

First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Indianapolis, Indiana

Safe Church Policy Concerning Harassment, Exploitation, and Stalking Prevention

Policy Prohibiting Harassment, Exploitation, and Stalking

As a community of Christian faith, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, referred to hereafter as 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. All persons associated with FCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to harassment, exploitation, and stalking and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of FCC to take action to prevent and/or correct behavior that is contrary to this policy. This policy will be reviewed by the FCC Church Council and Safe Church Response Team, hereafter known as the SCRT, every 3 years and, if appropriate, changes will be made to the document. If such changes are substantive, the policy will be brought to the congregation for review.

Ministerial Conduct

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers are ministers to the congregation.

It is important that every minister 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.

It is the policy of FCC to encourage its ministers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Harassment, exploitation, or stalking of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of FCC is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Definitions of Roles

minister: a person authorized by the church to carry out its ministry. Ministers include elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers as well as Authorized Ministers.

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

the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). An Authorized Minister is one type of minister within the meaning of this policy.

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

Definition of Behaviors

Harassment: Behavior directed at another person by a minister with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or embarrassing the other person or subjecting that person to public discrimination. Indiana state law defines harassment as including “unwanted action or contact taken against an alleged victim and involves making a telephone call, communicating by mail, telegraph or other written communication transmitting obscene messages, or indecent or profane messages on a citizen’s radio or communicating via computer network with the intent to harass, annoy, or alarm another person.”

- Any of the above mentioned or following behaviors involve repeated, coercive actions by a minister toward another person contrary to his/her wishes.
- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity.
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual: or
- 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.

Exploitation: activity or contact in which a person engages in a ministerial relationship with another, takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in inappropriate behavior with the minister or in which the minister has inappropriate influence over the other person.

Stalking: Behavior carried out by a person including knowing or intentional conduct involving the repeated harassment of another person that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, or threatened by another or actually causes the victim to feel those things. (Definition paraphrased from the Indiana State Statute on stalking.)

Further Explanation Related to Definitions

Harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that may have sexual overtones particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails or invitations;
- Verbal contact such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes gender-specific traits, or sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another 's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters or magazines.
- Continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome.
- Using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another.
- Suggesting, threatening, or implying that a failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church.
- Implying or actually withholding support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition.
- Hinting that benefits such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry for Authorized Ministers

As part of the hiring process, Authorized Ministers with ministerial positions at First Congregational will have a criminal background check completed; this is a standard procedure as part of the ministerial profile for the United Church of Christ. If the UCC profile is not used, the church will conduct a registered sex offender review for each candidate for a ministerial position by searching their name on the US Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. A limited general criminal background check will also be performed as well as a search of the Indiana sex offender registry because sometimes a name may be listed on one of these registries, but not the other.

Authorized Ministers with ministerial positions at First Congregational will attend all boundary workshops required by the Indiana Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ or will attend at least one workshop on these topics every three years.

Requirements for Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

FCC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which all people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors and vulnerable adults will have been members of FCC for at least six months or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with FCC for at least a year.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will complete and submit a disclosure form similar to the sample attached- Exhibit A which will be reviewed initially and every three years by the SCRT, or could be reviewed by Church Council. Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees and regular, ongoing volunteers will undergo a background check including, but not necessarily limited to; inquiries of references, a limited criminal history verification by a third party vendor that will include a check of the national and state sex offender registry.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will receive initial orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures by the SCRT or church council and whenever changes to the policy are made. Each volunteer/employee will receive a copy of the Safe Church Policy.
- It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. Whenever possible, two adults will be present when children are being supervised. Depending upon the number of children being supervised and the type of activity, more adults or youth age 18 or older may be necessary.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off church property and any overnight youth activities.

Procedures for Handling Complaints of Harassment, Exploitation or Stalking

- I. A subcommittee of the Church Council with no less than two members, one male and one female, will be appointed by the Church Council each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. This subcommittee the Safe Church Response Team, referred to as SCRT, will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint. The SCRT will strive for neutrality in all matters and will recuse themselves from any deliberations in which they cannot maintain neutrality.

- II. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged harassment, exploitation, or stalking.
- The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of harassment, exploitation, or stalking.
 - The complainant can report the incident to a called Authorized Minister of FCC or to the SCRT in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
 - If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the SCRT institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps.
 1. The SCRT shall advise the Minister and Moderator of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Minister or Moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply to that person but shall be sent by the complainant directly to the Church Council and the Southeast Association Committee on Ministry of the Indiana-Kentucky conference of the United Church of Christ.
 2. The SCRT shall gather statements or other information from all individuals involved in the alleged harassment, exploitation, or stalking and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants and present such information to the Church Council. The report of any formal investigation made by the SCRT will be shared with the Church Council and ultimately, with the congregation if the complainant approves such disclosure. In any case, a summary of the investigation findings will be shared with the congregation. The intent is to be transparent in accordance with confidentiality of the complainant, at all times protecting their privacy.
 3. The Church Council, or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take action accordingly: such action may include one or more of the following:
 - a. A finding that harassment, exploitation, or stalking has occurred and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action accordingly; such action may include one or more of the following:
 - A formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior.
 - Recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment.
 - Probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined.
 - Pursue process to dismiss from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in the church.

b. A finding that harassment, exploitation, or stalking did not occur.

A written summary of the Church Council proceedings in such cases will be maintained and shared with the congregation, if appropriate, based on the complainant's wishes regarding disclosure.

1. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence by the person who is alleged to have been harassed, exploited or stalked, will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior by the person alleged to have been the perpetrator. At any time the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
2. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes harassment, exploitation, or stalking, consideration will be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.
3. Any person bringing a harassment, exploitation, or stalking complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will **not** be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or church membership or affiliation or otherwise discriminated against or discharged related to the incident(s).

III. Abuse Statutes and Reporting

It is a legal requirement to report to appropriate authorities (see information below for a listing of the proper authorities to which to report) if at any time, the church, its leaders, or any member of FCC has reasonable cause to believe a minor may be abused or neglected or in danger of being abused or neglected. Any person who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that indicate child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk child abuse or neglect may occur in the foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the proper authorities. The Indiana Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-800-5556. Reports can also be made to the Social Services Department of any hospital or Public Health Nurse in the county in which the abuse is alleged. **(The person seeing or suspecting the abuse must report the abuse. It cannot be reported to the Authorized Minister or other church leaders for them to report to the authorities, according to Indiana state law.) The reporter is immune from prosecution or suit from the victim's family if the report is made in good faith.** Additionally, any person who has reason to believe an individual adult is vulnerable and endangered as a victim or potential victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation must report their concerns and information to Indiana Adult Protective Services who will investigate the matter. A vulnerable adult is a person 18 years of age or older who is physically

and/or mentally incapacitated is in danger of being or has been abused, neglected, or exploited. The Adult Protective Services Hotline is 1-800-992-6978. A report can be made to the Hotline or to the resources listed above for child abuse. **As with child abuse reporting, a good faith report will grant immunity from suit or prosecution. The person observing or having knowledge of the abuse, neglect or exploitation must make the report directly.**

IV. Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Committee on Ministry of the Southeast Association of the Indiana Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ by the complainant.

The Southeast Association of the Indiana Kentucky Conference UCC may be contacted at 317-924-1395.

Developed by the Safe Church Response Team (SCRT) consisting of Jason Gray, Diana Kemper, and Sandra Wood in July and August, 2015, revised in conjunction with the FCC Church Council and passed by the Church Council 11/18/15. Further revisions made by Church Council on 1/13/16.

Approved by the Congregation at the Annual Meeting on 1/27/16.