

## *Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Topeka* Congregational Record



The Unitarian Universalist Association declares and affirms its special responsibility, and that of its member congregations and organizations, to promote the full participation of persons in all of its and their activities and in the full range of human endeavor without regard to race, color, sex, disability, affectional or sexual orientation, age, or national origin.

### **Congregational Record of:**

UU Fellowship of Topeka  
Topeka, KS

Website address: <http://www.uuft.org>

Membership: 155

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### **Position Information**

**Religious Education Position title:** Director of Religious Education

**Starting date:** immediately

**Position hours per week:** 40

**Compensation Consultant:** None

**RE Credential Level Desired:** No RE Credentialing Preference

(Indicate Insurance premium, percentage or other calculations)

**Salary:** \$25,000

**Vacation:** 8 weeks

**Study Leave:** 2 weeks

### **Congregation Information**

**Average Sunday Attendance:** 125

**Children's Enrollment:** 57

**Average Children's Attendance:** 40

**Youth Enrollment:** 17

**Average Youth Attendance:** 9

**RE program budget current fiscal year:** \$2,200

**RE program budget previous fiscal year:** \$2,496

**Number of Sunday Services:** 1

**Number of Sunday RE sessions:** 1

**Number of Other sessions during the week:** 0

**Months per year church at full operating capacity:** 10

**APF Contribution:** \$4,500

**Fair Share Congregation:** No

**Compensation Consultant:** None

**Surrounding Community:**

Affordability. Topeka's overall cost of living index is 92.2, more than 10 percent below the national urban area average, particularly in the housing market which is 83.8.

Intellectual Capital. There are 60,000 university students within a 60-mile radius of Topeka. With Topeka's own Washburn University flanked by Kansas University to the east and Kansas State University to the west Topeka draws young talent to make up a diverse and highly skilled workforce. Washburn Institute of Technology provides specialized training for the manufacturers and businesses in the area. The area is a hub for research with a focus in life sciences, bioscience, and animal science.

Education. Shawnee County is home to four distinct school districts and a number of private schools, all providing outstanding learning opportunities. Students here consistently outperform their peers across the country. ACT and SAT scores are well above the national average. Students can participate in international studies programs and a wide variety of other academic, music, sports, and drama activities.

Health Care. As the center for health care in northeast Kansas, our two general hospitals and five specialized hospitals provide highly ranked and innovative medical care and services.

Entrepreneurial Spirit. Entrepreneurs find acceptance and encouragement through programs sponsored by GO Topeka's Entrepreneurial and Minority Women Business Development program and Washburn University's School of Business. Specialized programs offer training and consultation for new and existing entrepreneurs.

Cultural Life. The arts are alive and well in Topeka with over 20 galleries, myriad performing and visual artists show casing their work during First Friday Art Walk events, to the NOTO Arts District that offers studio space and display opportunities in a collaborative environment. Musical events are numerous including the Sunflower Music Festival an annual series of orchestra concerts, chamber music evenings, educational projects and the Topeka Jazz Workshop Concert Series. Topeka is home to several museums including the Kansas Museum of History and the newly created Kansas Children's Discovery Center.

Recreation. Topeka is home to over 100 parks and green spaces. Gage Park features the Topeka Zoo, a miniature train, an outdoor theater and the Reinisch Rose Garden. Lake Shawnee is a 700 acre park and is an ideal location to swim, fish, boat, camp, golf, water-ski, sail, or row. The Shunga Trail and the Lake Shawnee Trail around Lake Shawnee offer paved paths for outdoor enthusiasts.

Young Talent. Bright and energetic young professionals find a community ready to welcome their talents and involvement. The Fast Forward program through the Topeka Chamber is designed just for YP's and offers educational, social, networking and philanthropic activities.

Livability. Just last year, Kiplinger Finance Magazine designated Topeka one of the top ten cities for the next decade. Neighborhoods, quality schools, civic and cultural activities, economic incentives combine to make Topeka one of the best small metros in the United States.

### **How and when was the congregation founded:**

UUFT was founded in 1961, when a growing number of Topekans wanted a UU presence in the community and liberal Religious Education for their children. (There had been a Unitarian church in Topeka from the late 19th century until about 1942.) The fledgling UUFT met in various rental spaces until 1967, when a member financed the purchase of a small, ranch-style home on a large lot on the far western outskirts of Topeka. Today our fine building wraps around that original structure, and the location is a prime spot on a busy street!

**Note the three or four most important events in the congregation's history:**

Purchasing and renovating our 21st street location (which led to stability and better facilities), building a Fellowship Hall in 1986 (it greatly expanded the capacity of the group), calling an extension minister in 1993 (he helped us grow, and further stabilize), and building our new addition in 2009 (the children were our priority, and the 5 RE classrooms and 2 bathrooms are the main part of the addition).

**Congregation's mission:**

To encourage and support personal religious journeys and ethical living by providing a community that consistently embraces and applies the Unitarian Universalist Principles.

**Provide your profile of the DRE you seek:**

Our ideal candidate would pair a love of children with some knowledge about their needs and developmental stages. S/he would have an understanding of UU principles and faith development. We seek someone who has experience working with children, and prefer someone with experience organizing a religious education program for kids in nursery through high school. Our DRE will have primary responsibility for recruiting and supporting volunteers and training them as needed. S/he must be able to work with committees of volunteers, and have the ability to develop and manage a budget for the RE program. Mediation skills are helpful, as is some experience working with children with special needs. A college degree is preferred but not required, but excellent communication skills are a must. UUFT subscribes to the Safe Congregation standards of the UUA, and all applicants must pass a background check.

**Provide your profile of your congregation:**

The UUFT is a vibrant congregation of about 160 adult members and 80 children. We are economically and theologically diverse, and include ages across the spectrum. Our members and friends range in belief from humanist to earth-based spirituality, and people are genuinely able to celebrate diversity most of the time rather than merely tolerate it. We are proudly a Welcoming Congregation, reaching out to GLBT people and their families. We have an attitude of encouraging racial and ethnic diversity, and we are progressing towards a multicultural reality by including that goal in our 5-year plan. The Fellowship has a long history of supporting and valuing our children and their programs. When we raised money for a building addition in 2008 our children were the first budgetary priority. We expanded our formerly small RE space into 5 large and well-equipped classrooms, and added two bathrooms in the RE wing. We also own and maintain a small adjoining facility for middle and high school youth. Our congregation is quite active in social justice activities for all ages, and is committed to fair trade issues (our coffee and tea are all fairly traded, and we host a Global Village Bazaar each December). This year we are focusing on immigration issues, and ethical eating as it pertains to food access and poverty issues. Each children's class chooses their own stewardship project every year, and those projects often take the form of outreach and social justice. Our kids have supported the local humane society, sent kids from Uganda to high school through the Invisible Children program, raised money and books for a library in rural Paraguay (when one of our young adults was

serving there in the Peace Corps), cleaned the shoreline of a local lake, and also performed service work in and around the Fellowship. The preschool and elementary children join the worship service for the first fifteen minutes each week, and are present for the chalice lighting, a hymn, the offering, and a story for all ages. We have four or five multigenerational services each year. The Fellowship sponsors and provides free or low cost meeting space for many community groups including the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, a Buddhist Sangha, the Spiral Scouts (an open and affirming scouting program for boys and girls), and 12-step groups. For 50 years the UUFT has provided a liberal religious voice in the Topeka community, and we are committed to continued growth in membership, in programming, and in spiritual maturity.

**Does the religious educator have responsibility for any youth group(s)?** Not as leader/facilitator, but in recruiting leaders, setting policy, supporting Cons.

**Does the religious educator have responsibility for providing Sunday morning childcare (infants/babies/toddlers)?** Hiring staff to do so.

**At other times?** sometimes, for special events.

**Does the religious educator have responsibility for administering the adult religious education program:** No.

**Does the religious educator have responsibility for supervising any staff? If yes, describe:**  
No, except for a large number of volunteer teachers!

**Religious Educator role, function and relationship in the Congregation:**

DRE is primarily responsible for the administration of the Children's and youth RE programs, and reports to the minister.

**Religious Educator role, function and relationship with the Parish or Senior Minister:**

The minister and religious educator work closely in a collaborative, collegial relationship. The DRE has primary responsibility for administering the RE program, discussing issues of policy with the minister and the board. The minister directly supervises the religious educator.

**Religious Educator role, function and relationship with the Staff Ministers:**

UUFT has a single minister.

**Religious Educator role, function and relationship with other paid staff:**

Other paid staff are administrative, who supports the DRE with clerical help, and a custodian. The DRE is responsible for hiring nursery staff.

**Current congregational life and Religious Education**

**Does the congregation have a mission -- not a mission statement, but a glowing coal at its center -- and if so, what is it?**

To encourage and support personal religious journeys and ethical living by providing a community that consistently embraces and applies the Unitarian Universalist Principles.

### **What is the mission of the religious education program?**

The UUFT, as part of its mission for all members and friends, offers vital and inviting options for religious education with emphasis on Unitarian Universalism's seven Foundational Principles.

### **Describe the religious education programs for children, youth and adults:**

The cornerstone of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Topeka (UUFT) mission is to “encourage and support personal religious journeys.” Religious education is a fundamental element of support for personal religious journeys. Religious education is available to all from the time they enter our community to the time in which they pass beyond our community. This plan outlines the stages of the religious journey available within our Fellowship and provides general guidelines for program development to meet the needs of each stage.

The first steps along the spiritual journey are from birth to age 5. This is a time when spiritual growth is promoted by providing a nurturing, caring environment within our community and developing awareness of the church environment. The focus is on creating spaces in our community for the positive interactions between parents and children, as well as other members of our community.

To meet the early needs of young children we have established the “Family Zone” in our sanctuary. This space invites families with small children to sit together where some limited movement and quiet play can be allowed. It also provides others who may be easily distracted to sit away from this beloved group. This space is also strategically located to provide easy access to our Family Worship Space; a separate room equipped with child friendly toys and activities as well as a loudspeaker so the worship service can be heard. There is a plan to install a large video screen so that the service may be observed as well. Additionally, we provide a well-staffed nursery with pre-school supervision.

The second stage of the spiritual journey occurs through the ages of 6 to 12. These are developmental ages requiring a more structured curriculum. Children will be gathered in age appropriate groupings. The learning environment will include stories, discussion, arts and crafts, hands-on projects, games and music. The focus during these years will be on learning our Unitarian Universalist principles and how they relate to us as individuals, to our local community and the larger global community. Though the primary emphasis of our curricula will be on Unitarian Universalism and its guiding principles, Jewish and Christian beliefs and other world religions will be integrated. Also at this age stewardship projects are introduced with practical experience being at the heart of this study and action.

The next two stages of the spiritual journey are largely transitional in nature. The first of these transitional stages typically includes ages 13 and 14. This is the beginning of a time of tremendous personal physical and emotional change. The focus of religious education during this time will be taking the UU principles learned in the earlier classes and putting them in more action oriented activities, such as social justice and community service projects and visiting with other faiths and religious organizations.

In addition to these curricula, two other courses will be employed to assist in the promoting healthy mental and physical development in response to the biological changes occurring during this time of life. The first course is Our Whole Life (OWL). OWL is a comprehensive human sexuality program based in appropriate developmental stages. We provide OWL training from age 6 through adulthood.

Coming of Age program is also offered during these years. This course emphasizes the development of personal faith beliefs, moral and ethical choices and a deepening understanding of being a part of a larger life force. This course prepares the youth for the transition from childhood to adolescent.

Presenting these two courses in alternate years provides our youth with a solid foundation upon which to build and transition through adolescence into the adult world physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The second transitional stage includes ages 15 to 18. Curricula during this time are less structured with emphasis on youth-guided study and action oriented projects. Emphasis will be on further development of personal belief systems through social and spiritual events, social justice and community service projects.

There are two primary goals of religious education during this time. The first is to assist the youth in refining their spiritual identity and developing an ability to articulate those ideas to peers in a positive and constructive manner. The second is to provide continued guidance and assistance in transitioning into the adult community.

The final three stages of Lifespan Education focus on the spiritual needs of our adult members and friends. Generally, religious education for these stages is mostly informal in nature and self-guided or self-initiated. The goal of religious education in these stages is to provide a sense of community and connection to like-minded individuals within the Fellowship and to facilitate individual and small group exploration of a variety of personal spiritual interests and growth. This goal is met through activities and small group gatherings such as book discussion groups, covenant groups, and Building Your Own Theology seminars. Other activities may be organized as requested by members and friends.

The first stage of the adult religious education is geared toward young adults consisting of two subgroups. The first subgroup is comprised generally of individuals ranging in age from 18 to 21. These young adults are typically recent high school graduates and college students. Gatherings are frequently social and/or service oriented. There is a need for mentoring and development of durable connections to the adult religious community. The other subgroup in this stage are those individuals usually ranging in age between 21 and 35. Many of these young adults are single individuals starting on first career paths; new to the community; and in search of like minded spirits. Other young adults in this age bracket are young couples parenting young children. Fostering spiritual growth in this age group is through social events, social justice projects, leadership activities; OWL; parenting programs and events for young families.

The second stage of adult religious education generally includes those members and friends who are in middle age and many who are more settled on their life paths, including significant relationships, families, and established careers. Religious education for this group is aimed at filling the gaps in the spiritual needs of the individuals through more focused discussions such as Covenant groups (small group ministry) yoga and meditation, Building Your own Theology seminars, book study and discussion and training in leadership.

The third stage of adult religious education includes adults of a more advanced age who may have adult children living independently or may be either retired or closing in on that opportunity. This stage may also include those members with special needs whose ability to actively participate in our community may be limited by age, disability or other factors. Religious education in this stage may continue to include the aforementioned activities during second stage adult development or may be more individually focused, with the goal of providing for the specific spiritual needs of the individual. This may include mentoring aging adults, coping with aging and end of life issues and personal assistance with other issues of aging or disability.

#### **Religious Education Program Strengths:**

Children at the UUFT are a very visible and valued part of the community. The congregation values RE as a high priority (including prioritizing children's needs in our facility expansion). We are intentional about community-building across ages, and it's become a really important part of our identity. Multigenerational services, once roundly boycotted by some adults, have become really important to all ages. Our religious education program strives to meet the developmental as well as the spiritual needs of our members and friends of all ages. We've used high quality, developmentally-appropriate curricula, most of which are written by UU religious education professionals. For the past 20 years the congregation has placed a high priority on having kids in the service every Sunday, so there's a good opportunity for them to connect with the minister and other adults. We have a large cadre of excellent volunteer teachers, many of whom have taught in a variety of UU programs over the years, and many of whom have taught for years in other settings as well. UUFT has a strong history of supporting sexuality education, and more recently has supported a dynamic Coming of Age program. The congregation has joyfully given financial and human resources to get youth to MidWest Leadership School and to other broadening experiences like the UU-UNO conference in New York City. The minister and DRE have a strong collegial relationship, and both work together with the board and other lay leaders in mutually strengthening and sustaining ways.

#### **Religious Education Program Challenges:**

It's a challenge to have enough volunteers so that teachers can have a balance between teaching duties and attending worship services. As is the case with most growing congregations, money is an ever-present challenge. Though we are enjoying our wonderful new building addition that added 5 spectacular classrooms and two bathrooms to our space, the addition of a mortgage to our annual budget has meant that, even as we grow in stewardship, we struggle to fund our RE program to the level we'd like to.

**What religious education program issues are likely to be most pressing . . .  
. . . within the next couple of years**

Though the UUFT is quick to organize special fund raisers and individuals make special financial gifts for RE in a pinch, it will be a challenge for us to fund our RE needs within the annual budget with a new mortgage and in the midst of a sluggish world economy.

**. . . over the next ten years**

Training and leadership development is a constant need, and congregational financial support of this essential element will have to grow. A continuing challenge will be to provide programming that is relevant to the changing world in which our children and youth are growing up.

**What religious education program issues may never be resolved?**

Volunteerism and consistent attendance issues are growing challenges in our increasingly busy world.

**To what degree does the congregation possess a dominant theology or religious philosophy?**

There is a wide diversity of theological beliefs, and our overriding philosophy nurtures the development of a warm and radically welcoming community. The UUFT has humanists, pagans and other theists who strive to celebrate rather than merely tolerate our differences.

**Describe the role of music and the arts in the life of the congregation:**

This is an area in which we could clearly grow. We value music, and now have a volunteer music director. We struggle to maintain a regular choir, though mixed-age groups of singers and instrumentalists can usually come together for special services.

**Lay leadership and Religious Education**

**What are the responsibilities of the Religious Education Committee (or its equivalent) and how does it function?**

The responsibilities of the RE committee are to oversee the running of the Sunday RE program for children and youth. This includes discussion of curriculum; reporting classroom needs for supplies and physical room maintenance. The committee meets one time a month and shares joys and concerns; needs and wants; behavior challenges; review of the next month's calendar; and ideas for improvement. All teachers are invited. The goal is to have at least one teacher from each classroom present. The RE Chair makes the agenda and conducts the meeting. The RE Co-Chair takes the minutes.

**What are the Religious Education Committee's strengths:**

It gives all teachers a time for a voice in what is not working and to celebrate the cherishable moments. This type of communication is vital for teachers to feel included in this ministry to children and youth. This committee is a problem-solving group and the DRE often goes to them with choices to be made or problems to solve. The DRE and committee are a team. As we are a green congregation, we prefer to work with recyclable materials. RE committee meetings give us a chance to share what we might have that will be useful to others in the way of supplies. This keeps expenses down and helps us use what others might throw in the trash.

**What are the Religious Education Committee's challenges:**

Attendance is sometimes a problem. When the group is very small, the synergy of the group is much less; there are fewer creative ideas and much less problem solving. Time to celebrate the work of the teachers is always hard to come by. When we try to do that, it is poorly attended. This speaks to the level of fatigue and the limited time people have for social activities. Sometimes class size varies a lot, which is a challenge for the teachers (and thus the committee).

**Identify any other committees related to religious education for children, youth, and adults, or to the religious educator:**

**List the Committee name, function and it's relationship with the Religious Educator**

Lifespan Religious Education Council This Council gives advice and consent to the DRE. It acts in much the same way as a committee on ministry. In contrast to the RE committee, it acts in a more administrative forum. The Council designs an annual evaluation of the RE program, and teachers, parents and members of the Fellowship are asked for their input. These evaluations are used to give the DRE feedback on perception and performance. They are also used to support salary proposals made to the Board for the DRE. The LRE Council also works with the DRE and approves the RE budget and then presents it to the Board of Trustees. The LRE Council hears any complaints, problems, or other concerns that concern the DRE. In this capacity, they support the DRE by giving feedback.

**The Religious Educator**

**Describe the process by which a religious educator will be hired:**

After a review of applications qualified applicants will be interviewed by the search committee. The top candidate will be submitted to the UUFT Board of Trustees for final approval.

**Describe the process by which the Religious Educator Search Committee (or its equivalent) was chosen:**

The UUFT Board president appointed the committee.

**Religious Educator skills and enthusiasms most needed by the congregation:**

4-Crucial 3-Significant 2-Modest 1-Of less consequence

*Note: use no numeral but "1" more than four times.*

- |                                      |                                     |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4 RE Administration                  | 2 Personal counseling with families |
| 1 Adult religious education          | 1 Stewardship                       |
| 2 Visual Arts and/or crafts          | 3 Community Building                |
| 4 Committee work                     | 4 Youth Work                        |
| 4 Volunteer Support                  | 3 Faith/Spiritual Development       |
| 1 Denominational/District activities | 3 Curricula development             |
| 1 Singing/Instrumental Music         | 1 Social Action                     |
| 1 Community Outreach                 | 1 Storytelling                      |
| 1 Children's Worship                 | 2 Staff supervision                 |
| 1 Young Adult Work                   |                                     |

- 3 Group Leadership
- 1 Membership growth
- 2 Worship for All Ages

**Assess the capacity of the congregation to exercise forbearance and nurture in assisting a religious educator's professional development:**

We hope that our religious educator will grow and develop along with our vibrant program. S/he should be open to change and willing to continue her/his education as needed through workshops, Renaissance modules, and classes.

**What expectations, however silent, may there be about the religious educator's family and personal life?**

There are none.

**Describe the worst mistake your new professional religious leader could make:**

Treating the children or youth in an inappropriate way.