

Lay Pastoral Care Trainee Guide



We grow in search of wisdom,
We care in support of community,
We act in service of justice.

First UU Church of Richmond
1000 Blanton Ave
Richmond, VA 23221

Dear Lay Pastoral Care Trainee:

Welcome to our Lay Pastoral Care training program. We extend to you the care and concern of the First Universalist Church of Richmond. This training program has evolved with input from Unitarian Universalists from many congregations.

Following the attack on the Pentagon on 9/11, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fairfax started a program designed to help the congregants of their church come to terms with the tragedy and deal with other challenges in their lives. Their goal was to provide comfort, hope, and relief to members of their church suffering from personal loss and pain in their lives. In April of 2003, they trained a team at the First UU of Richmond which was the beginning of our Lay Pastoral Program.

The goal of our Lay Pastoral Care Program is to provide comfort, relief, and support to our members struggling with personal loss and pain, isolation, illness, and other challenges in their lives.

This is your manual; use it as a starting point as you begin the process of becoming a Lay Pastoral Care Associate. Personalize your manual by adding your own ideas so it becomes an even more valuable resource.

Please feel free to email us if you have questions.

Sincerely,

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Table of Contents

The Lay Pastoral Care Program is.....	4
The Lay Pastoral Care Program is not.....	5
Why Do Congregants Need to Be Seen by Lay Pastoral Care?	6
The Lay Pastoral Care Associate is.....	7
The Lay Pastoral Care Associate is not.....	8
How Lay Pastoral Care Compares	9
Confidentiality.....	10
Listening Fully.....	11
Companioning	12
The Practice of Active Listening	13
Things to Notice When Active Listening	14
Getting Comfortable in Your New Role.....	15
Tips for Virtual Lay Pastoral Care	16
How Matches Are Made	17
How to be Present with a Congregant when Active Listening is not Practical	18
Logistics: From the Appointment to the Synergy Meeting.....	19
Evaluation of Lay Pastoral Care Training.....	21



The Lay Pastoral Care Program is...

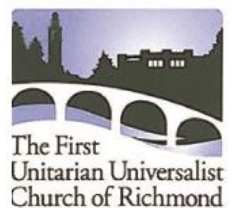
LPC is a ministerial program to provide a confidential, caring presence to congregants undergoing stressful life challenges.

- **An extension of the Minister's own pastoral care presence**
- **A group of Lay Pastoral Care Associates (LPCA) recruited by, and reporting directly to the minister – a unique ministry independent of the staff and committee structure of the church**
- **A program visible to, and accessible by the congregation**
 - Maintains LPCA presence at vespers or other worship services
 - Creates recognizable name tags or pins for LPCA
 - Inducts and recognizes LPCA at Sunday services
- **A system for continuing LPCA training and feedback**
 - Chaired by an experienced LPCA, reporting to the minister
 - Mentored by the minister
 - Stresses strict confidentiality, practiced throughout the program
 - Provides initial, basic training (1-2days)
 - Meets monthly ("Synergy,") reporting and discussing congregant contacts (1-2hr)
 - Continues training at each monthly meeting (~1hr)
 - Provides self-support of members' own life stresses
 - Discusses questions arising from congregant contacts
 - Quantifies LPC effort – recording number and length of contacts (typically~1hr/wk; phone, or face-to-face)
- **A means for maintaining a sustained connection between the congregants and the church, especially when service attendance becomes impractical or impossible**
- **A program that provides a structure for responding to life events or emergencies that affect the congregation:**
 - National crises (e.g., 9/11, mass shootings, pandemic)
 - Funerals and congregational losses
 - Support for UU community at large (e.g., UU's being treated at Richmond hospitals or participating in protests or other social justice activities)



The Lay Pastoral Care Program is not...

- **A program providing practical, logistical service** (this aspect of congregant support is the function of Team Kindness at First UU Richmond)
- **A “support group” for congregants**
- **A source of specific (especially professional) advice**
 - Legal
 - Medical
 - Financial
 - Psychological



Why Do Congregants Need to Be Seen by Lay Pastoral Care?

Life challenges that leave us feeling very alone and overwhelmed, or demand great contemplation.

All congregants experience stress, but prolonged, intense, and/or multiple sources of stress may warrant Lay Pastoral Care.

These sources of stress *may* include:

- The death of a close friend, family member, or caregiver
- Family member or partner relationship changes (including separation and divorce)
- Employment changes (including job loss or work environment adjustment)
- Serious injury or illness
- Challenges in building a family (including birth, adoption, miscarriage, pregnancy, and post-partum depression)
- Changes in household structure such as relatives moving in or out
- Changes or questioning of gender identity
- Discrimination and prejudice
- Threats to security or safety
- Activism
- Isolation
- Imprisonment or jail, or re-entry



The Lay Pastoral Care Associate is...

The LPCA is an extension of the Minister.

- Distinct from other caring members of the congregation
- Represents the church as the Minister would
- Is responsible only to the Minister
- Is an addition to, not a substitute for, the Minister

An LPCA provides care that is:

- **Sustained.** Conducts regular, dependable, progressive meetings and conversations that can continue to explore a line of thought.
- **Trained.** Knows how to listen, recognize needs, be sensitive and empathetic, guide or prompt spiritual thinking, and support needs for spiritual practices.
- **Confidential.** Accepts secrets, admissions, or other non-public thoughts.

The LPCA is:

- A recorder of life events, attitudes, attributes, desires for end- of-life, and other recollections
- A non-judgmental listener for thoughtful discussions, perhaps biased toward bringing forward the values of our faith
- Actively focused on the needs of the congregant rather than their personal dilemmas/situations

The LPCA is supported by co-chairs and supervising minister who:

- As needed, are available for questions via phone or email
- Companion with the LPCA on their initial congregant visit
- Coordinate monthly meetings to provide ongoing training and development

The LPCA commits their time to care for congregants and grow as part of the LPC team:

- Attending at least 6 of 9 monthly meetings per year (no meetings in May, July, or December)
- Approximately 5 to 8 hours per month to provide sustained lay pastoral care support to a congregant



The Lay Pastoral Care Associate is not...

- Practical solver of everyday problems, a “fixer”
- Chat partner, unless it opens routes to deeper discussions; sometimes, chat may be the only communication possible
- Cheerleader, Pollyanna, “yes-man,” absolver
- Decision-maker
- Judge or approver
- Professional counselor (though trained to recognize when such services are needed)
- Searcher for own spiritual beliefs



How Lay Pastoral Care Compares

Psychotherapist/ Counselor

- Treats mental health concerns
- Helps individual to change feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
- Helps individual to ease conflicts
- Needs a professional license
- Provides professional mental health counseling

Lay Pastoral Care Associate

- Should be trained in lay pastoral care, ministry of presence
- Offers to hear congregant's feelings and problems
- Visits with congregant in a neutral setting, their home, hospital, or a safe and accepting environment
- Provides space for congregant to talk about current problems so that a greater understanding may be achieved
- Refers congregant to a church minister if they need professional assistance
- Does not need a license and is not a therapist or counselor
- Is under the auspices of the minister, who meets with the team monthly
- Associate makes a commitment to be a supportive presence over an extended time.

Team Kindness Member

- Is not trained in lay pastoral care
- A ministry of action
- Provides phone calls and cards of care and sympathy to congregants
- Sends birthday cards to church members

On short-term basis:

- Provides meals
- Helps with shopping
- Provides transportation to and from professional or medical appointments
- Runs errands
- Writes notes or letters
- Makes phone calls
- Provides childcare
- Pays occasional social visits



Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is the foundation of the Lay Pastoral Care relationship which relies on mutual trust. People can grow when they are able to share concerns and fears with someone they trust.
- During synergy, the associate should not say their congregant's name or mention any information that would reveal the congregant's identity.
- The associate cannot reveal the lay pastoral care relationship or anything that is said EVEN when the congregant reveals it themselves.
- The Lay Pastoral Care Associate should share serious concerns privately with the Supervising Minister or Co-chairs such as:
 - Indications that the congregant is contemplating injury to self or others
 - Signs of undiagnosed depression



Listening Fully

What if...

you could meet with someone who has respect for your spiritual needs, who cares about your distress, who is a part of your church community, and would hold your situation in strict confidence?

What if...

you could explain everything to someone who wants to hear the whole thing all the way through, the entire range of your experience, and you could finish your thoughts without interruption?

What if...

you didn't have to hear about how so-and-so handled it such-and-such a way, or get any other well-intentioned but sometimes irrelevant advice?

What if...

you had compassionate support and the time to talk completely through the issue?



Companioning

A ministry of presence

- Put everything aside before you begin visits so you are fully present to your congregant.
- Stand WITH your congregant as they struggle with challenges so they know they are not alone.
- Convey unconditional positive regard, empathy, compassion, assurance, affirmation, understanding, and acceptance for your congregant.
- Talk about the feelings and the process of wrestling with the challenge. Resist the temptation to fix or cure the problem.
- Assist your congregant in identifying community resources that may be helpful.
- Create a space in which the congregant can acknowledge the multiple feelings they may have about their issues.
- Don't rush the process; progress will happen when the time is right.
- Part of being caring is being honest; there may be times when you'll want to reflect your concerns to your congregant about ideas they may have.
- Be dependable. Keep appointments and confidentiality.



The Practice of Active Listening

1. Listen to understand what is meant, not to ready yourself to reply to, contradict, or refute the person speaking. This is extremely important as a general attitude.
2. Knowing what is meant involves more than the dictionary meanings of words spoken. It involves, among other things, the speaker's tone of voice, their facial expressions, and their overall behavior.
3. Observe all this and be careful not to interpret too quickly. Look for clues as to what the speaker is trying to say, putting yourself (as best you can) in the speaker's shoes, seeing the world as the speaker sees it.
4. Put aside your own views and opinions for the time being. Realize that you cannot listen to yourself inwardly and at the same time listen outwardly to the speaker.
5. Listening happens faster than talking. Be patient when you are listening.
6. The average person speaks about 125 words per minute but can listen to about 400 words per minute. The effective listener does not jump ahead of the speaker but gives time to tell the story.
7. Do not prepare your answer while you listen. Get the whole message before deciding what to say in return. The last sentence of the speaker may give a new slant to what was said before.
8. Show interest and alertness. This stimulates the speaker and improves sharing.
9. Do not interrupt. When you ask questions, it is to secure more information not to trap or force the speaker into a corner.
10. Expect the speaker's language to differ from the way you would say the "same thing" yourself. Do not quibble about words but try to get at what is meant.



Things to Notice When Active Listening

Look for...

- Lack of eye contact
- Nervous actions
 - Fidgeting
 - Nail-biting
 - Handwringing
 - Fiddling with hair, clothes, or a small object (e.g., pen)
 - Jiggling foot
- Body language that signals defensiveness or withdrawal
 - Turning body away
 - Hands in pockets
 - Crossed arms

Listen for...

- Nervous laughter
- Making light of a serious topic
- Overtalking (especially about casual topics instead of reason for visit)
- Unnecessary apologizing
- Changes in tone of voice that signal a shift in emotions
- Abrupt changes in topic
- Reacts defensively in certain conversations
- Sudden revelation just before end of visit
- Reluctance or eagerness for visit to end



Getting Comfortable in Your New Role

Learning with the team

- Attend monthly LPC meetings for the training sessions and to learn from situations and advice shared during synergy.
- Deepen relationships with other lay pastoral care associates in social settings, taking care not to share anything confidential about congregants in your or their care.
- When you have questions or concerns, reach out to one of the co-chairs.

Learning independently

- Read about lay pastoral care, pastoral care, and topics about which you'd like to improve your knowledge/skills. One suggestion is
- Practice active listening in your personal relationships.
- Participate in a *Living the Pledge* workshop, a 12-hour workshop offered periodically in the Richmond area to help people who've taken the Richmond Pledge to End Racism live their pledge.
- Familiarize yourself with support services in your locality and the broader Richmond area.
- As you read poems or meditations, gather those that may be helpful in lay pastoral care.
- Take *Spiritual Care Training, Part 1: Discernment*, offered through the UUA (free).
- Take *Spiritual Care Training, Part 2: The Art of Spiritual Care*, offered through the UUA (\$30)
- Periodically self-assess your comfort/readiness to work with a congregant experiencing various challenges – and seek to strengthen yourself in which you are uncomfortable or lack experience.
- If you haven't filled out your own memorial planning form, do so to see what you learn/notice.
- Attend related workshops or other training opportunities in-person or online.

Centering and preparation

- Strengthen your centering/calming/mindfulness practices so that you have techniques to draw from when you need to settle your mind and focus your attention before visiting a congregant.
- Put together a container or tote bag with items useful in your lay pastoral care work, such as a battery-operated tealight candle, a small notebook, and a collection of favorite readings.
- Save inspirational or contemplative music or hymns to your smartphone to play during congregant visits when appropriate.



Tips for Virtual Lay Pastoral Care

Be flexible about format

- What works for one visit may not be the best choice for the next visit.
- Cards, letters, and postcards are all viable, time-tested methods of connection that still work. If a congregant prefers, you can send a digital card instead of a paper one.
- Zoom and similar services approximate face-to-face visits when those aren't possible. However, Zoom may not always be the best option, particularly if a congregant struggles with technology, doesn't have the necessary technology, or has been Zooming for their whole work/school day.
- If you meet via Zoom with a congregant who has hearing difficulties, use the best microphone or headset you can. Also encourage the congregant to use headphones or an external speaker.
- Phone calls provide a break from the screen but may also be difficult for those with hearing challenges. If you connect with your congregant via phone, consider integrating music or singing.
- Text messages are a quick way to let a congregant know that you care and are thinking of them, particularly if it's difficult for them to set aside enough time for a call or Zoom meeting.
- Emails offer a way to listen to someone who'd prefer to write about how they're feeling instead of talk about it. They're also another way to send words of encouragement and support.
- If a congregant communicates via American Sign Language, the Wavello app (for smartphones) is one way to connect with them and have a sign language interpreter on the call too.
- Be creative and discuss what makes your congregant feel most connected. They may prefer to type into a shared Google Doc, make a digital photo album of memories – or something else!

Develop rituals to mark your time together as special, as spiritual

- Offer an opening/closing reading, invite your congregant to bring a reading, or take turns.
- Use a chime, meditation bowl, or other sound to mark the beginning/end of your meeting – or perhaps mark a time of reflection midway through a visit.
- Listen to a hymn – or sing a hymn – together during your visit.
- Pray together if this is a spiritual practice you share.
- Give each other “hugs” at the close of your meeting by hugging yourselves.
- If you're on Zoom or something similar
 - Light a chalice or candle. You might even log in to the meeting separately with your smartphone so you can show the chalice or candle with that.
 - Use a special background or wear a special hat or accessory
 - Hold out your open hand, palm toward the camera, and invite your congregant to do the same, as if you could touch palm-to-palm.
- Be creative and invent unique, personalized rituals with your congregant.



How Matches Are Made

- Congregants may contact a minister or a co-chair to request Lay Pastoral Care, or the minister may identify a congregant as needing care.
- If an LPCA finds out about a congregant needing care from either the congregant who needs help or someone else, it should be discussed with a co-chair.
- The co-chairs, in consultation with the supervising minister, identify the LPCA best suited to help the congregant based on strengths, interests, and location.
- One of the co-chairs calls the identified associate to explain the circumstances and be sure the associate can reach out to the congregant by phone within 24 hours.
- The co-chair then calls the congregant to let them know which LPCA will be contacting them.
- The LPCA calls the congregant within 24 hours and arranges the first visit to be held within less than one week.



How to be Present with a Congregant when Active Listening is not Practical

- Mention that you bring greetings from the congregation.
- Read the church newsletter.
- Read selections (lyrics, responsive readings) from hymnals.
- Play a podcast or recording of Sunday service.
- Research congregant's previous contributions in the congregation to use as a point of conversation. For example, if congregant was on the Board of Directors, check past minutes for information about his or her contributions to the church and read those sections to the congregant.
- Bring a chalice to touch, hold, see, and light.
- Show photos from daily life in prior decades when congregant was younger.
- Bring a fruit or vegetable to see, touch, and eat.
- Bring a seasonal nature item to see, touch, hold.
- Read to the congregant from his or her library.
- Show the congregant photos from his or her photo albums.
- Bring something pleasing to touch.
- Take congregants around their living quarters so they can give a tour and describe their belongings and the stories that go with them. Help them touch items they may not normally be able to reach.
- Bring recordings of UU hymns to hear and sing along with.
- Bring in art object for the congregant to see, touch, hold.
- Show congregant church membership directory photographs from a range of years during the congregant's membership.
- Your loving, caring presence and tone of voice will be received probably more than you can tell.



Logistics: From the Appointment to the Synergy Meeting

1. Maintain confidentiality so that others near you or the congregant during calls or visits will not become aware of the Lay Pastoral Care (LPC) relationship. The only other people who should know are ministers, church staff who the Minister has authorized, and the LPC co-chairs. **Note:** The relationship may be slightly less confidential in the case of dementia.
2. When you are matched with a congregant, call them within 24 hours and schedule the first appointment to be held within a week.
3. Give them your phone number and let them know when it's okay to call.
4. Reschedule your appointment if you become sick with anything contagious.
5. Meet on neutral ground that provides privacy.
6. During the first meeting with the congregant:
 - Explain what Lay Pastoral Care is
 - Explain the confidentiality of the relationship
 - Listen and provide companionship
 - Establish a plan of the frequency and duration of the visits (generally weekly for an hour)
 - Schedule the next visit
7. After the first visit:
 - Note the data needed for synergy meetings (# of visits, # of hours, etc.)
 - Record the key points discussed with your congregant
8. Call an LPC co-chair if you have questions that must be answered before the next synergy meeting
9. Protect this relationship
 - Focus on listening fully
 - Set boundaries
 - In general, transportation, meals, and similar needs are met by others in the congregation
10. Attend the monthly training and synergy meetings with the other associates and minister(s):
 - Give the group a little information about the circumstances for your congregant without revealing identifying information
 - Ask the group for help if you have questions
 - Allow the group to offer suggestions
 - Participate in helping your fellow associates with their congregants
 - Take notes during training so that you can refer to them later as needed



Logistics: From the Appointment to the Synergy Meeting (continued)

11. As the congregant begins to come to terms with their challenges, you will sense when it's time to conclude the LPC relationship
 - Discuss with your congregant and determine their readiness and the best way to taper visits
 - Discuss any closure plans at synergy meeting
 - You may find a deeper connection to your congregant that keeps you in touch long after the supervised LPC relationship has closed—and this is normal



Evaluation of Lay Pastoral Care Training

Most helpful segments and why

1.

2.

Least helpful segments and why

1.

2.

Please provide feedback about the trainers

Overall suggestions to improve training

