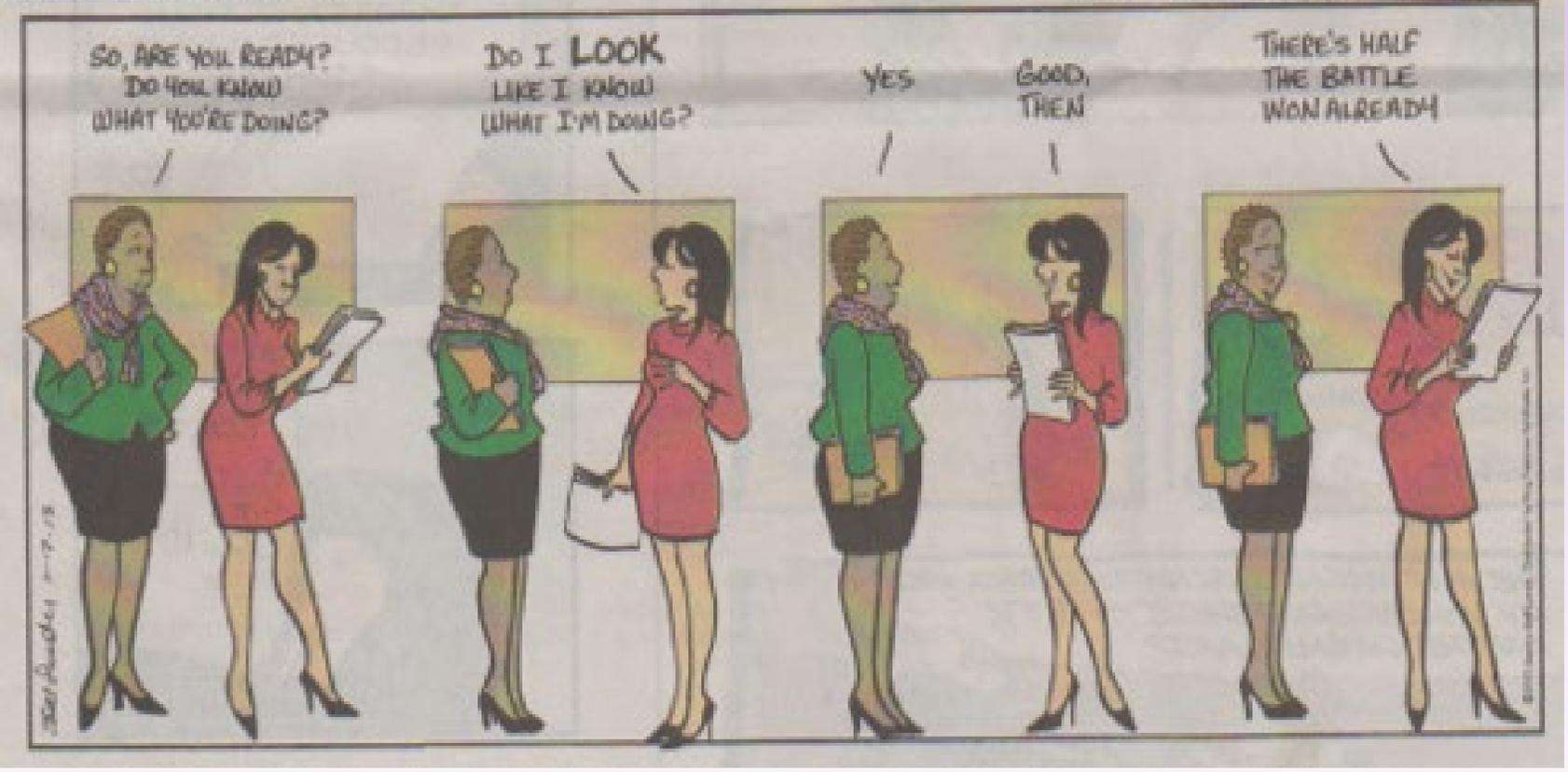


The CUC Lay Chaplaincy Program: An Introduction



BETWEEN FRIENDS

BY SANDRA BELL LUNDY



Origin of the CUC Lay Chaplaincy Program

- Began in 1971
- There were few Unitarian Ministers in Canada and they were being swamped with requests for rites of passage from other congregations and the public
- Ministers had too much travel time to other congregations or fellowships
- Canadian Unitarians believed that people had a “right” to a “rite”!
- The Lay Chaplaincy programme is unique to Canada. Only the Canadian Unitarian Council’s member congregations/fellowships have lay chaplains.



CUC Lay Chaplaincy Mission Statement

The Canadian Unitarian Council Lay Chaplaincy Program helps clients, couples and families in need of meaningful rite of passage ceremonies, at places chosen by them, by recognizing their personal beliefs and wishes, while being sensitive to the needs of others who attend the ceremony, and reflecting Unitarian and Universalist values.



Purposes of the Lay Chaplaincy Program

- To provide quality rites of passage in a manner consistent with CUC principles and sources for the public and in congregations where a minister is not available..... and
- To promote and showcase UU values
- To assist non-Unitarians to connect with UU congregations and fellowships
- To enhance the spiritual growth and development of lay chaplains



Qualities of a Lay Chaplain (1/2)

- Working knowledge of UU
- Maturity and ability to cope in a crisis
- Communicates in a spirit of empathy, helpfulness, concern
- Effective public speaking voice and manner



Qualities of a Lay Chaplain 2/2

- Ability to conduct rites of passage with sensitivity and acceptance of varied spiritual, cultural and religious perspectives
- Sense of personal responsibility and commitment, independent worker, team member with minister and congregation
- Self-presentation and conduct which favourably reflect on the congregation and denomination



Qualifications of a Lay Chaplain ^{1/2}

- Be a member of a congregation in good standing
- Be actively involved in congregational work
- Be able to articulate why they want to become a lay chaplain
- Be willing to adhere to the Code of Practice, Conflict of Interest Guidelines, Counseling vs Consulting Guidelines....



Qualifications of a Lay Chaplain ^{2/2}

- Be willing to sign a contract with the congregation
- Be willing to conduct all the standard rites of passage
- Be able to provide or arrange transportation
- Be able to work flexible hours and respond quickly to requests
- Be willing to renounce registration as a wedding officiant obtained through a religious body other than: 1) the CUC or, 2) in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec, their own Unitarian or Unitarian Universalist congregation.
- Complete the Basic Training for Lay Chaplaincy:
Part 1 – this self study guide and accompanying quiz
Part 2 – “Designing Rites of Passage” – 3 day online or in person course whenever it is available, ideally before being appointed or as soon as possible after



Role of a Lay Chaplain

What is your role?

To provide quality rites of passage in the community adhering to the policies and guidelines of the CUC and your home congregations, provincial laws and Unitarian and Universalist values

What is NOT your role?

UU Lay Chaplains are not counsellors or therapists, do not provide bereavement support and are not wedding or event planners – see Code of Practice

To whom are you accountable?

The CUC, your home congregation, your clients and the Provincial Registrar that issues your license

What are your responsibilities to your congregation?

See next slide!



Responsibilities ^{1/2}

- providing information on rites of passage in the Unitarian Universalist tradition
- preparing the service in consultation with the clients
- arranging for and conducting wedding rehearsals if clients want them
- putting clients in contact with the lay chaplain's congregational musical director, accompanist, or other staff as appropriate
- coordinating with and working with other vendors and service people, such as musicians, photographers, funeral directors, florists, etc., as necessary



Responsibilities 2/2

- ensuring, when services are held in their congregation's meeting space, that the space's integrity and security are maintained
- ensuring that the legal requirements for performing, registering, and recording a marriage are met
- maintaining a congregational record of services performed, fees earned and expenses incurred
- providing data on clients and services as required by the congregation's Board of Trustees and Treasurer, and the Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committee.



Relationship with Congregation



- UU Lay Chaplains are appointed by the congregation or fellowship at a general meeting and contracted to the congregation, renewed annually, for a term (recommended is 6 years maximum)
- Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committee co-ordinates activities with others and staff
- UU Lay Chaplains are considered leaders within the congregation, participate in the life of the congregation
- Lay Chaplaincy is an outreach program of the congregation



Consulting vs Counseling

- The lay chaplain consults on rites of passage only. They do not provide grief or bereavement support, marriage counselling, etc.
- The lay chaplain, even if qualified to do so, may not counsel the client, but must refer.
- You may refer to a list of qualified counsellors or agencies, not one in particular.
- Supportive listening need not involve counseling.
- Suspected child abuse must be reported.
- If spousal abuse is suspected, a minister or other qualified professional or appropriate authority must be contacted.



Conflict of Interest Guidelines

- Can not be the primary source of income for the lay chaplain
- Dual role – Can not be licensed elsewhere or have an independent business that offers the same service
- Must identify self as a Unitarian Universalist LC
- Counseling clients is not allowed
- Ministerial or congregational leadership roles – UU Ministers are not UU Lay Chaplains. Lay chaplains and congregations should consider the candidate's involvement in major committees or several committees as there may be a conflict with the role of a UU Lay Chaplain
- Rites of passage for members of congregations are officiated by ministers, unless a minister decides otherwise (i.e. first right of refusal). In some cases, it may be more appropriate for a minister to officiate in the community as well – examples would be a high profile person, a tragic death like a murder or suicide etc.



Relationship with Ministers

- In some congregations, the minister supports, supervises and evaluates lay chaplains
- Lay Chaplains support ministers.
- Lay Chaplains & Ministers establish a good working relationship.
- Minister's prerogative to perform rites of passage for members of congregation



Guidelines for Wearing a Stole

- The stole is a sacred symbol of ministry and service which emphasizes the religious aspect of lay chaplaincy and shows honour and respect for the client and their ceremony.
- To be worn only while officiating as a UU Lay Chaplain or participating in a UU service about lay chaplaincy.
- Should have a visible chalice.
- Not to be worn while presenting other worship services or attending meetings of your congregation.



Training of a Lay Chaplain

- UU Lay Chaplains are expected to successfully complete “Basic Training” Designing and Leading Rites of Passage, ideally prior to their appointment but as soon as possible afterwards.
- Mentoring and job shadowing with experienced lay chaplains, participation in congregational lay chaplaincy committee meetings
- Experienced UU Lay Chaplains are expected to contribute to the program. This may mean reaching out to the National CUC Lay Chaplaincy Committee to assist with finding mentors in other congregations if there are no experienced lay chaplains in the home congregation



Code of Practice ^{1/2}

- Includes sections on Self, Colleagues, Community
- Features good relations, confidentiality, respect, personal advantage and exploitation, professionalism
- We sign a contract to abide by this
- Refer to pages 11 & 12 of the Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Program Manual which you can download [here](#)



Code of Practice, 2/2

Code of Practice, Self --

Read these articles of ethics out loud:

#4 Knowing my limitations, I will seek help when in difficulty.

#3 I will identify areas of weakness and improve them with training and mentoring.

#2 I take responsibility for my spiritual development and growth.

#1 I commit myself, before all else, to an honest and responsible performance of my duties and my role as lay chaplain.



Code of Practice Exercise

Take 5 minutes to write down:

- 3 people you would turn to about the difficulties of being a lay chaplain
- Have you identified any areas you think you will need support?
- What is your plan for fostering your spiritual development and growth in a way that relates to Lay Chaplaincy?



The Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committee's Relationship with the CUC

- The CUC creates the structure under which we operate, collaborates with the National CUC Lay Chaplaincy Committee to ensure the program is delivered consistently throughout the country
- Trains UU Lay Chaplains and authorizes the number of lay chaplains per congregation or fellowship
- Approves or denies applications and advises the CUC National Office to apply to the province for a license to solemnize marriages on behalf of the Lay Chaplain. In some provinces, the NLCC would advise the individual congregation or fellowship to make the application for the license
- \$20 per service to the public is sent by the congregation annually to the CUC where it is allocated to the CUC Lay Chaplaincy training fund
- Lots of valuable resource material at cuc.ca
- Current CUC admin staff: Ahna DiFelice: ahna.difelice@cuc.ca



2026 CUC National Lay Chaplaincy Committee 1/2

CUC Staff Liaison and UU Ministers of Canada Liaison:

Nicoline Guerrier – nicoline.guerrier@cuc.ca 514-229-7421

British Columbia and Western Regions

Name	Home Congregation	Representing
Larry Boldt boldtlarry500@gmail.com 250-585-4777	Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo	Beacon, Comox, North Shore, Salt Spring Island, South Fraser, Vancouver, 1 st Victoria
Mary-Anna Louise Kovar maryannalouise@gmail.com 403-271-4182	Unitarian Church of Calgary	Edmonton, Saskatoon, Capital, Winnipeg, Nelson
Christina Swindells-Nader christina.sn@uuwinnipeg.mb.ca 604-999-5666	First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg	Nanaimo, Kelowna, Lakehead, Regina, Westwood, Calgary



2026 CUC National Lay Chaplaincy Committee 2/2

Central and Eastern Regions

Name	Home Congregation	Representing
Anne Coward hatton_coward@yahoo.ca 613-653-2017	Kingston Unitarian Fellowship	Fredericton, Lakeshore, Montreal, Ottawa Fellowship/Ottawa First, Peterborough, Guelph, Grand River, Don Heights, Huronia, Olinda, Elora-Fergus, Northwest
Guy Belleperche guy.belleperche@gmail.com 343-961-9014	First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa	Halifax, North Hatley, Durham, Hamilton, Kingston, Mississauga, Sarnia-Port Huron, London, Niagara, First Toronto, Neighbourhood
TBD We are actively seeking one or two more Central and Eastern committee members		

Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada Liaison: Nicoline Guerrier



Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committees

- Recruit, select, support and evaluate lay chaplains, be informed on training opportunities through the CUC and otherwise
- Speak on behalf of lay chaplains to the congregational Board of Trustees and congregations in general
- Oversee the work of lay chaplains
- Ensure CUC policies are followed and guidelines respected
- Sets congregational fees and policies



Contract Highlights

- Contract between a UU Lay Chaplain and a congregation or fellowship is for a 6 year term
- Renewed annually by congregation
- Should cover accountability, confidentiality, role clarity, professional conduct, record of services, fees to CUC, attendance at workshops, participation in the congregational Lay Chaplaincy committee



CUC Licensing Process

See the CUC Website, under the Tab: Congregations and Leaders, pull down to Lay Chaplaincy

The steps are:

1. Congregation conducts a search and recommends potential candidate(s) to congregational Board.
2. **Candidate is affirmed by a vote during a congregational meeting**
3. Application is sent to the CUC National Lay Chaplaincy Committee

*Two online forms required:

Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committee submits the [Lay Chaplain Endorsement Form by Congregations](#).

The Lay Chaplain Candidate submits the [Lay Chaplain Application for New Lay Chaplains](#).

The National LC Committee will review all these to ensure that the necessary information has been submitted. They will not proceed with approval until both forms are received

4. Once the National Committee approves the candidate, the National Committee will communicate the approval to the congregation, and the congregation. Then the congregation can **sign a contract** to appoint the LC and send a copy to the CUC.
5. Either the CUC or the congregation (depending on the province) can apply for a license to solemnize marriages for the new UU Lay Chaplain

The Lay Chaplain can't perform weddings until they get a license, but they can perform all other rites of passage in accordance with their congregation's policies



Evaluation of Lay Chaplains



- Purpose: Maintain quality, highlight strengths, respond quickly to any problems
- Components: self-reflection, observation, client input
- Areas: Professional conduct, communication skills, working with others, administration and record keeping, professional development, accountability



Role of the Retired Lay Chaplain, 1/2



- The position of the Lay Chaplain lies with the congregation.
- When you enter, you remember that you will be giving it back.
- The term is limited to 6 years so that more people can have an opportunity to benefit from becoming a UU Lay Chaplain.



Role of the Retired Lay Chaplain, 2/2

- When asked to perform a memorial or child dedication, the retired LC should decline, and refer to the present LC.
- May be involved in a supporting role.
- Should not wear a robe or stole, nor use the title UU Lay Chaplain or Officiant, nor accept payment.
- Must return license to the Province, and all documentation to the congregation or fellowship



Emergency Backup

- Each congregation should establish a backup plan; and have more than one Lay Chaplain – the recommended minimum is 2
- Information should be shared so that one can take over for another in case of illness, etc.
- Type of ceremony, date, place and time, contact information for clients and venue
- Where the service script is to be found



Outreach

- Bridal Fair, wedding venues, service providers
- Baby fairs
- Funeral homes
- Website review: Can you be found?
- Is your information clear and appealing?
- Do you have a brochure?



Rites of Passage for Lay Chaplains

- Installation
- Retirement
- Meaningful for you and for your congregation
- Consider presenting an annual service for your congregation



Self Care for Lay Chaplains

- Don't put this last in your personal practice (even though it is almost last in this guide!)
- Support systems: colleagues, committee, minister (or neighbouring minister)
- Be mindful of confidentiality
- Journaling or other personal spiritual practice
- Identify your own personal triggering issues



Let's review: The qualities of a Lay Chaplain

- Working knowledge of UU
- Maturity and ability to cope in a crisis
- Communicates in a spirit of empathy, helpfulness, concern
- Effective public speaking voice and manner



- Ability to conduct rites of passage with sensitivity and acceptance of varied spiritual, cultural and religious perspectives
- Sense of personal responsibility and commitment, independent worker, team member with minister and congregation
- Self-presentation and conduct which favourably reflect on the congregation and denomination



What happens next?

Are you planning to become a UU Lay Chaplain or serve on a Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Committee?

1. Download the Congregational Lay Chaplaincy Program Manual from the CUC website [here](#) and read it
2. **Register for the next Basic Training:** Designing and Leading Rites of Passage: see the CUC events calendar or reach out to your congregation's liaison on the National CUC LC Committee (slide 22)
3. If you wish to become a Lay Chaplain, or as a Congregational LC Committee member, you are looking to appoint one, **follow the steps on the CUC website** here: <https://cuc.ca/congregations-leaders/lay-chaplaincy/>
4. **If you are going to become a Lay Chaplain, YOU MUST complete the Quiz** associated with this self study guide. The links is on the Lay Chaplains Resources page at cuc.ca or you can contact the National LCC directly via lcc@cuc.ca Completing this self study and the accompanying quiz are MANDATORY for Lay Chaplains, and are considered part of the basic training.
5. **Optional but highly recommended:** Attend one of the 3 Zoom Lay Chaplaincy Chats that happen annually, hosted by the Lay Chaplaincy committee – see the Events listings on the CUC website or reach out to your congregational liaison to the National committee for dates. This can be done at any time after reviewing this self study guide.



Go now in Peace.

