

# **Attachment D: Member/Active Friend as Church Employee Policy**

## **First Unitarian Church of Oakland**

### Issues for Consideration

Hiring members/active friends as church employees has been a subject of serious consideration across the UUA. There are clear advantages to this practice, as well as serious potential difficulties. Indeed, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland has experienced both outcomes in its history of hiring members/friends as employees, and of having employees subsequently becoming church members. This document will outline both the advantages and disadvantages of church members/ friends as being church employees and will lay out church policy in relation to the issue.

#### *Advantages of members/friends as church employees:*

Church members/friends are more likely to be familiar with and dedicated to the goals and mission of the church and working for the church probably blends well with their life goals and philosophy. They potentially know other members and friends on a personal level, and have connections, which supports their efforts as a church employee. Church members /friends presumably have a pre- existing knowledge of church life, church history and of professional and volunteer roles. In the ideal situation, being a church member can enhance and augment the individual's ability to do an excellent job as a church employee.

#### *Disadvantages of members/friends as church employees:*

The major disadvantages are the potentially unclear personal and professional boundaries and confusion and conflict between the rights and responsibilities of church members and church employees. When a member/friend becomes an employee, relationships change. Expectations between the church and the individual must change on both sides. If not, there is potential for conflict of interest, potential issues related to confidentiality and great potential for feelings of betrayal and loss on the part of the employee, which can easily cause the entire congregation to be drawn into a messy personnel conflict. This is especially likely if the

difficulty is great enough to cause a termination of the employee. In short, there is potential for damage to the church and to the well being of the individual if there is not great clarity from the beginning about the roles and responsibilities of the member/friend-employee.

*When a church member/friend becomes a church employee:*

1. When a church member/friend becomes a church employee, the individual now has responsibility to the church as a whole, rather than to a specific interest group or functional area. The employee now acts on behalf of the entire church and must maintain a high degree of objectivity. The employee must relinquish the desire to advocate for any specific program that is not aligned with the congregation's larger mission.

2. The member/friend-employee is seen and regarded as part of the church staff and part of a working professional team. All relationships should be made, developed, and nurtured from this stance. As an employee, the individual needs to work in concert with other church employees to maximize the efficiency of all areas in order to minimize frustration, failure, and burnout.

3. The member/friend-employee is a church employee first and a church member/friend second. This means that in most cases they will not have the same access to pastoral care from the minister(s) as a member would. The minister of the church may still be the staff member's minister for weddings, funerals, and other public functions, but for more private pastoral attention, the employee may need to seek this assistance from outside the church. Divulging personal information or frustrations to the ministers who are also the individual's co-worker or even a supervisor sets up a vulnerable situation for the member/friend-employee. For the minister, being the supervisor of a member/friend-employee is incompatible with intense pastoral care or counseling. The member/friend-employee is welcome, however, to use the services of the church's pastoral associates. They are available to the member/friend-employee to discuss personal and emotional issues but not personnel or job related issues.

4. The member/friend-employee may need to seek supportive peer relationships outside of the church. Having the church as one's primary source of friendship, support, spiritual sustenance and employment can be

tricky. Church friends have to learn to see the individual as an employee and not request or expect the sharing of confidential information. The member/friend-employee has to be cautious in sharing information about church functioning. And when/if work tensions arise, sharing with other church members or friends work frustrations can / may have negative effects on the individual and church community.

*In summary, here are the general guidelines for church members/friends who are or may become church employees:*

- The member/friend-employee must act in a professional manner at all times and put the interests of the church above all personal interests and gains and be aware of the extra responsibilities as a member-employee.
- The member/friend employee may not serve as a voting member of any church committee, though they may work with committees on time-limited projects.
- Member/friend-employees must refrain from communicating with other church members any personnel issue related to their jobs. This includes using any church communication mechanisms such as the newsletter (paper or electronic) or listserve to share, discuss, or solicit information or opinion.
- Member/friend-employees may not serve on the Board of Trustees, nor be a voting member any church committee or council.
- Member/friend-employees must maintain confidentiality around all sensitive church information.

*Special Process when considering a member for church employment:*

1. When a member/friend is applying for a paid church position, they will be given this memorandum for their review and consideration. In addition they will have a conversation with a member of the

Executive Team about the change in role, rights, and responsibilities that such employment entails.

2. If the member/friend decides to continue their pursuit of the position, additional questions suggested by the above information will be asked during the interview.

3. If the member/friend is selected for the position, the member/friend-employee will sign a Covenant of Understanding about the confidential nature of the work, the potential conflicts between being a congregant/friend and an employee, and the terms of agreement in regard to staff performance review and/or termination (specifically, non-disclosure to other church members details surrounding termination and not using any church communication mechanism for grievance or advocacy).

Through serious consideration of the above information and use of the practices outlined, the Executive Team believes we will be better able to manage and minimize the potential difficulties of hiring members/friends as employees and maximize the potential benefits when we decide to hire a church member as an employee.