



Foothills Unitarian

LOVE UNITES US ALL

1815 Yorktown Avenue
Fort Collins, CO 80526
Phone: 970-493-5906
hello@foothillsuu.org
foothillsuu.org

Restoring Wholeness

In January 2017, multiple women in the congregation disclosed to church leadership that the music director was having simultaneous romantic and sexual relationships with married congregants. He lied to these women, telling each one that they were his only relationship at church. He urged them to keep the relationship secret, to which they agreed.

These were not consensual relationships, as consent is not possible when one party is lying about foundational aspects of a relationship. Furthermore, a sexual relationship between any religious professional and a congregant over whom they have power is misconduct, as is violating the covenants of existing relationships. The music director was aware that engaging in sexual relationships with congregants violated the Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network code of professional practice and was grounds for termination.

When confronted by the ministers and members of the board, the music director confirmed the relationships had happened, and Foothills terminated his employment immediately. Before church leadership could inform the congregation, he wrote to the members of the choir, denying any relationships and claiming the senior minister had orchestrated his firing.

The now-former music director then hired an attorney. As a result, the church spent more than \$20,000 defending against his threat of a six-figure lawsuit, and church leadership was constrained from speaking in any greater detail about the misconduct. A number of congregants believed his denials and accusations and resigned from Foothills.

As a part of legal negotiations, in April 2017, the Foothills Board offered the former music director a path toward a restored relationship with the congregation. They



Foothills Unitarian

LOVE UNITES US ALL

1815 Yorktown Avenue
Fort Collins, CO 80526
Phone: 970-493-5906
hello@foothillsuu.org
foothillsuu.org

requested that he offer a public statement of the truth of his misconduct and that he release Foothills from all legal claims. He refused this offer.

In early 2018, the former music director sent a letter to members of the board and staff in which he acknowledged the relationships, apologized for lying about them, and articulated his experience of hurt by the church's disclosure. In this letter, he also claimed the relationships were consensual and – by implication– were not misconduct. He also did not release the congregation from legal claims; as a result, the board was advised by their attorney not to respond to or amplify his email.

The relationship between Foothills and the former music director remains unresolved. It is Foothills' hope that the former music director will fully acknowledge the many layers of harm to the congregation caused by his misconduct, his denials, and his ongoing minimizing of it. Foothills has also been advised that before engaging in a process like this, that there be a formal release of future legal claims, which will allow us to begin the process of reconciliation.

The disclosure process with our Music Director led to a woman coming forward in August of that year. She'd seen how the church handled the misconduct and felt it was safe to return to Foothills after being away for some time. Upon hearing congregants speak glowingly of our former minister, who had retired in 2014, she felt that she needed to share her traumatic experience of misconduct by the former senior minister with the current Senior Minister, Rev. Gretchen Haley, in part because she worried that there might be other victims.

She reported that in the early 2000s, our previous senior minister, Rev. Marc Salkin, had invited her to meet to discuss her thoughts on a recent sermon and propositioned her for a romantic relationship in a letter, which she kept and later shared with Rev. Haley. She left the congregation shortly after being propositioned, and she and her children lost their religious home. The Board received this information in the fall of 2017, and attempted to meet with Rev. Salkin about it in the hopes of a shared restorative process.



Foothills Unitarian

LOVE UNITES US ALL

1815 Yorktown Avenue
Fort Collins, CO 80526
Phone: 970-493-5906
hello@foothillsuu.org
foothillsuu.org

Rev. Salkin declined to meet, and instead hired an attorney. After a lengthy discernment process, the Board decided to disclose his misconduct to the congregation as well.

This second disclosure process led to two other women coming forward, stating that the former senior minister had propositioned them in similar ways, in the same timeframe.

These advances were especially inappropriate because he was married and his wife was the director of adult religious education at Foothills, deeply complicating any reporting of his misconduct. There was no other minister on staff at that time.

We are a congregation that understands that people make mistakes, break covenant, and sometimes misconduct. Misconduct by religious professionals is a betrayal of trust, and has far-reaching impact, requiring an intentional process of healing not just individually, but collectively. It is important that each person who joins in our covenant understands this part of our history, and becomes a part of our ongoing journey of wholeness and healing.

Since these discoveries in recent years, we have built structures to support our leaders and prevent this from happening in our policies. We have clarified how to recognize and report misconduct. We are a congregation that has committed to receiving the truth, being transparent about violations, and taking action to protect and heal our community. We want to hear about such violations should they occur and we commit to responding compassionately and effectively.

To make a report of misconduct, please contact the Senior Minister, Rev. Gretchen Haley, or the Board of Trustees. If you would prefer to make a report to someone outside of Foothills, you can contact the UUA at (617) 948-6462, and find more information at this link: <https://www.uua.org/safe/misconduct>.