

CCC Safe Conduct Policy

CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Approved by the Coordinating Council, May 1, 2017¹

Statement of Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

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

As a community of Christian faith, Christ Congregational Church 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 harassment, abuse, exploitation, or intimidation. The congregation of Christ Congregational Church supports safe conduct principles, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith. Christ Congregational Church strongly opposes and prohibits sexual harassment or any form of exploitation or abuse of others regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or mental capacity.

It is the intention of our congregation to affirmatively promote good behavior, and to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this policy. This policy is not intended to cover violations of law. Allegations of criminal activities should be immediately reported to the proper authorities. In addition, under Maryland law, all adults have an obligation to make report(s), if they have reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect.

¹ Original version adopted November 11, 2007 and amended May 4, 2009. The Board of Trustees approved this working draft on June 20, 2016.

Overview

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, everyone at CCC -- authorized clergy, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, members and friends -- is a Minister to the congregation. It is important that authorized clergy, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, members and authorized volunteers be adequately prepared and trained for the ministry in which they serve and understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. Everyone is obligated to demonstrate and encourage safe conduct by being attentive to self-care, continuing education, maintenance of personal boundaries, and support of those who are vulnerable or in need of support or refuge. Everyone should seek to protect vulnerable individuals of every kind. Abuse, exploitation and harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of Christ Congregational Church will not be tolerated in this congregation.

Everyone at CCC should read and understand the details of this policy and related procedures in order to:

- Ensure CCC remains a sacred space where everyone belongs, where all are welcome, where we honor and celebrate people of all races, cultures, ages, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.
- Prevent sexual exploitation or sexual harassment of parishioners, employees or others.
- Prevent abuse or exploitation of vulnerable adults, including financial exploitation.
- Prevent abuse or mistreatment of children and youth to include abuse of one child by another.
- Recognize circumstances of, and understand how to report, suspected abuse, exploitation and harassment of children and youth or vulnerable adults as required by this policy or as required by the State of Maryland, and cooperate with any investigations.

Authorized clergy who are serving the congregation in any capacity (active, retired, employee, volunteer) should hold themselves to a higher standard of care with respect to their personal conduct and relationships with the congregation, church staff and volunteers, whether pastoral, administrative or personal in nature.

Christ Congregational Church is committed to prompt, professional and measured response to all alleged violations of these policies and procedures and suspicions or allegations of abuse. CCC is committed to (1) seriously consider the concerns of victims; (2) undertake a fair investigation; (3) protect the confidentiality of parties involved in an investigation; (4) report as required to, and cooperate fully with, public authorities; and (5) communicate fully with the congregation within the bounds of individual rights to confidentiality.

Fulfillment of this commitment requires everyone to assume responsibility for safe conduct as part of their respective duties, whether authorized clergy, employee or volunteer.

Code of Conduct

The following **Code of Conduct** applies to everyone (members, friends, staff and volunteers) in the Christ Congregational Church community wherever they encounter members of the CCC community (e.g. Mission trips, beach weekend, Retreat House, or downtown Silver Spring).

The following behaviors are prohibited at all times --

- Displaying affection toward a child, youth or vulnerable adult in private (for exceptions, see section below outlining acceptable physical interactions).
- Discussing sexual encounters with or around children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Adults dating or becoming romantically involved with children or youth.
- Possessing sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography.
- Having secrets with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Staring at or commenting on the bodies of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Engaging in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Touching bottom, chest, or genital area of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- Permitting children or youth to engage in the following: Hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, games such as Truth or Dare, ridicule or humiliation or sexual activity.
- Abusing children, youth or vulnerable adults in any way including (but not limited to) the following:
 - Physical abuse: hit, spank, shake, slap, unnecessarily restrain
 - Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, curse
 - Sexual abuse: inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented conversations
 - Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, act cruelly
 - Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter
- Manipulating or exploiting a child, youth or vulnerable adult in any way.

Interaction Guidelines –

In addition to the **Code of Conduct**, everyone at CCC should be aware of and adhere to these **Interaction Guidelines** when interacting with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The interaction guidelines listed below serve two purposes:

- To protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse or grooming for abuse; and
- To protect/prevent church staff from engaging in patterns of behavior that may be construed as abusive or predatory.

While a single infraction of these guidelines may not be a concern, a pattern of repeated violations may result in disciplinary action for employees and dismissal from a ministry involving children, youth or vulnerable adults for volunteers.

- **Approval and Affection** – In providing approval or affection, the following guidelines apply:

| <i>Acceptable Physical Interactions</i> | <i>Discouraged Physical Interactions</i> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side hugs • Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs • Pats on the shoulder or back • Handshakes • High-fives and hand slapping • Pats on the head when culturally appropriate • Touching hands, shoulders, and arms • Arms around shoulders • Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) <p>These may be inappropriate if unwanted by the child, youth or vulnerable adult.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-frontal hugs • Kisses • Lap sitting • Wrestling • Piggyback rides • Tickling • Allowing a child to cling to an employee or volunteer’s leg • Any type of massage given by or to a child, youth or vulnerable adult • Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child, youth or vulnerable adult • Compliments relating to physique or body development |

Note: When working with very young children (infants through 5 years old (Pre-K), some items in the discouraged physical interaction category are appropriate and commonly used in early childhood settings to support the social-emotional development of children – such as full-frontal hugs, kisses, lap sitting.

- **Verbal Interactions** – The manner of speaking with children, youth, and vulnerable adults establishes respect. The following guidelines apply:

| <i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i> | <i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive reinforcement • Appropriate jokes • Encouragement • Praise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name-calling • Cursing • Shaming • Belittling • Derogatory remarks • Using profanity or telling racist or sexist jokes • Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children, youth, or vulnerable adults • Derogatory remarks |

One-on-One Interactions –

One-on-one meetings with a child, youth or vulnerable adult should generally be avoided. When they are necessary, the following guidelines shall apply:

One-on-One Interaction With Children and Youth Guidelines

- When meeting one-on-one with a child or youth, always do so in a public place in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other employees and volunteers that you are alone with a child or youth and ask them to randomly drop in. (Ask to be supervised.)
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

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

One-on-One Interaction With Vulnerable Adults Guidelines

- To the extent possible, notify a vulnerable adult and his or her family (if appropriate) prior to a visit
- When visiting in care facilities, sign in and sign out at the front desk
- Do not accept any gifts, dispense medicine or take money during the visits.
- Caregiver will provide brief reports to the authorized clergy or Program Director after each visit, reporting any significant safety concerns.
- When meeting one-on-one with a vulnerable adult, to the extent possible, conduct the meeting in a public place in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other employees and volunteers that you are alone with the vulnerable adult and ask them to randomly drop in. (Ask to be observed.)
- The caregiver should visit with the vulnerable adult with the Program Director or another volunteer periodically to allow “two-deep” interactions as a cross check.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

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

Safe Conduct Training

Every employee and each volunteer ministering to children, youth or vulnerable adults shall complete a specific program of training on this policy. Training shall be repeated annually. For additional information about the training, please see **Safe Conduct Procedures**.

Screening & Selection of Candidates for Employment and Volunteers for Certain Ministries

Prior to beginning their duties, every candidate for employment or volunteer work with children, youth or vulnerable adults must complete a safe conduct screening form and application (see **Safe Conduct Procedures – Applications and Forms**), including disclosure of criminal convictions and permission to conduct appropriate background checks as specified by this policy. For additional information on screening, please refer to **Safe Conduct Procedures**.

Reporting Obligations —

1. When anyone observes a violation of the Code of Conduct, whether committed by an employee, volunteer or other person, or observes any other circumstance they find suspicious or feel is inappropriate, they have a duty to report it directly to the Senior Minister, Associate Minister, Moderator, or Chair of the Personnel Committee. If someone does not know who to report a violation to, they should consult **Safe Conduct Procedures – Leadership & Reporting Roster** for a list of people.

If someone who has observed a violation believes that the primary contact has failed to respond or has not taken their allegation seriously, the latter may contact members of the Personnel Committee. The witness or victim may report violations of policy or circumstances of abuse anonymously. The Personnel Committee shall (1) investigate the facts, (2) institute corrective action, if warranted, and/or (3) report as may be required by statute.

2. When anyone observes a violation of the Interaction Guidelines, Guidelines Applicable to those Employees and Volunteers Ministering to Children and Youth or the Social Media Policy, they should report it to the Board Chair for the appropriate ministry.
3. If the witness or victim believes a criminal act has occurred, they should contact the appropriate law enforcement authority.

Every report of misconduct must be taken seriously. All persons involved in an allegation regarding misconduct must be treated with compassion, sensitivity and concern. The confidentiality of persons and the specifics of an allegation must be maintained in so far as possible. There is always a presumption of innocence until allegations are proven.

Christ Congregational Church expects and requires the cooperation of everyone in the investigation of violations of this policy, including a complainant, witness, and the accused

offender. CCC may interview these individuals privately and take oral and/or written statements from them. Please see Safe Conduct Procedures for additional information about procedures for reporting and investigating allegations.

Response to Allegations

Progressive discipline will generally be followed to address violations of the Code of Conduct. Please see Safe Conduct Procedures for further information about addressing violations.

Congregational Awareness

Christ Congregational Church is dedicated to a policy of open communication and education. Children, youth, parents, vulnerable adults and guardians are entitled to know what to expect of CCC ministries, the authorized clergy and volunteers who serve them, and to know the related policies and procedures created to protect the respective ministry constituencies.

At the time children, youth, or vulnerable adults enroll in CCC programs, parents or legal guardians must be provided a copy of the CCC Code of Conduct, Interaction Guidelines, Guidelines Applicable to those Employees and Volunteers Ministering to Children and Youth or the Social Media Policy, as appropriate.

This entire policy will be posted on the Christ Congregational Church website (www.cccsilverspring.org). The web site administrator will keep it up-to-date at the direction of the Personnel Committee.

Please see Safe Conduct Procedures for additional information about communication.

Conclusion

This policy is a living document guiding the authorized clergy, staff, volunteers, and congregation of Christ Congregational Church (CCC), United Church of Christ, in the area of sexual misconduct and any other form of exploitation or abuse. This policy recognizes and upholds relevant state and federal laws dealing with sexual misconduct and exploitation and also sets guidelines for prevention and intervention procedures within Christ Congregational Church, United Church of Christ. It is intended that this document be subject to review and/or revision at least every three years. In the event any allegation of misconduct subject to this policy occurs, this policy shall automatically undergo review within one calendar year by a committee designated by the Coordinating Council.