

First Congregational Church

Safe Church Policy

(updated 2-2017)

Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse Prevention

Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, First Congregational Church of Stamford 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 First Congregational Church of Stamford should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

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 First Congregational Church of Stamford to encourage its Ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of First Congregational Church of Stamford is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit a disclosure form similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit A.
- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.
- The church will conduct a registered sex offender review for each Minister by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. This registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all Ministers.
- Authorized Ministers of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by the CTUCC or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

First Congregational Church of Stamford is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young 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 will have been members of First Congregational Church of Stamford for at least six months or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with First Congregational Church of Stamford for at least a year.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form substantially similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit B.
- Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third-party vendor.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.
- It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children. Youth over the age of 15 may assist an unrelated adult in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two unrelated adults be present.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities.

Definitions

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.

Sexual Exploitation: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Minister engaged 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 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 with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance 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.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has 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 about gender-specific traits, 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.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that 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. It is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold 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; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment

I. Generally

- A. A subcommittee of the Christian Education Board with no less than two members, one male and one female, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee, hereinafter referred to as "The Response Team," will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

B. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:

1. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.

2. The complainant can report the incident to a called minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.

3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:

- The Response Team shall advise the Senior Minister and Moderator of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Senior Minister or Moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.

- The Response Team shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged exploitation or harassment and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to the Christian Education Board or an appropriate subcommittee thereof.

- The Christian Education Board, or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:

a. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment 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:

(i) a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;

(ii) recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;

(iii) probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;

(iv) dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.

b. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

- The Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.

C. A written summary of the Christian Education Board proceedings in such cases will be maintained.

- D. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. At any time the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
- E. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation, consideration shall 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.
- F. Any person bringing a sexual harassment or exploitation 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.
- G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Christian Education Board, he or she has the right to appeal to the Moderator, or to the Vice Moderator if the Moderator is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the Church Moderator. The subject of any such appeal to the Church Moderator shall be limited solely to whether the procedures of this policy were followed. The matter will not be reconsidered on the merits and the decision of the Church Moderator will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Church Moderator determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Christian Education Board to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

II. Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements, the First Congregational Church of Stamford will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families, if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any Minister of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Senior Minister and Moderator so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Connecticut Child Abuse Hotline currently is 1-800-842-2288.

III. 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 Church & Ministry Committee of the CT UCC of the United Church of Christ.

The CTUCC may be contacted at 860-233-5564.

Exhibit A

DISCLOSURE and AUTHORIZATION – BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION

In connection with my application for employment or to serve as a volunteer with The First Congregational Church of Stamford (“Client”), I understand that an “investigative consumer report”, as defined by the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15 U.S.C. § 1681), will be requested by Client for employment or volunteer purposes, whichever is applicable, from Protect My Ministry, Inc., (“Protect My Ministry”), a consumer reporting agency as defined by the Fair Credit Reporting Act. These reports may include information as to my character, general reputation, personal characteristics or mode of living, whichever are applicable. The report may also contain information about me relating to my criminal history, driving and/or motor vehicle records, social security number verification, verification of education or employment history or other background checks. Such reports may be obtained at any time after receipt of this Disclosure and Authorization and if I am hired or serve as a volunteer, whichever is applicable, throughout the course of my employment or volunteer service, as permitted by law and unless revoked by me in writing. Client also reserves the right to share my report with any third-party with whom I will be placed to work or volunteer with as a representative of Client. I understand that I have the right, upon written request made within a reasonable amount of time after the receipt of this notice, to request disclosure of the nature and scope of any investigative consumer report to Protect My Ministry, Inc., 14499 N. Dale Mabry Hwy., Suite 201 South, Tampa, FL 33618 or 1-800-319-5581. For information about Protect My Ministry’s privacy practices, see www.protectmyministry.com.

Acknowledgement and Authorization

By signing below, I authorize Client or its authorized agents to obtain or prepare an investigative consumer reports about me. I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the federal notice entitled *A Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act* and certify that I have read this Disclosure and Authorization as well as the summary document explaining my rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Signature TODAY’S DATE _____

LAST NAME _____

FIRST NAME _____ MIDDLE NAME/INITIAL _____

HOME ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ COUNTY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

SSN D/L or STATE ID STATE ISSUED

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

For identification purposes only, please provide FULL DOB: _____

Please List Other Names Used: _____
(Maiden or other known aliases)