



First Congregational Church of Westminster  
, United Church of Christ

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES

## I. PURPOSE:

The Safe Church Policies and Procedures of the First Congregational Church of Westminster, United Church of Christ, (herein referred to as the Church) require its members and friends to provide sanctuary for persons of all ages who are entrusted to its care. They also serve to protect those who have responsibilities as leaders and teachers.

## II. OVERVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- A. The policies and procedures set forth in this document apply to all activities which take place within the buildings and properties of the Church, as well as any programs, activities or events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church which take place off the properties of the Church.
  - 1. These policies and procedures are subject to yearly review.
  - 2. Current copies of these policies and procedures are available in the church office.
  - 3. The following categories of leadership shall be covered by these policies and procedures;
    - a. Ordained clergy.
    - b. Staff – part-time, full-time, temporary or permanent
    - c. Authorized volunteers; includes but not limited to, lay pastors, confirmation mentors, church school teachers, aids, church school and youth program advisors and drivers for any church event.

## III. SAFE CHURCH RESPONSE TEAM COMPOSITION:

- A. The Safe Church Response Team consisting of five members, representing both genders, shall be established and meet regularly.
- B. Two of these members shall be the Pastor and the Christian Education Coordinator who shall both be ex officio with voting privileges.
- C. Three members of the Safe Church Response Team shall be elected for a three-year term staggered according to Church Bylaws.
- D. Those elected shall exhibit an understanding of confidentiality.

### III. BUILDING USAGE:

#### A. Buildings & Grounds

1. The Church Trustees are responsible for:
  - a. Performing an annual safety audit to review the condition of the facilities for church use.
  - b. Assure that Facilities conform to the fire safety map as posted next to front door (including extinguishers, detectors, alarms, exits, etc.).
  - c. Assure that fire exits are not blocked.
- d. Assure that no flame hazards exist church buildings especially near **heat** producing items such as stoves and boilers.
  - e. Stairs are clear, treads or carpet firmly in place, hand rails secure.
- f. Flooring is free from trip hazards.
- g. All offices and children's areas are visible from outside the doorways.
  - h. Appropriate lighting is installed.
  - i. No protruding sharp objects or head-bumping objects are in passageways, class areas, or other routine use areas. Evaluate reasonable height of all individuals using areas
  - j. Play items in children's areas are appropriately safe.
2. The Safe Church Response Team is responsible for:
  - a. The policy will be to register all key holders.
    - b. Issuing Church keys and maintaining a list of Church key holders.
      - i. Potential key holders will complete Part A of Church Key Acquisition Form upon receipt of key(s) (See addendum for form)
  - ii. Asking that keys be returned when appropriate.

Reasons and procedures for requesting that a key be returned:  
Failure to comply with the Policies and Procedures for a Safe Church.  
Lending the key to another person.  
Duplicating the key.

Other reasons and conditions the Safe Church Response Team may deem necessary.

- c. Provide emergency phone numbers for fire, police, and ambulance in known place for volunteers and staff.
  - d. Provide first aid kits for volunteers and staff.
3. Possession and/or use of alcohol, illegal drugs and marijuana in any form is prohibited in the church, on church grounds or during any church related activity.
  4. Smoking is prohibited in the church building or on church grounds.
  5. Church leadership will take appropriate action as related to numbers 3 and 4.

#### IV. FIRE PROCEDURES

A. The Fire Department inspects the buildings annually. A map of each building is posted next to the front door, which shows all exits, alarm pulls, smoke sensors, heat sensors, fire extinguishers and specific Designated Safety Zones.

B. Volunteers are urged to review this map at their convenience, and be aware of what exits are available for whatever room they will be occupying.

1. In case of a required evacuation, leaders of the activity groups should take their group to the nearest exit, and keep the group together in the specified Designated Safety Zone until given instructions.
2. All members of the group should be accounted for; if not, then under no circumstances should any non-emergency personnel re-enter the building without authorization.
3. Any missing individuals should be reported immediately to fire officials on Duty.
4. Fire drills shall be conducted at least once per year under the direction of the Safe Church Response Team and the Westminster Fire Department (see addendum)
5. The teachers shall have an attendance sheet to be sure everyone in their group is present and documented as such.
6. Attendance sheets should be turned into Christian Education Coordinator or his/her designee and kept on file for one year.
7. Refer to Fire Drill Instruction sheet (Addendum) for further instructions.

## V. PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION, EXPLOITATION AND HARASSMENT

The First Congregational Church of Westminster is committed to creating and maintaining a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers worship and work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and intimidation.

- A. The Church prohibits exploitation; misconduct, harassment, in any form. including sexual. Physical abuse of children and adults is never acceptable. (see definitions listed under III). It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior, which is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to seek discipline for those persons who violate it.
- B. Ministerial Conduct: All persons engaged in the ministry of The Church (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, 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.
- C. The Church will follow all state and federal regulations as they pertain to exploitation, misconduct, harassment, (sexual or otherwise) (and) child and elder (adult)abuse exhibited toward any parishioner(s) or other individual(s) by anyone engaged in the ministry of the Church is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.
- D. Because ministers (see definition) 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 preparation and education for helping those individuals they seek to serve in ministry. It is the policy of the Church 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.

## VI. DEFINITIONS

A. Minister: a person engaged by the Church to carry out its ministry. Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, volunteers as well as authorized ministers.

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

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

D. Child and Adult Abuse:

1. Physical Abuse: non-accidental harm of a person.
2. Neglect: maltreatment or negligence that harms a person's health, welfare or

- safety.
3. Emotional Abuse: verbal assault or emotional cruelty.
    4. Sexual Abuse: any form of physical contact or exploitation in which a person is being used for the sexual stimulation of an adult, adolescent or another person.
  5. Physic contact includes fondling; genital contact; oral, anal, or genital penetration, intercourse and rape.
    6. Non-physical contact includes verbal comment, pornographic videos, Internet sites and magazines, obscene or harassing phone calls and exhibitionism.
- E. Sexual exploitation: always involves a relationship in which both parties do not have equal power. Any sexual contact must, if it is to be ethical and life giving, take place between two mutually consenting adults. Such mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of power, for example between pastor and parishioner; church school teacher or youth leader, or any authorized volunteer and a child; choir director and choir member; spiritual director and the person seeking spiritual direction.
- F. Sexual misconduct: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) between an ordained, licensed, commissioned minister or any person, ordained or lay, who has an assigned role in the Church and employees, members, youth, children, or counselees.
- G. Sexual harassment: Repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his/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:
1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a condition of instruction, employment, or participation in any Church activity; or
  2. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or Church related decisions affecting an individual; or
  3. Such conduct ha 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 environment.
  4. Sexual Harassment also includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:
    - a. Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, e-mails, notes or invitations;

- b. Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or one's sexual orientation; or sexual propositions;
- physical contact, such as intentional and inappropriate touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, or coercing sexual intercourse; and
- visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, or displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, web sites, posters or magazines.

(H) Elder Exploitation, Abuse and/or Neglect

- 1. If any church member suspects exploitation, abuse and/or neglect of a person over 60 years of age, it should be reported to Montachusett Home Care. Telephone 1-800-734-7312

I. Disruptive Behavior Policy

While seeking to remain a congregation where all are welcomed, we affirm the belief that our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere where such openness can exist. When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being is threatened, the source of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly, even if this ultimately requires the expulsion of the offending person or persons.

- 1. Disruptive behavior may be defined as any or all the following:
  - a. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child;
  - b. The disruption of church activities;
- c. Diminishment of the appeal of the church to its potential and existing membership.

The following shall be the policy of First Congregational Church of Westminster, UCC in dealing with these issues:

- 2. If an immediate response is required, this will be undertaken by the Minister, if available, and/or the leader of the group involved. This may include asking the offending person or persons to leave, or suspending the meeting or activity until such a time as it can safely be resumed. If further assistance is required, the Police Department may be called. Anytime any of these actions are undertaken without the Minister being present, the Minister must be notified. A follow-up letter detailing what steps must be taken before returning to the activities involved will be sent by the Minister to the offending party or parties.

3. Situations not requiring immediate response will be referred to the Safe Church committee. The committee will respond in terms of their own judgment observing the following:
  - a. The committee will respond to problems as they arise. There will be no attempt to define "acceptable" behavior in advance
  - b. Persons identified as disruptive will be dealt with as individuals; stereotypes will be avoided.
  - c. The committee will collect all necessary information.
- d. To aid in evaluating the problem, the following points will be considered:
  - DANGEROUSNESS: Is the individual the source of a threat or perceived threat to persons or property?
  - DISRUPTIVENESS: How much interference with church functions is going on?
  - OFFENSIVENESS: How likely is it that prospective or existing members will be driven away?

To determine the necessary response, the following points will be considered:

- CAUSES: Why is the disruption occurring? Is it a conflict between the individual and others in the church? Is it due to a professionally diagnosed condition of mental illness?
- HISTORY: What is the frequency and degree of disruption caused in the past.
- PROBABILITY OF CHANGE: How likely is it that the problem behavior will diminish in the future?

The committee will decide on the necessary response on a case by case basis. However, the following three levels of response are recommended:

- LEVEL ONE: The committee shall inform the Minister of the problem and either the Minister or a member of the committee shall meet with the offending individual to communicate the concern.
- LEVEL TWO: The offending individual is excluded from the church and/or specific church activities for a limited period, with reasons and the conditions of return made clear.
- LEVEL THREE: The offending individual is permanently excluded from the church premises and all church activities. If it is decided that expulsion will take place, a letter will be sent by the Minister explaining the expulsion.

The First Congregational Church of Westminster strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in beliefs, opinions and life experiences. However, concern for the safety and well-being of the congregation must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of the individual. To the degree the disruptive behavior compromises the health of this congregation, our actions as people of faith must reflect this emphasis on security.



## V CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

The Church is committed to the nurturing, protection and safeguarding of all, especially the children in our community.

The following policy was developed to provide guidelines and procedures to ensure protection for both children and those who work with them. The Church is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. It is the policy of this Church to provide adequate supervision for all activities involving children and youth. To the fullest extent practical no minister or authorized minister shall be alone with children or youth.

### A. Staffing

1. All volunteers who work with minors shall be required to complete and submit a Volunteer Disclosure Form and to fill out and complete a Criminal Offense Record Investigation (CORI) form, which will be held in confidence, accessible only to the Christian Education Coordinator.

2. All paid staff who work with minors, shall also have a CORI which will be held in confidence.

3. In the event of a CORI concern by the CE Coordinator, the concern shall be brought to the Safe Church Response Team for evaluation.

### B. Good Practice Guidelines

1. All workers shall treat all children and young people with respect and dignity.

2. The purpose of discipline of children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect and cooperation.

3. No child shall be disciplined using spanking, hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.

4. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults or shouting.

5. Teachers and authorized volunteers accompany a child to the bathroom, shall

notify another authorized volunteer as to the situation.

6. The authorized volunteer shall remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside.
7. When able, a child shall take care of his/her own clothes. When a child needs help with his/her clothing, the teacher or authorized volunteer shall enter the bathroom, but shall keep the door ajar.
8. This policy shall be posted in a public place where parents, teachers and child care providers can see it.
9. No authorized volunteer shall be alone with a child in a place that cannot be observed by others. This may be accomplished by leaving the door open or having two groups work in the same room.
10. Make sure that there is another adult in the building who knows when a counseling meeting is taking place with a young person, when privacy and confidentiality is important.
11. Since much of the value of religious education is due to the caring atmosphere between staff and youth, it is understood that there is a need for appropriate physical gestures of support and love (hug, pat on back, etc.). **BE AWARE!!**  
For example: Ask before you hug a child/youth.
12. Be prepared to speak out if you see another member of the church school or an adult in the Church acting in ways that might be misconstrued. Speak to them or to a member of the Safe Church Response Team.
13. Preserve the privacy of families and their children.

#### C. Health & Safety

1. The Christian Education Coordinator shall coordinate and keep completed registration forms containing parents' current contact information and numbers and any specific medical information on their children.
2. The Christian Education Coordinator shall keep attendance records for all Church school classes, and keep on file at the Christian Education Coordinator office for at least one year.
3. All reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that all rooms have at least one door with a window. If a room does not have a door with a window, the door shall remain open when an adult or authorized volunteer is meeting with any youth or children.
4. Children shall be released only to parents or legal guardians or to persons authorized by their parent or guardian.
5. When taking children or young people off-site, see Field Trip Guidelines.
6. The Trustees shall provide access to a telephone or mobile phone on the premises.
7. The Trustees shall provide well-lighted access to premises.
8. The Safe Church Response Team shall provide first aid kits on the premises, strategically located.

#### D. Education/Orientation

1. Training for authorized volunteers responsible for the care of children will be periodically conducted.
2. This training will include strategies for preventing potential abuse situations, identification of signs of abuse, individual obligations and procedures for reporting abuse, and the discipline policy and appropriate guidance of children.
3. Emergency procedures will be presented and updated as needed.

E. Emergency (Medical) Procedures

1. An authorized volunteer will make any emergency decisions regarding the safety of the Church School students and staff.
2. An adult should accompany any young person to the hospital.
3. Contact the parent of the affected young person immediately.
4. Contact the Christian Education Coordinator or the pastor immediately.
5. A report of the incident should be written as soon as possible including the names of all witnesses to the incident.

F. Fire emergency:

1. When the fire alarm sounds, each teacher takes his/her class out the Designated Exit to the Designated Safety Zone and takes attendance.
2. A designated person checks all classrooms and bathrooms.
3. Teachers keep their classes together in the designated safety zone until the alarm is cleared, and they can return to the classrooms.

G. Field Trip/Youth Event and Transportation Guidelines

1. Field trip/Youth Event Guidelines

- a. **Advanced Notice:** The Christian Education Coordinator and the Christian Education Committee shall receive a proposal for all field trips and all evening or overnight functions at the Church (with the exception of regular youth group meetings) at least one month in advance.
- b. **Approval:** All field trips or events shall receive the approval of the Christian Education Committee before the activity can take place and before fundraising for the activity begins.
- c. **Approval of Chaperones:** All chaperones for youth activities will be approved by the Christian Education Coordinator.
- d. **Parental Consent:** Parents or guardians should be fully informed about programs, activities, leaders, chaperones, dates and times, cost, method

of transportation, and purpose of the scheduled trip or activity. The appropriate signed Field Trip Permission Form, General Release and Medical Forms all should be completed and returned before any child or youth can participate in the event.

**e. Sleeping Arrangements:** A plan on sleeping arrangements shall be determined before the trip. Some of the issues to be considered are gender specific rooms, minimum and maximums per room. Sleeping arrangements for advisors shall depend on size and age of group.

**f. Participation:** All youth participants must stay at the chosen lodging, and participate in the activity. Youth are not allowed to leave the site without notification to the group leaders.

**g. Respect of Event Sites:** Participants shall protect and respect the event and lodging sites and act as considerate guests. All rules and regulations of the event site must be obeyed.

**h. Rules & Consequences:** Prior to an overnight, everyone shall agree on the consequences for breaking rules and publish them in writing to participants. Consequences may range from being asked to leave the trip at any time under any conditions, to being banned from further trips. Extenuating circumstances should be considered. Minor and first offenses can sometimes be handled with verbal warnings.

## H. Transportation Guidelines

Adults who transport children on behalf of the Church are responsible for complying with the following guidelines always.

1. All those who drive on Church organized activities shall have held a full driving license for over two years.
2. All cars that carry children shall have bodily injury liability coverage and comprehensive coverage.
3. All children must wear suitable seat belts. If there are no seat belts, children may not be transported.
4. If a child is known to have a disability or special requirement, a non-driving adult must travel in the car. This adult must sit in the back, behind the driver, with the child in the seat beside him/her.
5. Drivers must comply with all speed restrictions and other driving regulations, including the use of mobile phones.
6. Drivers must not consume alcohol and or drugs prior to or when there are young people in their care. (See alcohol and drug policy)
7. If, in an emergency, a driver must transport one child on his/her own, the child must sit in the back seat of the car.
8. Parents must be made aware of all transport arrangements, and their permission must be granted for front seat travel.

## VII PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING INCIDENTS AND COMPLAINT

### Incident Reporting

A. Possible courses of actions to be taken by the complainant(s) regarding incidents of alleged sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment include:

1. The complainant(s) may attempt to resolve the matter directly with the individual(s) accused of sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment.
2. The complainant(s) may report the incident(s) to the pastor of the church, in an effort to resolve the matter.
3. If an informal resolution by the complainant(s) does not seem wise, appropriate or possible, or fails, the complainant(s) may request the Safe Church Response Team institute formal proceedings regarding allegations against those who are not an authorized minister(s) with standing in the UCC.

B. If the allegation(s) pertains to an authorized minister(s) of the Church:

1. The Safe Church Response Team shall inform the United Church of Christ, Massachusetts Conference, of the allegation.
2. The Church shall cooperate fully in any procedures of the United Church of Christ. The Moderator of the Church will follow up on any allegation.
3. If allegations of child abuse are included in the complaint(s), the Safe Church Response Team shall notify the Department of Children & Family or the appropriate law enforcement agency. The Church shall cooperate fully in any investigation.
4. If allegations of a felony charged are brought to the attention of the Safe Church Response Team (Mandated Reporters), every effort shall be made to encourage the complainant(s) to report such charges to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
5. A written summary of the proceedings shall be maintained by the Safe Church

Response Team in a secure and confidential manner.

C. If the allegation(s) pertains to persons other than authorized minister(s) in the United Church of Christ and:

1.If allegations of child abuse are included in the complaint(s), the Safe Church Response Team shall notify the Department of Children & Family or the appropriate law enforcement agency. The Church shall cooperate fully in any investigation.

2.If allegations of a felony charge are brought to the attention of the Safe Church Response Team, every effort shall be made to encourage the complainant(s) to report such charges to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

3.If the allegations are other than for child abuse, the following procedures shall be followed:

a) The Safe Church Response Team shall gather statements from the person(s) so charged and from others who might have information regarding the alleged sexual exploitation(s), sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment.

b) The Safe Church Response Team shall assess the allegations. In determining whether the alleged misconduct constitutes sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment consideration shall be given to the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.

c) If there is a finding that no sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment has occurred, the complainant(s) shall be notified of the same and the case shall be closed.

d) If there is a finding that sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment has occurred, the appropriate body (i.e., Music Committee, Christian Education, etc.) shall be notified and called upon to act accordingly. Such action shall include one of the following:

- Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior;
- Recommending or requiring a program of growth that shall include education and/or counseling;
- Probation, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
- Dismissal from employment or volunteer leadership position.

e)The Safe Church Response Team shall notify the appropriate law enforcement agency. The Church shall cooperate fully in any investigation.

f.) In all cases, a written summary of the proceedings in such cases will be maintained by the Safe Church Response Team. A copy of the written summary will be maintained in the Church office.

g.) Any person bringing a sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or child abuse complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint shall not be adversely affected in the terms and conditions of their employment, Church membership or affiliation; or otherwise

discriminated against or discharged.

D. Appeal process: If the complainant(s) or accused person(s) is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Safe Church Response Team and/or the supervisory body, he or she has the right to appeal to the Moderator of the Church who shall refer the matter to the Church Council for resolution.

## VIII ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTING

Leaders and all church members are also encouraged to record accidents (incidents). The reason for this is so we can take actions to prevent accidents, rather than waiting for them to happen. Some situations will be easy to remedy, and some might need to get taken up by the Trustees. Accident (Incident) reports should be filled out, filed at the Church office and forwarded to the forwarded to the Safe Church Response Team.

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### Addendum

Applicable Forms (may be obtained from Church office)



Accident (Incident) Report Form  
Church Key Acquisition Form  
CORI Application  
Fire Drill Instruction Sheet  
Incident Response Report Form  
Mandatory Reporting Form  
Medical Release  
Permission for Out-of-town Activities  
Permission for Youth Activities  
Statement of Compliance  
Vehicle Operator Application  
Volunteer Disclosure Form