



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

United Church of Christ - ONA

One Church Street

South Hadley, Massachusetts 01075

(413) 532-2262

E mail: centerchurch@verizon.net

website: www.centerchurchsouthhadley.org



Safe Church Document

Effective January 2010

Revised January 2017

First Congregational Church South Hadley UCC, **Safe Church Document**

First Congregational Church UCC, of South Hadley MA (Center Church) is committed to creating a safe and healthful environment in which all congregants can learn about and experience God's love. It is the intention of this document to encourage all congregants to treat all persons entering this church with dignity and respect. Also to encourage its leaders, ministers, employees and volunteers to nurture safety by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE CHURCH DOCUMENT

Policies set forth in this document apply to all activities which take place within the building and property of First Congregational Church, as well as any programs, activities or events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church which take place off site. This document and procedures apply to all groups using First Congregational Church facilities as guests or as part of any arrangement with the Trustees. There are no exceptions.

These policies shall be distributed annually in February during the first meeting of all First Congregational Church committees, boards etc, in order to ensure that new members and volunteers are made aware of this document. All new staff shall be oriented to this document. In addition, First Congregational Church, UCC makes a commitment to provide appropriate training, on an annual basis, to volunteers, staff and congregants, in order that the goal of creating a safe and healthful environment can be realized.

This document is subject to annual review by the Safe Church Committee.

Safe Church Appointee

Definition: An appointed person by church council shall coordinate Safe Church practice, and is responsible for implementation and maintaining Safe Church practice with input from appropriate designated persons. (as stated in the church constitution) Safe Church appointee will have completed the volunteer application and screening and signed the Safe Church covenant.

Which will be kept in the safe church report binder, for a period of no less than 3 years.

Responsibilities:

- Implementation of this document
- Consultation on screening and disclosures
- Annual Training of volunteers and staff
- Annual Review of this document

SCREENING POLICY FOR PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

1. Screening Process for all paid staff

Screening is required for all paid staff. Safe church document screening shall be incorporated with the interview and hiring of all paid staff.

Required Screening Elements:

- An employment application
- personal interview
- Two reference checks
- CORI check

The Senior Pastor reviews CORI Checks. If a CORI check reflects arrests and/or criminal convictions, the Pastor will discuss the CORI with the potential staff/volunteer with the goal of resolving the concern. The Pastor may consult with a designated member of the Safe Church Committee if discussion with the applicant does not provide resolution. Every effort will be made to protect the privacy of the applicant.

Please review the **staff/volunteer application and covenant** included as Appendix A

2. Screening Process for regular volunteers

Required before any volunteers may work on their own with the children and youth of the church. Includes all volunteer children and youth workers, including Sunday school teachers, nursery helpers, overnight chaperones, mentors, confirmation teachers, and high school assistants.

Required Screening Elements

- An completed application form
- Volunteers must be known to the congregation.
- The Supervisor of the Sunday school and Youth Program must approve volunteers.
- Volunteers must sign a covenant pledging to protect the safety of our children

Ad hoc volunteers who have not been screened will not be left alone with children or youth, for any amount of time, during church activities, but will always be accompanied by a screened church staff member or screened regular volunteer.

Training of Volunteers

All volunteers will be given a copy of the Safe Churches Document to read prior to working in a program. They will discuss with the Supervisor of that program procedures included in the Policy pertaining to the age with which they will be working; such as discipline, bathroom, as well as reporting procedures.

Volunteers will be directed to familiarize themselves with the sexual offenders file in the office.

Policy regarding known, convicted sexual offenders

Any known, convicted sexual offender shall never be allowed to work with children or youth in any capacity.

Such persons shall not be allowed to ever have a key, or access to a key, to the premises.

Child Care Policies

Preamble:

All adults will act with respect and kindness toward children and youth in their care. Adults will speak with respect to other adults when around children. Children and youth will be encouraged to act and speak with respect toward one another and toward adult teachers and advisors.

Adults failing to act according to these guidelines, or who demonstrate dangerous or disrespectful behavior around children or youth, may be barred from future participation.

Sign in/Sign out Policy for -The Nursery.

No child is to be left in the nursery unattended. Before being allowed to use the nursery on Sunday mornings, a child must be signed in by the parent/parents or person/persons responsible for that child. At that time, whoever is responsible for the child must let the caregiver know who will be picking up the child at the end of the service.

At the end of their time in the nursery, a child will not be allowed to leave without first being signed out by the parent/parents or person/persons responsible for that child.

Bathroom/Diapering Policy

No child shall be punished, verbally abused or humiliated for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet.

Nursery teachers shall ask parents or guardians their preferences about changing their children's diapers.

Toddlers and preschoolers who are no longer in diapers shall be accompanied to the bathroom by an adult. Generally, the adult shall remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside. If anything unusual happens during this assistance, the Director of Church School shall be notified and take further appropriate action.

Children who are kindergarten-age and older do not need to be escorted to the bathroom, as long as it is nearby. If a child does not return in a reasonable time frame, send *another (older) child* to find out where the child is. If assistance is needed in the bathroom, request help from another adult *and* prop the door open.

If, for any reason, an adult leader is left alone with a child, the door to the classroom they are in should remain open.

Discipline

Should the need for discipline occur, it shall be conducted with the purpose of maintaining order and in the spirit of teaching responsibility, respect and cooperation.

No child shall be disciplined by the use of shaking, spanking, hitting, slapping, or any other form of physical punishment.

No child shall be verbally reprimanded by the use of destructive criticism, insults or shouting.

Teachers and other adults helping in the classroom are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, model appropriate behavior, use time-outs or give alternative choices. If this is not feasible, a parent will need to be contacted and brought to the room.

It is not within the ministry of Church School teachers or volunteers to act in place of parents with regard to serious behavioral problems that occur during church school sessions or youth group events.

Sunday School/ Youth Group

At the beginning of Sunday School and Youth Group Classes, the leader will fill out an attendance sheet, including a count of total children and adults present. The sheet will be used to track the children and youth in case of an emergency evacuation.

Attendance Records Attendance sheets from the nursery, Sunday School and Youth Group will be filed in the Christian Education office and kept for three years.

Trips and Events

Both day trips and overnight church school and youth group events should include at least two adults.

Co-educational overnight events must include both male and female adults. At least one adult male will dorm with boys and one adult female will dorm with girls on coeducational overnight trips. Any and all adult chaperones supervising events shall have (completed a volunteer application/been cleared to do so by the Pastor, Church School Coordinator, Youth Group Coordinator, or other designated church official). The Youth director will be required to send information about Youth Ministry and emergency information needed, to parent(s) or guardian(s), once the youth participates. Additional written consent forms are required for any activity or trip not within walking distance of the church. Emergency medical information and parental consent is required for overnights.

Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco

The use of any illegal drugs, tobacco, or alcohol on or in church facilities or at church sponsored events with children and youth groups of this church is strictly prohibited.

Transportation

Neither children nor youth should be dropped off at the church at any time unless provisions have been made by the parent or guardian with another adult who will supervise the child's arrival. Transportation from and return to the church, by staff and other approved adult leaders for field trip activities and events, is by groups and is allowed with written or verbal permission of parent or guardian.

Disclosures of Abuse or Neglect

Any concerning issues shall be reported to the appropriate Youth Director or Pastor. Concerning issues include, but are not limited to, any evidence of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult and a minor (whether they are related or not) or between two minors. Upon receiving such a report, the volunteer should report the disclosure to the appropriate Youth Director or Pastor and follow the procedure as outlined below.

If the allegation involves a Pastor of the church, please follow the procedure outlined below titled **“Response Procedures After an Allegation involving a First Congregational Church Pastor”**

The following guidelines will be observed:

- Show sensitivity toward the child who discloses the information
- Do not deny or try to explain away the information
- Assure the child that the abuse is not his/her fault
- Refrain from judging the alleged abuser. Often the person is someone the child loves and must depend upon for care.
- Refrain from an agreement to keep the information a secret. Assure the child that when the information is shared it is for her/his benefit.

Response Procedures After an Allegation is made:

- A. Nothing in this guideline supersedes the responsibilities of the employees, volunteers and administration of the Church under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119 Section 51A (mandated reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect)
- B. All allegations shall be taken seriously and immediately made known to the appropriate Youth Director and/or Pastor. If the allegation involves a Pastor of the church, please follow the procedure outlined below **“Response Procedures After an Allegation involving a First Congregational Church Pastor”**
- C. No accused party shall be interviewed until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
- D. All situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect to people's privacy and confidentiality
- E. The Church's insurance carrier, attorney and officials (including the Church Moderator and Chair of the Personnel Committee) shall be contacted immediately by the Pastor.

Following the guidance of the insurance carriers and attorney, the Pastor shall contact the appropriate authorities.

- F. An incident report form shall be completed. (In duplicate)
- G. The Pastor and an advisor designated by the Pastor and the Church Moderator shall notify the alleged victim's parents/guardians
- H. In all incidents of suspected child maltreatment, the Church reserves the right to take any action it deems necessary, including suspension and termination of church duties or employment, volunteer or otherwise, in regards to the accused person, if it presents as in the best interest of the safety of the children
- I. Full cooperation shall be given to governmental authorities, including police, with an attorney representing the church to be present while answering any investigative questions.
- J. All efforts in handling the incident shall be documented by a designee of the Church Moderator. Such documents shall remain the confidential property of the Church as permitted by law.

Please review the **Incident Report form** included as Appendix B.

Response Procedures After an Allegation involving a First Congregational Church Pastor

- A. Nothing in this guideline supersedes the responsibilities of the employees, volunteers and administration of the Church under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119 Section 51A (mandated reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect)
- B. All allegations involving a First Congregational Church Pastor shall be taken seriously and immediately made known to the appropriate youth Director and the First Congregational Church Moderator.
- C. No accused party shall be interviewed until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
- D. All situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect to people's privacy and confidentiality
- E. The Church's insurance carrier, attorney and officials (including the Chair of the Board of Deacons and Chair of the Personnel Committee) shall be contacted immediately by the Church Moderators designee. Following the guidance of the insurance carrier and attorney, the Church Moderator designee shall contact the appropriate authorities.
- F. An incident report form shall be completed.
- G. The Church Moderator designee shall notify the alleged victim's parents/guardians
- H. In all incidents of suspected child maltreatment by the Pastor, the Church reserves the right to take any action it deems necessary, including suspension and termination of church duties or employment, volunteer or otherwise, in regards to the accused person, if it presents as in the best interest of the safety of the children
- I. Full cooperation shall be given to governmental authorities, including police, with an attorney representing the church to be present while answering any investigative questions.
- J. All efforts in handling the incident shall be documented by a designee of the Church Moderator. Such documents shall remain the confidential property of the Church as permitted by law.

Building Security Policies & Procedures

The physical facilities of the church must be safe for all who enter its doors. The Safe Church or Safety Committees, shall recommend to Trustees policies and procedures with respect to the security of the church property.

DRUGS, ALCOHOL and TOBACCO

The use of any illegal drugs on or in church facilities or at church sponsored events is not permitted.

Alcohol is prohibited on Church property.

Tobacco products are not to be used within the church facility, or any church sponsored event outside of church where there are children present.

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT

- Accident/Incident form shall be filled out in duplicate
- Parents shall be notified (If Applicable)
- Safe church designee and (If Applicable) personnel shall be notified
- Original copy will be retained in the Office (in the safe church report binder.)
- All accident/incidents relative to the safety of the church/congregation shall be written up with the date and signed by the person reporting and shall remain in the safe church report binder available in the church office for a period of not less than 3 years. It shall be the responsibility of the safe church coordinator to review these reports in a timely manner and it shall be his/her responsibility to take further action.

BUILDING SAFETY AND EVACUATION

- All exits are properly identified and illuminated
- The fire alarm is functional and tested on a regular basis
- Evacuation floor plans/emergency procedures are posted
- Emergency numbers are posted by all church telephones
- First aid supplies need to be checked/updated on a quarterly basis by a health professional
- Fire extinguishers need to be maintained and readily available at any church function involving candles.
- Two church members will be designated by the Deacons to act as fire safety personnel when the candles are lit during church services.
- Any group using candles or any type of open flame, in any part of the church building, must contact the church office before use. The office will then notify the safe church designee.

SECURITY

- Employees and members of the congregation may be notified of any criminal activity (that effects day by day life of the church) that occurs/occurred on the premises.
- A file in the office shall be kept regarding information on sexual offenders living in the community, to be shared with staff, volunteers and renters.
- Personnel are encouraged not to work alone during off hours or late in the evening.
- Personnel are encouraged to request ID from strangers in the building.
- The church will be locked after church personnel have left for the day.
- The Church will maintain logs to record inspection. The Church Council shall appoint a person from Board of Trustees to be responsible for conducting regularly scheduled inspections of the church premises and keeping up to date records.
- The Church will establish a key control policy and track possession of all keys including a procedure to collect keys from those no longer needing them.

KEY CONTROL POLICY

All keys to be loaned out will clearly be marked: DO NOT DUPLICATE.

The Office Manager has responsibility for distribution of keys.

The Office Manager is charged with the responsibility of determining the following:

- the need to assign keys
- to whom the keys will be issued
- length of time to hold the keys

All key holders are to complete and submit:

- Room Usage/Rental Form
- Key Receipt Form (Appendix C)

Reasons and procedures for requesting that a key be returned:

- failure to comply with the policies and procedures for a Safe Church
- loaning the key to another person
- duplicating the key
- no longer necessary to possess key
- any other reasons and conditions the authorized personnel may deem necessary

An active file of Keys In/Keys Out will be kept and updated at regular intervals.

Note: There is the potential for different levels of keys to determine who gets what keys with regard to the need/activity.

Confidential First Congregational Church Accident/Incident Report Form

This form is to be used to register all mishaps that take place during church programs or church events on or off church premises. This form is also to be used for all alleged incidents of harassment, intimidation, exploitation or abuse of an adult or child, or the neglect of a child. A copy of this form will be given to the parent and the original kept in the safe church report binder in the office. (if applicable)

Please contact a member of the Safe Church Committee for assistance in completing this Incident Report Form.

A. Type of Incident: _____
(if there is not a person involved SKIP to section C)

B. Victim's Name: _____ Gender: _____ DOB: _____
Home Address: _____
Phone: _____

C. Name of person completing this form: _____
Home phone: _____ Work phone: _____

1. Briefly describe the nature and extent of the incident. Include specifics such as date, time and location.

2. Describe the circumstances under which you became aware of the incident. Include the names of witnesses. (if applicable)

3. Indicate action taken by staff and/or authorized volunteers. Include these people's names. (if applicable)

- 4. Please provide any other information that you think might be helpful in describing the incident(s) and/or the person(s) responsible for it. If known, please provide the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s). (if applicable)

I have read and agree with the information provided on this form.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Office use only

Date report received: _____
Report received by: _____ and _____

If the injured person is a child, a copy has been submitted to parents/guardians.

Date submitted: _____
Submitted by: _____

Description of action taken (including date):

Additional comments: _____

First Congregational Church, Application for Children/Youth Work

CONFIDENTIAL

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or paid) involving the supervision and/or custody of minors. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

PERSONAL:

Date: _____

Name: _____
Last First MI

Name: _____
Maiden (if applicable)

Current Address: _____ **City:** _____

State: _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Home Phone: _____ **Cell/work phone:** _____

Email: _____

What type of children/ youth work do you prefer?

On what date are you available to start?

Minimum length of commitment?

Do you have any disabilities or conditions preventing you from performing certain activities related to youth or children's work? Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes please explain:

Do you have a current valid driver's license? Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes please list your driver's license: _____

Have you ever been convicted of a traffic offense? Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes please describe all convictions in the past five years:

Have you ever been arrested or convicted for a criminal offence? (other than a traffic offense) Yes _____ No _____

If yes please explain _____

(continued)

CHURCH ACTIVITY

Name of Church of which you are a member:

Please list the name and addresses of other churches you have regularly attended during the past five years:

List all previous church work (paid or volunteer) involving youth/children; please include the name of the church in which the work was done and the type of work:

Please list any training, education, personal calling, gifts or other factors that have prepared you for work with children/youth:

Applicants Statement

The covenants between persons seeking authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity and truthfulness for the health of the faith community. To that end, I attest that the information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be ground for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the position I am seeking to fill. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give First Congregational Church of South Hadley any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children/youth work. I release all such references from any liability for furnishing such evaluations to you, provided they do so in good faith and without malice. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Bylaws and Policies of the First Congregational Church, and to refrain from inappropriate and illegal conduct in the performances of my services on behalf of the Church.

Applicants Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Witness: _____ **Date:** _____