

# **St. John's United Church of Christ Safe Church Policy**

Revised 09/01/2007

## **Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment**

As a community of Christian faith, St. John's UCC 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 St. John's UCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual harassment and exploitation, and that such behavior is prohibited. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy, and discipline those persons who violate this policy.

## **Ministerial Conduct**

The pastor, every employee, volunteers, elected and appointed lay leader are all recognized as Ministers of this congregation. It is important that every minister of this church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others.

As such, each is responsible for understanding that any misuse of their power or authority could cause extreme anguish to vulnerable persons.

All ministers of this church at times deal with individuals who are vulnerable in some way (i.e. emotionally, personally or because of their age). Sexual harassment and/or sexual exploitation of parishioners and others (including children) by anyone engaged in the ministry of St. John's UCC is unethical and unprofessional. Any behavior of this nature will not be tolerated within this congregation.

It is the policy of St. John's UCC to encourage its ministers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by attending to self-care, education and the importance of being familiar with community resources for referral of those in need.

## **Requirements for Ministry - administered by PPRM for confidentiality**

Before an offer of employment is made to any individual (whether ordained, commissioned, licensed or other lay person), a comprehensive background check, including criminal, will be completed. This will include all counties (and States as is applies) of previous residence or employment over the past seven years.

- All paid employees of St. John's will complete a disclosure document before commencing their duties.
- The Pastor Parish Relationship Ministry (PPRM) will conduct a search of the sex

offender registry by name on the Department of Justice website. This registry will be reviewed quarterly for all employees and volunteers. PPRM members will document the date and time of all checks.

- Ministers of the church will attend boundary workshops suggested or required by the Fox Valley Association or will attend one workshop each three years, whichever is more frequent.

### **Child and Youth Protection Policy**

St. John's UCC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love.

In order to ensure this, we have established the following guidelines:

- New volunteers, who wish to work with minors (anyone under the age of 18); will be paired with an experienced volunteer.
- Provide adequate supervision for all youth activities. In any situation where participants are secluded by others, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present. Teen youth may assist an unrelated adult; however, this does not change the requirement of two unrelated adults being present.
- All ministers who work with minors will complete and submit a disclosure document.
- All ministers who work with children and youth will receive orientation to the overall policy.
- Written consent of one parent/guardian will be required for all overnights and activities off church property.

### **Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment**

The Authorized Minister or his/her designee will oversee the investigation into and respond to any complaints under this policy involving volunteers.

Several approaches may be used to resolve the complaint.

- The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent- the individual accused of sexual exploitation, harassment, physical or verbal abuse.
- The complainant can report the incident to a minister of the church, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
- If the informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Authorized Minister institute formal proceedings to investigate the matter.

A decision on removal of the accused must be made:

- In all cases, if the situation has the potential of harm to any individual, the person whom the complaint is against will be immediately suspended from the position while an investigation is conducted.

- If the alleged behavior is that of a volunteer and took place in an youth ministry setting, and, if conversations among the persons involved do not assure the safety of all, the Director of Christian Education or his/her designee (if not the accused) may immediately remove the individual against whom a complaint has been made from the leadership position.
- Before any individual against whom the complaint has been made may return to volunteer ministry, a full investigation of the matter must be made, to include written records filed and a determination made of the volunteers' fitness to return.

If a formal investigation is required, it shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. If it is found that the sexual exploitation, harassment, physical and/or verbal abuse has occurred, action taken may include:

- A formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior
- An assignment to probationary standing, with the terms of that probation clearly defined.
- Dismissal from voluntary ministry
- If deemed necessary, a complaint will be made to the Waukegan Police Department (847-360-8000).

### **Procedures for Handling Complaints of Child Abuse**

Any and all employees and volunteers who work with the youth (under the age of 18) are mandated reporters of child abuse/neglect by Illinois State Law. Any employee or volunteer who becomes aware that any child abuse (physical or sexual) or neglect has taken place must:

- As soon as possible report the matter to the Illinois Department of Children Family Services (DCFS) using the hotline number, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873)
- If the abuse has occurred at the child's home and abuse was inflicted by a family member, and the child is in immediate danger, the volunteer or employee is to IMMEDIATELY contact the Waukegan Police Department, 847-360-8000.
- As soon as possible notify the Authorized Minister.
- A report is to be made to the Fox Valley Association and the St. John's insurance company.

### **General Conditions**

The investigating individual may seek the advice of legal counsel to advise him/her in performing the investigation.

The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed does not have to be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process at any time.

In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual exploitation, harassment, physical and/or verbal abuse, consideration shall be given to the record of alleged

incidents as a whole and to the totality of the circumstance, including the context in which the alleged incident occurred.

Any person bringing forward a complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

A written summary of the investigation and recommendations will be maintained in St. John's office, and if necessary in the Conference Office.

## **Definitions**

**Minister:** a person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry- Minister includes elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers and authorized ministers.

**Authorized Minister:** a person who holds ordained ministerial standing, or has been commissioned or licensed by an association if the United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

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

**Sexual Abuse:** Any contact or interaction between a child and an adult in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the adult or another person. This includes touching under or over clothing, and non-touching such as inappropriate language, showing or displaying inappropriate images, and displaying or asking children to watch sexual acts. Sexual abuse also includes any of the above-mentioned acts if it occurs between child and child and there is a five-year age difference between the two children.

**Sexual Exploitation:** sexual activity or contact (including, but not limited to sexual intercourse) in which the minister engaged in the work of the church takes advantage 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/her wish. This includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidation, humiliation, embarrassment, or discrimination, whether done in private or in public. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when:

Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance, participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- **Written Contact** sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails or invitations
- **Verbal Contact:** sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, sexual gender specific jokes and sexual propositions.
- **Physical Contact:** intentional touching, brushing against another's body, impeding/blocking movement, assault and coercing sexual intercourse.
- **Visual Contact:** leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, cartoons, posters and magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes: continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome; using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning or worship environment of another. 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 had declined a personal proposition; 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.