior to these two situations arising last year.

The good news is that the Board of Trustees initiated a process to come up with policies regarding disruptive behavior and regarding integration of sex offenders into congregational life. The policies are included in this week's Announcements. These Safe Congregation policies (or very similar ones) will be recommended to the congregation for adoption at the June congregational meeting. I thank the Board and the Safe Congregation Task Force for their fine work.

The "Balancing Acts" document on the UUA website was prepared by Unitarian Universalist minister the Rev. Debra Haffner of the Religious Institute. Most of my remarks this morning come directly from the "Balancing Acts" document because it is so important.¹ [Rev. Ann read excerpts from this document.]

May we balance the wellbeing of the congregation with the wellbeing of everyone who might benefit from participating in congregational life. May we never forget neither victims of sexual abuse nor sex offenders who change their behavior. May it be so!

¹ See <http://www.uua.org/leaders/safecongregations/balancingacts/>.