

Nov. 1, 2023

Revs. Vanessa Southern and Laura Shennum, ministers and Rochelle Fortier Nwadibia, President
First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco
1187 Franklin St.
San Francisco, CA 94109

Dear Rochelle and Revs. Vanessa and Laura,

We are writing to let you know that the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) voted on September 24th to accept the resignation from ministerial Fellowship of the Rev. Stephen Furrer, who served your congregation from 2011-2013.

Rev. Furrer chose to resign after a complaint was filed in 2022 for sexual misconduct (adult to adult), and the complaint was investigated and substantiated during a Full Fellowship Review. In early December the MFC will be sending a public announcement stating that he resigned pending a sexual misconduct review. We wanted to allow you time to process this information and perhaps share it with your congregation.

Because Rev. Furrer served your congregation, we wanted to communicate with you before such a public announcement. The substantiated allegations range from comments verging on sexual harassment to having sexual relationships with congregants. None of these involve minors or illegal activity. There is evidence of a pattern of boundary violations in several of his ministries. It is also true that many people and congregational leaders experienced his ministry as positive, and that may be true for people in your congregation as well.

We may never know the full extent of Rev. Furrer's misconduct, but there is evidence of this behavior going back as long as forty years. After reviewing this evidence, it has become clear that the UUA and its related district structures failed to act decisively enough to hold him accountable then, and to thus safeguard our congregations. For that we apologize. We deeply regret the harm caused by our failure to address this behavior sooner, and any impacts this may have had on your congregation. Over the last few decades, in recognition of the harm which sexual misconduct causes congregations, the [ministerial code of conduct](#) has been updated and the UUA and the MFC have



strengthened our structures of accountability. This updated accountability process is the foundation for how the MFC has handled the current misconduct complaint against Rev. Furrer, which has led to his resignation. If you have questions about the standards of ministerial conduct or [accountability procedures](#), we are always available to answer questions.

The UUA is committed to doing what we can to help your congregation process and respond to this situation in the way that best serves your community. As your regional staff, we're here to support you in deciding about what to communicate to your congregation, making a communication plan, and possibly setting up support such as listening circles for those in the congregation who feel impacted by his misconduct. Please let us know what your next steps will be, if any, and we will partner with you to help them happen.

In service of healing and vitality,



Dr. Melissa James
Congregational Life Staff



Rev. Sarah Gibb Millspaugh
Congregational Life Staff, Safe Congregations Specialist



Rev. Carlton Elliot Smith
Regional Lead

