

First Church of Christ in Longmeadow, UCC
Safe Conduct - Statement of Policy

“Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”
(1 Peter 1:15) (NRSV)

As a community of Christian faith, First Church of Christ, UCC (hereafter “FCC”) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship, learn, and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. FCC is committed to creating and maintaining a safe environment for all, which includes individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith. FCC strongly opposes and prohibits “sexual exploitation”, “sexual harassment” or any form of exploitation or abuse of others regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or mental capacity. It is the intention of our congregation to educate our staff and volunteers; affirmatively nurture good behavior; to prevent, counsel and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, eliminate those persons from their positions who violate this policy.

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, every member of the Congregation is called to uphold these principles. However, we specifically name “authorized clergy,” “standard employees” and “authorized volunteers” (called Ministers), to have a role in leading those who look to them individually for guidance, to monitor their behavior and redirect them as they cross boundaries of safe behavior. Our congregation shall nurture good conduct as demonstrated by personal behaviors that are consistent with our Christian values.

1) Definitions

Ministers are identified as “authorized clergy”, “standard employees” and “authorized volunteers” as follows:

Authorized Clergy are people who hold ordained ministerial standing or have been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ or a region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

Standard Employees are all paid employees who work more than 10 hours per week or are regular weekly staff if less than 10 hours per week.

Authorized Volunteers are anyone non-paid who will be in leadership over or spend extended time with vulnerable people (elders, disabled and/or children) without direct supervision. Examples of these people would be assistant youth group leaders. Authorized volunteers shall be active members of the church, or otherwise affiliated with the church as a regular and active participant.

Vulnerable Adults protected by the law include all adults over 60 years of age and all disabled adults over age 18.

Non-standard employees are defined as anyone who is paid for work at the church that is either not regular or less than 10 hours per week. These employees should always be in the presence of a Minister/ Standard employee.

General Volunteers are defined as people who are non-paid and assist in programs and worship of the church and are always supervised by either an “authorized volunteer” or “standard employee” of FCC. If their duties preclude this possibility, (i.e. Confirmation mentors on an outing, Pastoral Visitors going to a Vulnerable Adult’s home,) then they must be CORI checked.

FCC Supervision Chain - For general purposes, the Senior Pastor is supervised by the Personnel group of the FCC Leadership Team. All other standard employees are supervised by the Senior Pastor or the Position Supervisor and the Senior Pastor as applicable. The Associate Pastor is supervised by the Senior Pastor and the Personnel group of the FCC Leadership Team.

Minister Responsibilities

It is especially important that all Ministers to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. Each Minister is obligated to demonstrate and encourage a safe environment by being attentive to self-care, continuing education, maintenance of personal boundaries, and support of those who are vulnerable or in need of support or refuge. Every Minister should seek to protect vulnerable individuals of every kind and familiarize themselves with the mandated reporting laws found in Appendix A.

This policy is intended to equip FCC Ministers to:

1. Prevent “sexual exploitation” or “sexual harassment” of congregants, employees or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of FCC.
2. Prevent abuse or exploitation of “vulnerable adults”, to include financial exploitation.
3. Prevent abuse or mistreatment of children to include abuse of one child by another.
4. Demonstrate appropriate physical contact or verbal interaction as defined in this policy and prevent or re-direct inappropriate interaction or physical contact by others.

5. Enforce standards for contact between employees, staff, and children outside of scheduled programs.
6. Communicate to others and practice guidelines regarding electronic communications and social media.
7. Manage risk of one-on-one contact between adults and children.
8. Recognize the importance and act upon observations or allegations of behavior outside policy boundaries to include personal interactions, use of social media, and use of church computers.
9. Understand and accept obligations and know how to report suspected abuse of children or vulnerable adults and cooperate with investigations as may follow.
10. Recognize circumstances of “sexual harassment” and the obligation and means to report to church leadership.
11. Understand how Ministers, by their action or inaction, individually pose a risk to the church in the form of legal liability or loss of reputation.
12. Refrain from using a position of power or authority to exploit an advantage over any other person, adult or child.

FCC will strive to equip every Minister of the church to be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. Every new Minister, Non-standard Employee and Lead Volunteer will review these guidelines with their supervisor upon hiring. Ministers and Standard Employees will additionally review these guidelines annually as part of their performance review process.

Guidelines for Church School, Youth Group, and Pre-K Nursery Teaching Assistants

- Church School and Pre-K Nursery teaching assistants (shepherds), will have a CORI/SORI check when they turn 18. (These are Non-standard Employees.)
- Adults in the congregation, who wish to sit in on a Church School class, must have a CORI/SORI, if they are replacing an assistant (as they will be considered a Lead Volunteer). This can be waived if the adult is a parent of one of the children in the class and under the supervision of the Program Minister/Standard Employee.
- Adult substitute volunteers from the congregation must have a CORI/SORI, unless they are the parent of one of the children in the class.

Protocols for Church School assistants

- Assistants/Shepherds will always stay within sight of the Minister/Teacher except:
- When assistants need to take a child out of class to use the restroom or return to their parents, they should be visible to one of the program Ministers/Standard Employees.

- When children are using the restrooms, the assistant will wait outside the outside door.

Guidelines for General (non-authorized) Volunteers and Non-Standard Employees

Non-authorized (General) volunteers and Non-standard Employees for the church will need to follow these guidelines anytime they are volunteering with vulnerable people of the church. These types of volunteers include mentors for Confirmation youth, pastoral visiting team members, short-term assistants in Sunday School, etc. These guidelines will be given to both the volunteers and parents of children under 18, and will be visible in public places of FCC in the library area and Bailey Hall bulletin boards for all church adults to see. FCC Ministers would be the people responsible for distribution of these guidelines.

Guidelines:

- Volunteers will strive to keep any interactions with vulnerable people of the church in public areas only. Examples of this include: a classroom with an open door and other adults nearby; meeting in a restaurant or coffee shop; transporting where more than one adult is present; texting or emailing with copies to parents or other church leaders on the message.
- Volunteers should avoid being alone with vulnerable people of the church, and if they find themselves in such a situation, should remedy as soon as is reasonably possible. Examples of situations to avoid include being alone in a room with no windows, transporting someone with no other adult in the car, having electronic communication with someone that is private.

Exceptions to these guidelines can be made if the parent or other person who has ability to give consent for the vulnerable person gives permission.

Section II. Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct defines individual responsibilities as Ministers, leaders, employees or volunteers to meet the expectations of FCC with respect to behavior or conduct in the service of the ministries of the church, especially those which serve children and vulnerable adults.

General Requirements --

Everyone in church life, but especially each person subject to this Code, shall:

1. Act as a team member in fulfilling ministry objectives.
2. Treat children and “vulnerable adults” fairly and with respect, and without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion.
3. Practice those behaviors we regard as necessary and positive as well as to refrain from those behaviors which have been defined as prohibited.

General Prohibitions --

The following behaviors are prohibited at all times:

1. Display physical affection toward a child or “vulnerable adult” without another adult present.
2. Use profanity or tell off-color jokes.
3. Date or become romantically involved with children or vulnerable adults.
4. Use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of children and vulnerable adults.
5. Possess sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on Church property.
6. Have secrets with children or vulnerable adults.
7. Stare at or comment on children’s bodies.
8. Engage in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with children.
9. Work one-on-one alone with children without a second adult present.
10. Abuse a child or “vulnerable adult” in any way – physically/sexually, mentally/verbally, or allow children in their care to abuse others similarly.

Reporting Obligations --

Each Minister or statutory mandatory reporter shall report:

1. Concerns or complaints about other employees and volunteers, other adults, or children to a supervisor.
2. Allegations or incidents of suspected abuse to the designated law enforcement or child welfare authority.

Specific Interaction Standards –

Ministers, employees or volunteers of FCC shall conduct themselves in a manner that fosters understanding of safe behavior policy in the context of serving everyone in the church, especially children and “vulnerable adults”. The standards articulated below serve two purposes:

- To protect all people, especially children and “vulnerable adults”, from abuse; and
- To protect/prevent church staff from engaging in patterns of behavior that may be construed as abusive or predatory. A pattern of repeated violations will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from ministry.

1. **Approval and Affection** – In providing approval or affection, the following examples are given:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Handshakes ● High-fives and hand slapping ● Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) <p>These may be inappropriate if unwanted by the child or the employee or volunteer. In case of consoling an upset person, for example, one should ask permission before touching if possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lingering or hip-to-hip hugs ● Kisses on the lips ● Showing affection in isolated area ● Lap sitting ● Wrestling ● Piggyback rides ● Tickling ● Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or the employee or volunteer ● Comments relating to physique or body development ● Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

2. **Verbal Interactions** – The manner of speaking with children and vulnerable adults establishes respect. The following examples are given:

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive reinforcement ● Appropriate jokes ● Encouragement ● Praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Name-calling ● Discussing sexual encounters ● Secrets ● Cursing ● Off-color or sexual jokes ● Shaming ● Belittling ● Derogatory remarks

3. One-on-One Interactions –

There may be times in church life when one-on-one interactions with children or vulnerable adults is appropriate. Because most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a child or vulnerable adult, private one-on-one meetings with a child/vulnerable adult are to be avoided unless the following guidelines shall apply:

One-on-One Interaction Guidelines

- When meeting one-on-one with a child, always do so in a public place in view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other employees and volunteers that you are alone with a child and ask them to randomly drop in.
- Telephone communications are to be kept to a minimum. Use of a speakerphone is recommended for long conversation.
- Email and texting communications must be copied to a third party (such as a parent) or a parent shall be notified that texting/email is happening, so they may oversee communication.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

To the extent any of these guidelines may appear to be in conflict, the spirit of them is that one shall seek to be under the supervision of others while meeting privately with a child.

4. Social Media – Electronic Communications –

General Social Media Policy -- When clergy or staff, acting in their capacity as a representative of the church, lead or coordinate a group activity using social media, each may use only official church sites/channels when they have been made available by the church. These may include web pages, Facebook, e-mail and similar means.

Social Media Communications –

In order to enhance communication and develop participation of young people in the life of the church and its ministry, FCC will authorize certain Ministers to manage the church's official website and organization Facebook page. Use by Ministers of private pages and private profiles are prohibited. When using Facebook to communicate with children, the authorized Minister shall inform parents/guardians of each child that the

latter is communicating with the Minister via Facebook, providing the parent/guardian the opportunity to disapprove or to participate in a Group.

Ministers or staff who shall create public pages on behalf of church programs are responsible to monitor communications and to assure that other employees or volunteers do not have private (and possibly inappropriate) conversations with children.

Ministers having Facebook privileges on behalf of the church shall treat unsolicited communication or “friending” from children under age 18 as an unauthorized text message. No reply may be given except to indicate by a posting that accepting a “friend” invitation by under-age children is a violation of the Code of Conduct. If a child reveals abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult, the Minister must report this information in the manner of any suspected abuse.

Social Networking Code of Conduct –

Children and their parents should be provided with a copy of this Social Networking Code of Conduct. Parents are reminded to be vigilant in monitoring their children’s interaction with church staff and volunteers via social networks and to continuously remind children to interact appropriately on such sites. Those who repeatedly violate this code will be denied participation in this form of communication.

Each Minister or staff person who leads using the resources of social media shall apply this Social Networking Code of Conduct:

- Prohibit comments that are, or could be construed by any observer, to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
- Prohibit sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities.
- Prohibit private messages between employees and volunteers and children.
- Prohibit posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive or voyeuristic) or inappropriate comments on pictures.

At the institution of the use of social media, the authorized Minister shall present this Social Networking Code of Conduct to children and parents/guardians.

5.) Group Interactions - Classes, Outings, Family Ministry Events, Mission Projects

Whenever there are group programs run by Family Ministries, Church School, or Youth Group where children and youth are present:

* There must be at least two adults present for every group of youth up to 12 in number. Of those adults, one must be a Minister of the church, and the second being a Lead volunteer where possible. This means both adults will be CORI/SORI-checked.

- * If there are more than twelve youth, there will be an additional adult Lead Volunteer, but this can also be a General Volunteer. The ratio of adults to additional youth (beyond the initial 12) should be one to every 10.
- * If FCC combines a program with another group or church, the ratio of adults to youth should be the same, and it is preferable to have qualifying Ministers/Volunteers from each community to meet the Safe Conduct guidelines.
- * If there are less than two youth present, the event/class will be cancelled and rescheduled or may be combined with another class/program that has more youth for the minimum standard of safety to be met.
- * For middle and high school programs - when out as a group, it is best for youth and leaders to wear an identifying marker together. When and if students need to travel away from the group (e.g. going to the bathroom) it is best to travel in small groups of three under supervision of a Minister/Volunteer. At the event space, it is best to establish a meeting place and first-aid location in case a youth becomes separated from the group.
- * FCC will endeavor to always have a stand-by Volunteer/Minister for youth and family events in case of last-minute cancellation by a scheduled Minister/Volunteer for each event, or for side-trips of a youth/child (such as to the bathroom, for First Aid, to meet a parent, etc.)

All these guidelines apply both for in-person events as well as virtual events, such as using Zoom or livestreaming.

6) Reporting Violations

If parents, guardians or youth at any time believe a harming event has happened that violates this policy, they should speak to a Minister/Standard Employee or leader of the Church that they feel safe contacting, such as the immediate Program Leader, the Supervisor of that Leader, the Senior Pastor, the Moderator of the Church e.g. whom they can reach through the church office (413) 567-6287 Mon-Thurs 9am -4pm. This reporting procedure will be communicated at least annually at the start of the program year by the Ministers of the programs to parents, guardians and youth.

7) Training/Communicating These Guidelines

- * Each new FCC Minister, Standard and Non-Standard employee hired will review the full Safe Conduct policy and sign off that they have fully read this in the presence of an FCC Minister or FCC Personnel Committee member.

- * The Family Ministries Director and Youth Leader will give these guidelines to each Lead Volunteer, General Volunteer or Non-standard employee they bring on board to help with events and programming and go over them thoroughly.
- * All Ministers, Standard Employees, and Authorized Volunteers must review this guideline annually and sign off in their personnel files that they have done so.
- * Every fall, or beginning of the church school/programming year, these guidelines will be given out and explained to parents and families with children under the age of 18 at the time of registration.