

**SAFE CHURCH GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES  
OF  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Norwell, Massachusetts**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

We are a Christ-centered, inclusive community called to ministry.

**STATEMENT OF INTENT**

As Christ's body in the world, United Church of Christ, Congregational in Norwell (UCC Norwell) is an intergenerational community. We are the spiritual home for people of all ages. We take seriously our responsibility to create an environment that nurtures the faith of the children and youth who are a part of our community, ensures their safety and minimizes their risk for harm.

A core value of our congregation is the ministry of the laity, as we believe that we are all called to minister to the world. The strength, vitality and efficacy of our ministry depends upon our volunteers. The intent of this document is to outline shared expectations, practices and procedures in order to ensure the safety and well-being of our volunteers, staff, youth, children and vulnerable populations to whom we are called to minister.

The *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures* set forth in this document apply to all UCC Norwell activities which take place within the building and the properties of UCC Norwell as well as any programs, activities, or events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church that take place off the properties of UCC Norwell. These *Guidelines and Procedures* are to be followed by all adults, both staff and volunteers, as well as youth volunteers who participate in UCC Norwell activities.

The *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures* are subject to yearly review, or more frequently if our leadership or congregation determines it to be necessary or advisable. Reviews are to be conducted by the Safe Church Committee and by other committees and ministry teams, as needed.

Staff, volunteers, and parents/guardians of children and youth involved in the ministries of UCC Norwell are encouraged to become familiar with the *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures*. Our ability to successfully live into these guidelines and procedures requires a partnership between staff, volunteers, youth, parents and guardians.

Current copies of these *Guidelines and Procedures* are available in the Safe Church mailbox in the copy room.

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## STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

### Definition:

**STAFF:** Individuals receiving a regular paycheck from UCC Norwell.

### Responsibilities:

- (1) All staff hired by the church must fill out an employment application with references. An inquiry into an applicants' criminal history will not be made on the initial written application or at any time prior to a first interview.
- (2) All staff hired by the church must consent to a background check including CORI (criminal offender record information) and SORI (sex offender registry information) checks prior to hire, and on an annual basis, or more frequently if the Pastor, Safe Church Committee, and/or Human Resources Committee determines it to be necessary or advisable. All staff must have a satisfactory, completed background check on file with the church before they begin employment.
- (3) All staff must read the *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures* and sign a "Statement of Compliance" every year or when revisions are made.
- (4) All staff are required to attend a Safe Church Training Session upon hire and every three (3) years thereafter.
- (5) Staff overseeing ministry teams requiring background checks will timely submit a list of names of individuals who need background checks and distribute the necessary forms to be returned to the church office to the attention of the CORI/SORI Processor.

## VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

### Definitions:

**AUTHORIZED VOLUNTEERS:** Individuals appointed by the church and/or its ministers to work with church participants on a regular basis.

**AUTHORIZED YOUTH VOLUNTEERS:** Youth, fifteen through eighteen years old, who have provided a signed consent/permission of a parent or legal guardian to work with children at church sponsored programs or activities.

**TEMPORARY VOLUNTEERS:** Individuals who work on a temporary basis under the direct supervision of church staff and/or an authorized volunteer. The supervising staff member or authorized volunteer does not have to be in the same room as the temporary volunteer at all times. Examples: Additional staff for youth group activities, Church School substitute teachers, parent volunteers for driving to or from church sponsored activities or events, etc.

### Responsibilities:

- (1) It is preferred and encouraged that all authorized, youth and temporary volunteers are personally known by the church and/or its ministers for not less than six (6) months.
- (2) All authorized volunteers and youth volunteers must complete a CORI (criminal offender record information) and SORI (sex offender registry information) check each new program year, or more frequently if the Pastor, Safe Church Committee, and/or Human Resources Committee deems advisable. New authorized volunteers and youth volunteers must have a satisfactory, completed background check on file with the church before participating as volunteers in church sponsored programs or activities.
- (3) All authorized volunteers must read the *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures* and sign a "Statement of Compliance" yearly and when revisions are made. Authorized youth volunteers must read the *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures* with a parent or legal guardian, and sign jointly with the parent/legal guardian, yearly and when revisions are made.
- (4) All authorized volunteers and youth volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend a Safe Church Training session each year. Training of volunteers will be provided by the Safe Church Committee, in partnership with the leaders of the Church School, Youth, Music and Pastoral Care Ministry Teams.
- (5) A position description will be given to all Youth Group advisors.

## **PARENTS/GUARDIANS RESPONSIBILITIES**

In order for us to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and youth involved in the many ministries and programs of UCC Norwell, we ask the following from all parents/guardians:

1. An Up-to-Date, completed Registration Form for your child(ren)/youth.
2. Prompt pick-up of your child(ren) and youth at the designated end of Church School or any other UCC Norwell activity or event.

We ask parents/guardians to bear in mind that most church school teachers are not professional educators and do not have extensive classroom experience. Therefore, parents of children or youth with developmental or learning disabilities are encouraged to participate in church school and/or youth group with their child at the beginning of the school year to help acclimate their child to the routines.

We ask that parents/guardians maintain open channels of communication with the Church School teachers, Youth Advisors and Minister of Music regarding their child's needs. Please note that such information is treated as confidential as reasonably possible and the privacy of families will be respected.

## GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

As a lay led church, we depend upon the generosity of time, skill and care that our volunteers give on behalf of our ministries, and particularly those we offer to our children and youth. The following are the congregation's shared expectations and policies around adult interaction with children and youth. These policies are not intended to hinder but to enhance our ability to be in safe and meaningful relationships with children and youth.

- (1) It is expected that all adults engaged in our ministry with children and youth will help to create and maintain a safe environment, in keeping with our call to love and serve one another as Christ intends.
- (2) The Two Adult Rule – Whenever possible, there will be at least two (unmarried/unrelated) adults, or one adult and one youth volunteer, present with children and/or youth during a church sponsored activity, on or off church premises.
  - Staff or volunteers who need to have private conversations with youth will hold those conversations in a public place (restaurant, coffee shop, etc.) or in an office within UCC Norwell during normal business hours. The office shall have a clear glass panel allowing viewing from the hallway when the door is closed; or any other room with the door open allowing easy viewing from the outside.
- (3) The “Five Year Older” Guideline – Staff, authorized, and youth volunteers should be a minimum of five years older than the oldest child or youth in the class or youth group with whom they are working.
- (4) The Open-Door Policy – There will be easy and open access to all classrooms or activities sponsored by the church. Classes or youth activities will not take place behind closed doors, unless the room being used has a viewing window in the door for easy visibility. Doors without windows should be left open.
- (5) Permission Forms – Each activity that takes place off of the church premises must have its own permission form.
- (6) Church-Sponsored Activities in Homes – If there is a church-sponsored activity in a home involving youth, there must be at least two non-related adults present.
- (8) Church-Sponsored Overnight Events
  - Church-Sponsored overnights are *always* planned and announced well in advance.
  - There will be a minimum of two male and two female staff or volunteers present at all times during an overnight.
  - These activities require a detailed permission slip signed by a parent or guardian. The sleeping arrangements will be included on the permission form.

- (9) Touching – Appropriate physical touch is an important part of showing love and support to children. Hugs of affirmation or as an expression of comfort are acceptable as long as they do not take place in private. Inappropriate touching will not be tolerated. Inappropriate touching between the child or youth’s shoulders and knees, kissing, any type of hitting or any touch uncomfortable to a child is prohibited.
- (10) No adult will have or use alcohol, marijuana, or illegal or illicit drugs while supervising or chaperoning a youth group trip or activity.
- (11) Words have the power to heal or hurt. No adult or youth volunteers will engage in swearing, dirty stories, and/or gratuitous talk about sexual topics or sexual overtones (i.e. gestures, comments) while working with youth and children. Adults and youth volunteers who do not follow this policy will be excused from discussions, activities, and/or staff or volunteer responsibilities. Violation of this policy must be reported through an incident report.

### **DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Staff and volunteers at UCC Norwell seek to be a God-centered example in the life of all children in our church community, modeling healthy behavior for them and sharing healthy relationships with them. To that end, we require all volunteers and staff to adhere to the following discipline guidelines for youth and children:

1. Discipline of children and youth shall be conducted and communicated in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christian responsibility, respect and cooperation.
2. No child shall be disciplined with spanking, hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.
3. Punishing any child for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet is prohibited.
4. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults or shouting.

In order to create an environment of learning, safety and growth for all children at UCC Norwell, the Church School teacher(s) will maintain close communication with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of any child(ren) who are disruptive in a classroom environment. To the best of our ability, we seek to work with parents to provide appropriate support that will help to nurture the faith of all children in our church community.

**NOTE:** The New Nursery Preschool must follow state regulations and policies concerning behavior management.

## TOILETING

- (1) Parents/guardians are encouraged to have their children use the bathroom before the start of a class or activity (i.e. Church School class, Children's Choir rehearsal, VBS).
- (2) Any child in need of assistance must be walked to the bathroom by a staff member or an authorized volunteer.
- (3) Authorized volunteers that accompany children to the bathroom must stay outside the bathroom with an open outside bathroom door and let the child use the toilet/stall privately. If help is needed with wiping or dressing, help the child *only* while keeping the door to the bathroom open. Inform the parent that the child needed and requested help in the bathroom. One adult (other than the child's parent/guardian) should not be alone with one child within a closed-door bathroom.

## DIAPERING

Unless a parent/guardian gives express written permission *in advance* for authorized volunteers to change their child's diaper, diapering is only allowed by the parent/guardian of the child. If written permission is given, the parent/guardian is to provide the diapers and supplies needed. The diaper may be changed **only** if two adults are present.

## HANDWASHING

Handwashing is the first line of defense against communicable or infectious disease. All children who use the bathroom and all adults who use the bathroom must wash their hands. Fresh, running water, liquid soap and paper towels must be used for hand washing.

**NOTE:** The New Nursery School must follow state regulations and policies concerning toileting, diapering and handwashing.



## **BEHAVIOR CODE AND DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH**

**YOUTH:** All individuals in Grades 6 – 12. (Youth Groups, including all individuals attending Mission Trip, Lock-ins, Retreats, etc.)

### **Behavioral Expectations**

We believe God has high expectations of integrity and kindness for each one of us. We hold our Youth Group leaders, staff, and our youth to these high standards. We anticipate that all young people who choose to participate in youth group at UCC Norwell will follow these guidelines:

- (1) **R-E-S-P-E-C-T** is the key word in our youth ministry and we expect that all participants in our ministry to and with youth will:
  - respect one another (this includes peers, advisors, and ministers)
  - respect the church and its property
  - respect the personal property of others
  - respect the program
  - refrain from all forms of “bullying”
  
- (2) We have zero tolerance for the possession or use of alcohol, marijuana, and illegal or illicit drugs. The use of alcohol, marijuana or drugs before, during, or after any Youth Group activity is cause for dismissal from Youth Group.
  
- (3) Smoking or use of other tobacco or tobacco-like products (such as e-cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff, pipes, etc.) is not permitted anywhere in the church.
  
- (4) Profanity and sexual language (verbal and non-verbal) is not acceptable – either spoken or printed on t-shirts, etc.
  
- (5) Gambling is never allowed.
  
- (6) Knives or other items that may serve as weapons or other dangerous implements or substances may not be brought into the church or on any church sponsored activities.
  
- (7) Disruptive behavior or a lack of respect for others will not be tolerated.

## YOUTH GROUP DISCIPLINE

It is very rare to be faced with a situation leading to the dismissal of a young person from Youth Group. If there is a consistent behavior problem, unless drugs, alcohol, possession of a weapon or gambling are involved, we ordinarily\* follow this 5-step procedure.

- **First** -verbal warning
- **Second**- verbal warning
- **Third** -written warning sent to the Youth Group member and their parents/guardians
- **Fourth** -meeting with the Lead Pastor, Youth Group Advisor(s), and Parents
- **Fifth** -dismissal from Youth Group

\*At the discretion of the pastor(s) or Youth Group leader(s), in cases of a severe behavior problem, any or all of the 5 steps may be overruled. For example, if a Youth Group member were to assault another Youth Group member, they would be dismissed from Youth Group immediately and their parents would be contacted.

**The possession or use of alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs, with the exception of those accompanied by a written prescription from a physician. Possession of a weapon or gambling is cause for immediate dismissal from Youth Group.**

If a youth is on prescription medication, it should be disclosed to the Youth Group Advisors and also noted in an up-to-date medical release form. We ask that parents/guardians maintain open channels of communication with the Youth Group Advisors regarding their child's needs. Please note that such information is confidential and the privacy of youth will be respected.

In addition, it should be noted that youth will never be sent out of the church from any meeting or activity for disciplinary reasons unless a parent or guardian is informed first.

## TRANSPORTATION

- (1) Children and youth may not be transported for any church activity without the written permission of a parent or guardian.
- (2) Unless otherwise specified in a written permission form, transportation for youth is the responsibility of the youth and their parents/guardians. Our Youth Group leaders do not monitor who gets into whose car before or at the conclusion of a Youth Group meeting.
- (3) Activities for which the Youth Group will provide and be responsible for transportation will be clearly communicated.
  - Activities more than an hour from church, transportation is usually provided by bus or by rented vans driven by individuals who are 25 years or older.

- Activities less than an hour from church, we do permit Youth Group leaders and Youth Group parents/guardians to drive. Youth are permitted to drive themselves but not other youth.
- All drivers must provide a copy of a valid driver's license and documentation that they have acceptable automobile insurance.

*Note: If we do not have enough drivers for an activity, the activity will be cancelled.*

(4) Under ordinary circumstances, adults should never be in a car with just one youth. If there is an occasion in which a youth must be transported by just one adult, that youth's parent/guardian must give written permission (text message/email/handwritten). Example: In dropping off youth at their homes following an offsite youth activity, it is possible that the last young person to be dropped off will be the only person in the car with the driver.

(5) If emergency transportation is provided, an authorized adult will notify the parent or guardian as quickly as possible.

(6) Youth will never be left unattended in a vehicle.

(7) Our staff will never leave a youth at the church alone waiting for transportation.

- If only one youth is waiting for transportation, it is expected that two or more adults will wait with him/her.

*We ask parents to pick their sons and daughters up promptly at the end of Youth Group programs.*

## EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

**Norwell has a 911 emergency response for all fire, police, or medical emergencies. Calls should be made from a landline, if possible, to assist emergency personnel in locating the emergency.** Landline phones are available upstairs in the Kitchen, Library, Copy Room, Main Office, Executive Study, Pastors' Offices, and downstairs in the Youth Room (Room 1), office of the Music Minister, and the Children's Education office.

The Deacons, Church School and Youth Group have created detailed emergency procedures that can be reviewed at any time, per the request of the Church Office. These procedures will be reviewed annually by the Diaconate, Church School Ministry team and Youth Group Advisors.

### CHURCH SCHOOL

- Beginning at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings, the church utilizes walkie-talkies to communicate between Church School teachers, the designated Church School volunteer, and the designated Deacon In Charge.
- In the event of an emergency, the Church School teacher presents the emergency via walkie-talkie alerts to the designated Church School volunteer and the designated Deacon In Charge (on the same channel).
- The designated church school volunteer will make any emergency decisions required for the safety of the Church School. This includes medical treatment, or calling the police for any security reasons if parents/guardians are not on site.

### WHEN THE FIRE ALARM SOUNDS DURING CHURCH SCHOOL ON SUNDAY MORNING

- Each teacher takes their class, along with their attendance sheet and walkie talkie, outside of the church building to a safe location. Once outside, each teacher takes attendance and immediately reports any unaccounted-for child(ren) to the designated Church School volunteer and the designated Deacon In Charge via walkie talkie.
- Teachers will keep their class together until the alarm is cleared and they are advised to return to their classrooms.
- There will be one (1) announced fire drill for the Church School each year. Children will be advised by their teacher on what to do if the fire alarm rings while they are in class or at an activity.

### WHEN THE FIRE ALARM SOUNDS DURING WORSHIP ON SUNDAY MORNING

- Deacons will facilitate evacuation

### WHEN THE FIRE ALARM SOUNDS (all other instances)

- Groups using the church are responsible for immediately evacuating to the nearest exit.

## **“STRANGERS”**

If a Church School teacher or volunteer receives a report of a “stranger” or notices someone who is unfamiliar in the Church School area, they will immediately notify the Deacon In Charge via walkie-talkie. The Deacon In Charge will respond by greeting the individual and leading them to another area in the church other than the Church School area.

## **INTRUDER**

In the case of an intruder or a potential intruder inside or outside of the building, the designated Church School volunteer is responsible for calling a lock down. Classroom doors will remain locked during church school so that the teacher may close doors quickly and be locked into their classroom space if the intruder enters the building.

## **LOCK DOWNS OR EVACUATIONS**

The designated Church School volunteer will alert the staff that a lock down is in effect with a previously determined code word. The designated Church School volunteer will use a landline or personal cell phone if possible to call 911 and notify the authorities.

- Teachers are responsible for gathering children together, taking attendance and accounting for all children, and keeping everyone calm and quiet (including electronics).
- If the threat is inside the building and it is safe to do so, teachers and children will exit the building and move to a secure offsite location, either The Friendship Home or Norwell Middle School.
- If the threat is inside the building and children and teachers cannot exit, teachers and children will stay in their locked classroom. The teacher is responsible for locking children inside the classroom, away from the door.
- If the threat involves something or someone outside the building, the teachers will guide children to shelter in the hallway, away from windows.

When the situation has ended, the designated Church School volunteer or law enforcement personnel will notify each teacher. Parents will be notified as soon as possible based on safety of all.

## **HAZARDS**

- Dangerous items, which might cause fire or serious injury or damage, are not allowed to be left in classrooms or in any other places where children or youth may have access to them.

## CORI/SORI REVIEW PROCESS

### Definitions:

**CORI/SORI PROCESSOR:** Person(s) authorized to receive and submit CORI/SORI forms. The CORI/SORI processor will confidentially consult the Pastor when there are concerns. If the concerns involve the pastor(s), the CORI/SORI processor will confidentially consult the Response Team.

All staff of UCC Norwell and volunteers who work with children and/or youth are asked to complete a background check in order to confirm that they have not been charged or convicted of any form of child abuse involving their own or other children. This background check will include Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) and Sex Offender Registry Information/NSOPW (National Sex Offender) Quick Search (SORI) checks. These background checks will be performed when they are first hired/first volunteer and then not less often than annually thereafter.

All information obtained in the CORI/SORI process will be treated as highly confidential, and access to the information must be limited to those individuals who have a "need to know." The church will keep and maintain a current list of each individual authorized to have access to or view criminal history information requests, who will be expected to review and be thoroughly familiar with the educational and relevant training materials regarding CORI laws and regulations. When background check information including CORI/SORI is no longer required, it will be disposed of securely.

1. Each staff/volunteer must complete a CORI Acknowledgment Form and provide a copy of their driver's license or other state-issued identification to verify identity.
2. Completed forms should be put in a sealed envelope and delivered to the UCC Norwell Minister of Parish Life in person or placed in the lock box outside of the main office.
3. The Minister of Parish Life will file all CORI/SORI documents in a locked filing cabinet.
4. CORI/SORI documents will stay in a locked filing cabinet at the church when not being handled by the Safe Church Representative (or CORI/SORI processor). The documents are not to leave the church building.
5. The Safe Church Representative (or CORI/SORI processor) will have access to the locked filing cabinet and is responsible for submitting any new requests through the CORI/SORI online service or by email.
6. The Safe Church Representative will maintain a record of all searches and results. CORI/SORI results will be printed and kept in the filing cabinet.
7. Should a non-clear CORI or SORI result be returned, the Safe Church Representative will discuss the information with the Pastor only (or the Moderator for the Pastor's results), and they will compare the results with the license/identification provided by the individual to ensure the information relates to the same person.
8. If the Pastor believes that the information appears to make the individual unsuitable for the staff/volunteer position or role, they will bring the information to the Moderator.
9. If the information appears to relate to the individual, the Pastor and Moderator will contact the individual involved, provide him/her with a copy of the CORI and/or SORI, and discuss the results.

10. A criminal history is not an automatic bar to service or continued service. UCC Norwell may consult with legal counsel and will conduct an individualized assessment in an effort to screen out only those individuals whose criminal conduct and its dangers bear a direct relationship the risks inherent in the duties of the position or role in question. If the information appears to make the individual unsuitable for the position or role, the Pastor or Moderator will promptly notify the individual, including as required by the Fair Credit Reporting Act and other applicable laws.

Red Flags include (but are not limited to)

*SORI or NSOPW*

- Any non-clear SORI or NSOPW result

*CORI*

- Any felony conviction
- Any misdemeanor conviction in the last (7) years
- Any arrests for sex/abuse crimes against children/youth/elders/disabled persons
- Pending cases

A “conviction” means the final judgment on a verdict or finding of guilty, a plea of guilty, a plea of *nolo contendere* (no contest), or a plea treated by the court as a guilty plea, regardless of the jurisdiction where the conviction was entered.

## CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

### Definitions:

**CHILD or YOUTH:** A person under the age of eighteen.

**ABUSE OR NEGLECT:** Physical or emotional injury resulting from: (i) abuse inflicted upon the child/youth which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child/youth's health or welfare, including sexual abuse; (ii) neglect, including malnutrition; (iii) physical dependence upon an addictive drug at birth; (iv) being a sexually exploited child/youth; or (v) being a human trafficking victim.

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS):** The Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) manages child abuse and neglect reports.

**INCIDENT REPORT:** A written report of any unusual occurrence at UCC Norwell.

**MANDATED REPORTER:** A person who, by virtue of their profession or position/role, is required by law to promptly report suspected abuse or neglect if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child, youth, an elder or disabled person is suffering from abuse or neglect. UCC Norwell considers the following individuals to be mandated reporters: clergy, persons performing duties on behalf of the church (i.e. Deacons, Church School teachers, Youth leaders), church employees who supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel children on a regular basis (i.e. Children, Youth and Music Ministers).

## REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE OR NEGLECT OF A MINOR

### Definitions:

**RESPONSE TEAM:** Individual members of UCC Norwell, appointed by the Church Council, to review and respond to incident reports.

Any adult who serves in a caretaking role with children or adolescents is mandated to notify the Massachusetts Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) when they have a reasonable cause to suspect the abuse or neglect of a child or adolescent under the age of 18. This mandate includes "Clergy members, ordained or licensed ministers, leaders of any church or religious body...or a person employed by a church or religious body to supervise, coach, train or counsel a child on a regular basis." (*Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 119, sections 51A-E*).

*For non-mandated reporters:* If in the context of a class or other event, a child/youth discloses information or an adult otherwise has a reasonable cause to believe that a child/youth is not safe, the incident should be discussed promptly with the ministerial staff to clarify and determine an appropriate level of response.



With the support of the Pastor and/or Moderator, all UCC Norwell staff and volunteers will follow the mandated guidelines for reporting incidences of abuse or neglect, according to Massachusetts law:

**A. Guidelines for reporting a concern of abuse or neglect**

- i) If a volunteer believes that an incident of abuse or neglect has occurred, they shall report it to a staff member. The staff member shall report it to the Moderator, who will then promptly convene the Response Team.
- ii) The Response Team member will obtain details of the allegations from the reporter in a written report form (*Incident Report Form, p. 30*).
- iii) The reporter will keep this information confidential unless specifically instructed otherwise by the Response Team.

**B. Guidelines for the Response Team**

- i) As soon as possible and, in all cases, within 24 hours of the receipt of an incident report the Response Team will meet in person or via a telephone conference call to determine if the incident should be reported to DCFS. If it is determined that the incident should be reported, a member of the team will work with the reporter to notify DCFS by telephone and follow with a written report within 48 hours. If the team decides not to notify DCFS, the Team will review other possible responses and determine the appropriate course of action.
- ii) Possible actions of the Response Team to a report of an unusual incident (the team may use one or more of these options):
  - (1) File a 51-A report with DCFS.
  - (2) Seek consultation from DCFS or outside consultant to determine the appropriate response.
  - (3) Inform the police.
  - (4) Obtain consultation from the Associate Conference Minister or Committee on Ministry of the Pilgrim Association of the United Church of Christ.
  - (5) Recommend temporary removal of a person from a staff or volunteer position.
  - (6) Recommend counseling or pastoral care for any or all parties involved in the allegation.
  - (7) Inform Council of the report and any recommendations of discipline of the alleged perpetrator.
- iii) The Response Team will keep complete and confidential written records of all proceedings in a locked filing cabinet.
- iv) The Response Team will meet near the beginning of each term year to review its mandate and familiarize themselves with UCC Norwell's *Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures*.

**C. Composition of the Response Team**

- i) The Church Council shall appoint and maintain a Response Team to respond to all allegations of misconduct within the church.
- ii) The Response Team will ideally have at least 5 members, at least one male and at least one female.

- iii) The Response Team shall include the acting Moderator, one member of the Safe Church Committee, one member of the Human Resources Committee, one member at large from the congregation who does not represent the previous categories, and the Pastor. It is recommended that the team also include one or more trained professionals (school administrators, nurses, mental health counselors, etc.).
- iv) There will be one alternate designation, in case a member of the Response Team is directly involved in an allegation of abuse or neglect or is unavailable to participate on the Response Team for other reasons.
- v) Members of the Response Team will be appointment by Council and will serve for two years, with staggered terms. Names of members of the Response Team will be included in the Annual Report.

### **PREVENTING IMMINENT HARM**

To protect children and youths, any circumstance of abuse that poses imminent risk of serious harm will be reported to the Norwell Police Department at 911 or 781-659-7979. Because of the vulnerability of children and youths, their right to our protection supersedes a counselee's right to confidentiality.

### **ALLEGATION AGAINST PASTORAL STAFF**

If there is an allegation against the pastoral staff, the Moderator will file an incident report with the Response Team. The Moderator will also contact the Human Resource and Safe Church Committees, and will seek the council of the Associate Conference Minister of the Pilgrim Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ regarding action to be taken.

## **ADULT MISCONDUCT – DISCRIMINATION, HARRASSMENT AND EXPLOITATION**

Our congregation seeks to create and maintain a community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation.

### **Definitions:**

**HARRASSMENT**: repeated misconduct, whether verbal or physical, that creates an environment that is uncomfortable, unwelcoming, discriminating, or intimidating, or leads to an atmosphere in which a person's ability to participate in worship and activities at the church is compromised.

**SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**: activity or conduct of a sexualized nature in which an employed minister engaged in the work of the Church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister.

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

**VULNERABLE ADULT**: Any person aged 18 or over who is or may be in need of assistance by reason of physical, mental disability, age, emotional illness, and who is unable to take care of or to protect him or herself against significant harm or serious exploitation which may be occasioned by the actions or inactions of other people.

### **POLICY ON ADULT CONDUCT**

As a community rooted in Christ, UCC Norwell is opposed to sexual exploitation, discrimination, and harassment of any kind. It is the intention of our congregation to respond to allegations of behavior that are contrary to values that we share as a Christian community. Every individual always has the right to report allegations to local authorities.

### **PROCESS FOR RESPONDING TO A COMPLAINT OR CONCERN**

The utmost respect will be given to the confidentiality and privacy of all parties. Any person who brings a good faith concern or complaint forward, or who assists in investigation of such a report, will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or Church membership, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged. Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis. UCC Norwell will cooperate fully in any investigation conducted by law enforcement.

## RESPONSE

1. **Informal** - The person with a concern may attempt to resolve the matter directly with the person accused. Alternatively, the person with a concern may attempt to resolve the matter with the assistance of the Pastor, the Moderator or a staff member.
2. **Formal** - If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, or possible, or an informal resolution does not succeed, the person with a concern should complete an incident report form and submit it to a staff member or the Moderator, who will then promptly convene the Response Team. A formal proceeding will follow. If the allegation involves the Pastor, the person with a concern should contact the Moderator.

## FORMAL PROCEEDING

When the Response Team is requested to initiate a formal proceeding, the following procedure generally will happen:

- A. The Response Team will convene (*See Composition of Response Team*)
  - a. If the allegation involves the Pastor, the Response Team will be comprised of the Moderator, one member of the Safe Church Committee, one member of the Human Resources Committee, the chair of the Deacons, and one member at large from the congregation who does not represent the previous categories. The Moderator will inform the Pilgrim Association Area Conference Minister. UCC Norwell will cooperate fully in any conference procedures related to the person's ministerial authorization.
  - b. If the allegation involves another authorized UCC Norwell minister, the Moderator will inform the Pilgrim Association Area Conference Minister. UCC Norwell will cooperate fully in any conference procedures related to the person's ministerial authorization.
  - c. If a staff person is accused of misconduct, the employee will be asked to take a leave of absence until the Response Team reviews the merits of the case and makes recommendations regarding the complaint. In the case of alleged abuse by an ordained person the leave of absence will be extended until the Pilgrim Association's Committee on Ministry has made recommendations regarding the complaint. The status of that leave (paid or unpaid) will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Human Resources Committee.
- B. The person accused will be notified that an incident report form has been filed.
- C. Statements will be gathered from individuals involved.
- D. The Response Team will document its activities and meetings, including dates, times, locations, names of the parties present, any decisions, and any further action to be taken. This documentation is to be kept in a secure location determined by the Response Team.
- E. The Response Team will consider all information and determine an appropriate course of action.
- F. If the Response Team determines that no discrimination, harassment or sexual exploitation has occurred, all affected parties will be notified.
- G. If the Response Team determines that discrimination, harassment, sexual exploitation, or other serious policy violation has occurred, the task force will inform the individuals and take actions that may include (but are not limited to):
  - a. Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior

- b. Recommending or requiring a program of growth that may include education and/or counseling
- c. Probation, with the terms of the probation clearly identified
- d. Dismissal from volunteer or leadership position or employment and, in extreme cases, membership in the Church.

**APPEAL**

If the person(s) involved is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter, he or she has the right to appeal to the Church Council, who will appoint a committee to review the complaint.

## **KEY POLICY**

- (1) The exterior doors of the church are locked with keys that must not be duplicated without an authorized signature and an identification card issued by the manufacturer of the lock. The church's identification card is kept in a locked file cabinet in the church office.
- (2) The church keeps an accurate account of all authorized exterior door keys and current key holders. The list is always available in the church office. Key holders must be personally known to the church for a period of six (6) months.
- (3) Key holders must report lost keys immediately to the church office and/or the Board of Trustees.
- (4) Key holders must not loan their keys to anyone without the advance permission of the Pastor(s) or the chair of the Board of the Trustees.
- (5) Key holders must sign a "Key Receipt Form."
- (6) Key holders will turn in their key(s) immediately when their employment or responsibility ends, or at any time requested by the church.

## **INTERNET SAFETY/ SOCIAL NETWORKING GUIDELINES**

### **PUBLISHING/POSTING CONTENT ONLINE**

- UCC Norwell will attempt to secure signed Media Release forms from adults and parents/guardians of children and youths who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution. To encourage communication and joint responsibility, it is recommended that a joint signature be provided for all youth and their parents or guardians.
- Our church building is NOT considered public space, and we will post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast if it will distribute video of its services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media.
- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for children or youths (or adults without their consent.)

### **BOUNDARIES (Adult to Clergy Relationships)**

1. Members who seek religious or spiritual advice from clergy via digital means (email, social media, etc.) are reminded that their communications are NOT secure.
2. Clergy who work directly with children or youths are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with members.
3. Clergy should use privacy settings to shield both adult and child/youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.

### **VIDEO, CHATS, BLOGS, OR VIDEO BLOGS**

- Adults should refrain from video chats with non-related children and youths.
- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be visible in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
- All transcripts of online text chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
- All clergy and authorized youth volunteers should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to others. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church, and your content might be viewed as representative of church policy.

To the extent possible, the two-adult rule should apply to all social media interactions. Best efforts will be made to avoid one-to-one communication over text or instant messaging with a child or youth without express written consent of a parent or guardian.

All children and youth are advised that any communication that is sent via digital means (email, social networking messages or posts, etc.) is not secure or confidential and may be seen by, reported to or shared with others.

## **DIGITAL COVENANTS FOR YOUTH MINISTRIES**

Due to the ever-evolving use of social networking (such as Facebook groups, Twitter, Constant Contact, webpage, list serves, etc.) on an annual basis, the Minister of Youth Education and the Lead Pastor will review the Youth Ministries Digital Covenant outlining expected codes of conduct with regard to social networking and electronic communication. The Minister of Youth Education will present it to Council for approval on an annual basis. All youth ministry participants and volunteers will be asked to read, sign, and adhere to the digital covenant.

\* \* \*



**STATEMENT OF RECEIPT/COMPLIANCE**

Name:

Position:

End of Term:

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of UCC Norwell Safe Church Guidelines and Procedures Manual and I agree to abide by the guidelines, procedures, expectations and requirements in this document, as it may be revised from time to time.

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date

**KEY RECEIPT FORM/STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

Name:

Position:

End of Term:

Name of key/location in building:

I acknowledge my receipt of the key identified above, and my understanding of and agreement to abide by the UCC Norwell Key Policy and the following:

The exterior doors of the church are locked at all times except during normal church hours or during church activities.

The key must not be duplicated without an authorized Church signature and an identification card issued by the manufacturer of the lock.

I will report lost keys immediately to the church office.

I will never loan my key to anyone without the advance permission of the Pastor(s) or the chair of the Board of the Trustees. <sup>1</sup>

I will turn in the key immediately when my employment or responsibility ends, or at any time requested by the church.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE FOR GUESTS USING UCC NORWELL**

I acknowledge that I am a representative of the organization below, and I have received, read and understand the UCC Norwell Safe Church Guidelines And Procedures. I agree that the organization and its participants will abide by the UCC Norwell’s guidelines, procedures, expectations and obligations. Failure to follow the Policies and Procedures may result in the termination of the permission given to me and the organization that I represent to use church facilities, and other actions as UCC Norwell believes is appropriate to the circumstances.

The organization I represent is (legal name and address):

\_\_\_\_\_.

In addition, please indicate your understanding of your/your organization’s responsibilities as a guest in our church, by initialing each of the following paragraphs, then sign this document and return it to the church office during business hours in advance of the scheduled use.

1. \_\_\_\_I/We understand that our organization is required to report to the church’s pastor(s) immediately and file an Incident Report within 24 hours, if I/we believe, or have been told, that there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused and/or neglected at UCC Norwell.
2. \_\_\_\_I/We understand that no adult is to be alone in any room or secluded area on UCC Norwell property at any time with an individual child under the age of 18 that is not his or her close relative. If for any reason we cannot follow these policies and procedures, we will require the parents/guardians of program participants to sign permission forms, in advance, stating that the organization’s program is not church sponsored and does not conform to the UCC Norwell Safe Church Policies and Procedures.

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this document will be kept on file by the Minister of Parish Life.

**STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE UCC NORWELL STAFF & VOLUNTEERS**

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of UCC Norwell Safe Church Guidelines And Procedures Manual and I agree to abide by the guidelines, procedures, expectations and requirements in this document, as it may be revised from time to time. I understand any violation may lead to termination of my employment/role at UCC Norwell.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**ACCIDENT REPORT FORM**

Date of accident: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM

Location of accident: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of injured person(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Type of injury: \_\_\_\_\_

Injury requires physician/hospital visit? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Describe other damage (property, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Witnesses present (and contact if known):

\_\_\_\_\_

Details of accident: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Preparer Signature

Date

Return this form to appropriate supervisor / church office within 24 hours of accident.  
Copies are to be provided to all parties involved.

**NOTIFY THE PASTOR IMMEDIATELY IN THE EVENT OF SERIOUS INJURY OR PROPERTY  
DAMAGE**

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN NORWELL  
INCIDENT REPORT FORM**

*Confidential*

This form is to be filled out by a witness, child representative, or other accuser of an allegation of abuse or neglect. Please complete form within 24 hours and return to a member of the Response Team. This report will be kept confidential and will be stored in a secure location for the protection of everyone involved.

ALSO NOTIFY THE PASTOR IMMEDIATELY IN THE EVENT OF SERIOUS THREAT TO PERSON OR PROPERTY.

Reporter: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and Time of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

**Identification of person(s) involved:**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to UCC Norwell (Member, Employee, Volunteer, Visitor, Unknown) Parent Name (If under 18) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to UCC Norwell (Member, Employee, Volunteer, Visitor, Unknown) Parent Name (If under 18) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to UCC Norwell (Member, Employee, Volunteer, Visitor, Unknown) Parent Name (If under 18) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Specific Location of Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

What is the nature and extent of the alleged incident? Please include specifics such as name(s) of the accused, date, time, location. Cite the source of any information not observed first hand.

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What are the circumstances under which the reporter became aware of the alleged incident? Include names of witnesses, if any.

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Please give other information which you think might be helpful in establishing the cause of the alleged incident and/or person responsible for it. Please provide the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s).

What action has been taken thus far by those involved? (e.g. 911, family notification, alternative transportation). NOTE: *Individuals under age 18 require parent notification; include date & time of notification.*

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\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of person completing this report)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of person completing this report)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of person reviewing this report)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of person reviewing this report)