The First Church of Christ Congregational, Middletown
Safe Church Policy

Purpose

To create a policy in compliance with the UCC recommendations that each church has a safe church policy to ensure the safety of all adults and minors within the church, and of the church itself.

Goal

Our goal is to pursue love, safety, peace and security for all who participate in our programs, wherever held.

Safe Church Policy Mission Statement

The covenants between persons seeking employment or volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity and truthfulness for the health of the individuals participating and for the church as a whole. We recognize that all persons are created in God's image. Both the Old and New Testaments instruct the faithful to do justice and to care for all persons. To that end, First Church of Christ, Congregational is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment in which infants, children, youth and adults can learn about and experience God's love.

Definitions

The following definitions are those recommended by the UCC and will assist in the understanding of the policy that follows:

Sexual abuse and sexual misconduct, as understood in this document, always involve a relationship in which both parties do not have equal power. Any intimate contact must, if it is to be ethical and life-giving, takes place between two mutually consenting participants. Such mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of power, for example, between minister and congregant, church school teacher or youth leader and child, choir director and choir member, and contact between two or more minors.

Minister: a person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. The Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers.

Authorized Minister: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an association of the United Church of Christ.

Ministerial Relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

Minor: any individual under the age of eighteen (18).

RE Board or authorized Delegate: The Religious Education Board of First Church of Christ Congregational, which includes its volunteer members and the volunteer Education coordinators and leaders.

Child Sexual Abuse: any sexual activity with a child in which a minor is used for the sexual gratification of another to include, but not be limited to: fondling, penetration, inappropriate touching, verbal comments, pornographic materials, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism or any behavior that violates applicable law.

Sexual Misconduct: includes sexual harassment (verbal and/or physical), sexual advances and/or sexual contact between an authorized minister, or any minister who has an assigned role with children, youth, and adults in the church. It also includes such contact between two or more minors.

Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones.

This includes but may not be limited to:

- written contact
- verbal contact
- physical contact
- visual contact
- electronic contact via Internet, web-cam, email, or other electronic means

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another.

Advisor. An adult who has primary responsibility for a youth group and has attended teacher training.

Teacher: An adult who has primary responsibility for a church school classroom and has attended teacher training. Includes a mature young adult (older teen) who has met the approval of the Religious Education Committee, and has attended teacher training, and works under supervision.

Teacher Assistant: an adult or responsible youth who assists a teacher.

Volunteer Nursery Assistant: a responsible, qualified youth assisting with the care of minors, who is under the direct supervision of a Teacher or Group Leader during the time of care.

Direct or Prolonged Contact: involvement in overnight events with minors, transportation of minors, youth ministry events and field trips.

Inappropriate Behavior: the use of suggestive language, suggestive behavior or profanity to or around children, youth and adults.

Primary Leader: One who leads a children's or youth ministry. This person must be eighteen (18) years old or older.

Confidentiality: When investigating an allegation, those involved shall maintain complete confidentiality with respect to names and events. This means the involved person(s) tell only who needs to know and only what they need to know. This policy shall be followed by all involved.

Driver. A driver may be a Primary Leader, Teacher, Authorized Minister, Advisor – all of whom have Screening Forms on file; or an individual volunteer who signs a Driver Release Form (see Appendix) for a one-time event. At a minimum the volunteer driver(s) should have a current and valid driver's license, vehicle registration, and current insurance certificate for the vehicle they are operating.

The Conduct of Ministry

All persons engaged in the ministry at First Church of Christ, Congregational, including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteer and authorized ministers are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioners or other individuals by someone engaged in the ministry of First Church of Christ, Congregational, or in a ministerial position is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated by this congregation.

Because ministers often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry of this church maintain their own psychological, emotional and spiritual health and that they have adequate education for helping those individuals they serve in ministry. It is the policy of First Church of Christ Congregational to encourage its leaders, authorized ministers, employees and volunteers, to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Recruiting and Supervising Church Workers

A. Selection and Screening Process

All people of First Church of Christ, Congregational who work with minors shall complete the Screening Form. These Screening Forms will be retained in a confidential file and remain in the file for at least three (3) years after the end of volunteer status. The RE Board or authorized delegate in conjunction with the Authorized Minister shall be primarily responsible for screening applicants for volunteer positions with children and youth.

It is expected that all employees and volunteers who work with minors will, at a minimum, complete and submit a screening form (see attached Appendix).

State-level or criminal background checks shall be done as part of the screening process for Ministers, church Employees, Teachers, Primary Leaders, and Volunteers with prolonged or overnight contact with minors.

Other volunteers, including Volunteer Nursery Assistants, Teacher Assistants, and Volunteers for short term programs (4 or fewer Sundays/days/classes/events), who are supervised and not alone with minors may be background-checked at the discretion of the RE Board or its authorized delegate.

All Screening Forms will be reviewed by the RE Board or authorized delegate in consultation with the Authorized Minister, as needed. Prior to serving, each volunteer or staff member will meet with the RE Board or authorized delegate in order to review the statements on the Screening Forms and policy and guidelines regarding a safe and nurturing church environment.

In order to ensure safety for all persons involved, the guidelines below shall be used when inviting individuals into service as ministers to minors:

1. An individual with an undeclared criminal history shall not be considered.
2. An individual with a felony conviction involving any child abuse issue will not be considered.
3. An individual who has any criminal history that may impair or disable their ability to effectively perform the functions of the ministry position, including those which involve the abuse or neglect of a minor shall not be considered.
4. An individual with a criminal conviction for a crime of violence will not be considered.
5. The RE Board or authorized delegate and the Authorized Minister reserve the right to guide someone to another area of ministry should they feel the applicant is not suited for working with children or youth.

B. Supervision

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Authorized Minister and the RE Board or authorized delegate to **supervise** all staff and volunteers, including the Primary Leaders who have contact with minors involved in Children and Youth Ministry within First Church of Christ Congregational. They will provide the staff and volunteers with training to perform their ministries with competence and ensure that all church policies are being administered adequately.
2. **Church-Sanctioned Activity on Church Premises:** The Selection and Screening Process outlined above must be completed prior to the activity in order to participate in the overnight activity. This shall include all adults who will supervise or chaperone overnight stays of children or youth in the Church building. Additionally, these forms must be reviewed and a State-Level background check must be completed prior to participation in the overnight event. Background check cost will be included in the RE Board budget.
3. **Church-Sanctioned Activities Away from Church:** For participating children and minors, a signed Parental Consent Form AND a completed Medical Form disclosing all medications and dosages to be taken while on the trip must be submitted prior to such activity.
4. **Church-Sanctioned Activities Involving Other Churches:** As a default, all First Church youth, children, and minors shall follow the First Church Activity process prior to the activity. In the case that another participating church has a more rigorous Selection and Screening Process requirement, the more rigorous process shall be used to screen and select all participants and adults.
5. **The Use of Volunteer Assistance:** Due to emergencies or last-minute changes, there may be a spontaneous need for volunteers to supervise or transport minors at a church-sanctioned event or activity. These volunteers, other than a participating minor's parent, should first be chosen from a list of pre-qualified volunteers who have completed the Volunteer Screening form or have otherwise been reviewed and approved by the Religious Education Board or its authorized delegate. If transporting minors, at a minimum the volunteer driver(s) should have a current and valid driver's license, vehicle registration, and current insurance certificate for the vehicle they are operating.

C. Mandated Reporters

Connecticut Public Acts 02-106 and 02-138 require that any person paid to care for a child in any public or private facility is mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the state Department of Children and Families, or a Law Enforcement Agency.

By that definition the Authorized Minister and the RE Board or authorized delegate are mandated reporters, and thus First Church of Christ Congregational is a mandated reporter. If any Volunteer or salaried Church staff member suspects that a child is being abused or neglected, whether or not they believe the abuse or neglect has happened or is happening at the Church or a Church-Sanctioned activity, they must notify the Authorized Minister and the RE Board or authorized delegate immediately. The

Authorized Minister or the RE Board or authorized delegate will notify the proper authorities and will then follow the procedures listed below for the reporting of incidents.

D. Reporting of Incidents

All salaried Staff, Teachers, Teacher Assistants, Primary Leaders and Volunteers of First Church of Christ Congregational shall follow the Reporting Procedures listed below in order to promote accountability among all members of the church.

1. Any and all incidents involving questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual misconduct or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse shall be immediately reported to the Authorized Minister or the RE Board or authorized delegate.
2. The incident shall be documented in writing by the Staff member who receives the report. The report shall contain the date, time, persons involved and a full explanation of the incident. (See attached form in the Appendix.)
3. The Authorized Minister and the RE Board or authorized delegate shall meet to discuss and implement an appropriate response.
4. All Staff, Teachers, Teacher Assistants, Primary Leaders, and Volunteers shall be informed of this reporting responsibility.

E. Response to Reported Incidents:

The salaried Staff of First Church of Christ Congregational shall treat every allegation of sexual abuse, misconduct and inappropriate behavior very seriously and shall thoroughly investigate every allegation in a prompt, professional and confidential manner. The following steps are required.

1. When questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual abuse or inappropriate behavior is reported, responses may include, but are not limited to the following:
    - Document and discuss with the accused and accuser the events leading to the allegation.
    - Ensure he/she understands and respects appropriate limits of behavior.
    - If need be, the accused will be removed from his/her position, until the completion of the investigation.
    - Overall evaluation of the incident, to include interviews with the alleged victim and accused will be done.
    - If the nature of the incident does not require legal intervention and all parties agree that the incident is resolved, such recommendation may be reviewed by counsel to church for legal sufficiency and shared with the church president.
    - If, after the evaluation, it is determined that a formal report must be filed, professional intervention shall be requested through the Department of Children and Families and The Middletown Police Department.
2. The Authorized Minister shall notify and discuss all allegations with counsel to the church to ensure that all legal requirements are met in the response process. In the event that the accused is the Authorized Minister and the Moderator, in consultation

with the RE Board or authorized delegate, shall follow this course of action on behalf of the church.

3. The Authorized Minister and/or the Moderator shall notify First Church of Christ, Congregational's insurance carrier.
4. Every effort shall be made to comfort and protect the victim of the alleged abuse to ensure that the victim's needs are being met and the accused shall be treated with respect and dignity during the investigation process.
5. If an alleged incident involves a minor, the parent or guardian shall be notified immediately.
6. The Authorized Minister(s) of the church need to be free to provide pastoral care to all parties involved.
7. The Authorized Minister(s) of the church will decide on a case by case basis if Counsel and /or the Regional Minister of the United Church of Christ is needed and will make the appropriate contact.
8. Notification to the congregation will be handled on a case by case basis at the discretion of the Authorized Minister, the RE Board or authorized delegate and the Church Moderator.

F. Training

All Staff, Teachers, Teacher Assistants, Primary Leaders, Advisors and Volunteers who work with the children and minors of the congregation shall be given a copy of this policy and shall be oriented regarding what his/her responsibility is in preventing and reporting allegations.

1. The training content for Staff, Teacher, Teacher Assistants, Advisors and Volunteers shall include:
    - A basic orientation to the facts about child abuse including sexual abuse.
    - An explanation of First Church's Safe Church Policy and the reporting procedure.
    - A commitment to follow conduct guidelines and prevention and reporting procedures.
2. The Authorized Minister shall be responsible for reviewing the church's volunteer policies with all new members of the church during New Member Orientation.
3. The Authorized Minister, RE Board and its authorized delegates shall be responsible for educating the congregation on the need for such a policy and shall offer, as needed, an annual workshop or similar educational forum to discuss these issues with all members of the church community.
4. The Authorized Minister, RE Board or its authorized delegates shall record all who have attended training sessions.

To comply with insurance requirements and for your own protection, please fill out the form below.
If you have ever completed the state background check process for any other position (eg. school teacher, day care provider, scout leader, etc.), please check here ___.

Church Volunteer Screening Form

(The information on this form is to be considered Private and Confidential)

This form is to be filled out by anyone in a Volunteer position involving the supervision and custody of minors.

The covenant between the persons seeking volunteer positions in the church requires honesty, integrity and truthfulness for the health of the individuals participating and for the Church as a whole.

First Church of Christ Congregational is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment in which infants, children, youth and adults can learn about and experience God's Love.

We have a moral responsibility to provide the highest quality and safest care possible in all areas of our ministry programs. In order to ensure this, all volunteers who provide care for minors are expected to complete the Screening Process including this Form.

Name: _____

Other names you have used: _____

Address: _____

Business Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

Are you CPR certified or do you have any medical training? **YES** **NO**

If **YES**, please indicate which:

☐ infant/child certification ☐ adult CPR ☐ community CPR ☐ day care CPR

Expiration Date _____

Are you a Member of First Church? **YES** **NO**

Are you a Friend of the First Church? **YES** **NO**

If YES to either, how long? _____

Describe any previous work experience you have involving children and/or youth (including church work or volunteer work) _____
_____
_____

References (two people not related to you who know you well)

Name _____ Telephone _____

Street _____

Town _____ State _____

Zip Code _____

Telephone number(s) _____

Name _____ Telephone _____

Street _____

Town _____ State _____

Zip Code _____

Telephone number(s) _____

Background

1. Have you ever been convicted of a crime? **YES** **NO**

If **YES**, please give a short explanation of the circumstances including the outcome.

_____

_____

2. Are there any civil lawsuits alleging actual or attempted harassment, exploitation or misconduct; physical abuse, or child abuse resulting in a judgment being entered against you, that have been settled out of court or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired? **YES** **NO**

If **YES**, please give a short explanation of the circumstances including the outcome.

_____

_____

3. Have you ever terminated your employment or service in a volunteer position, or had your employment or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated, for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse or child abuse? **YES** **NO**

If your services have been terminated in the past for the above reasons, please give a short explanation. Please indicate the date of termination, name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor, and nature and place of incident(s) leading to your termination

_____
_____
_____

To that end, I attest the information set forth in this screening form is true and complete. I understand any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for the volunteer position I am seeking to fill.

I authorize First Church of Christ Congregational and its agents to make inquiries regarding all the statements I have set forth above including a state level background check on me if I participate in direct and prolonged contact with children/youth during church activities, including overnight programs.

❑ I acknowledge that I have received and understand the Safe Church Policy of First Church of Christ, Congregational. _____ (initial)

Applicant Signature _____

Printed Name
_____

Date _____

All applications will be strictly confidential and kept in a secure, locked file.

To comply with insurance requirements and for your own protection, please fill out the form below.

Transporting Minors in a Motor Vehicle

First Church of Christ Congregational, Middletown CT

Scope

All Persons who will transport children and minors as part of a Church-Sanctioned Activity are to complete this form. Completed forms will be kept on file in a secure place and shall be updated annually.

Attachments

Attach to this form copies of

- Current and valid state Driver's License
- Proof of automobile insurance ($300,000 liability coverage required)
- Current and valid state vehicle registration

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ (home) _____ (work)

Your Vehicle Information

Make and Model _____

Year _____ Color _____ License Plate _____

Background Information

1. Is your vehicle in good repair and equipped with the required number of restraints (including those for infants and young children if you will be transporting them)?

   YES **NO**

2. Have you ever had a Driver's License revoked or suspended? **YES** **NO**

   If **YES** give details. _____

3. Have you ever been convicted or cited for DWI (driving while impaired)? **YES** **NO**

   If **YES**, give details as to where and when such charge was made, and describe the outcome. _____

(continued)

In transporting children and minors, I agree to:

1. Obey all traffic regulations including speed limits and safety restraint requirements.
2. Transport only the number of persons my vehicle is equipped to carry.
3. Drive only when I am not under the influence of alcohol, intoxicating drugs, or other impairment.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Report of Suspected Abuse

First Church of Christ Congregational, Middletown CT

Reported by:

Name & Title: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Telephone (including area code): _____

Date of Report: _____

Person suspected of misconduct:

Name & Title: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Telephone (including area code): _____

Other person(s) involved (witnesses or victims):

Name & Title: _____

Age & Gender _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

Telephone (including area code): _____

Report of Suspected Abuse

First Church of Christ Congregational, Middletown CT

The information on this form is considered PRIVATE and CONFIDENTIAL

Describe incident(s) of suspected abuse, including date(s), time(s), and location(s):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Identify eyewitnesses to the incident, including names, addresses, and telephone numbers, where available:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Other information which may be helpful to the investigation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____