

**United Church of Chapel Hill  
Safe Conduct Policy**

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## I. PURPOSE OF POLICY

*“[As Christ] who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.” 1 Peter 1:15*

United Church of Chapel Hill (UCCH) is committed to maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all who work, volunteer, and worship here. As people of faith guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, we are called to be a beacon of hope and justice. We believe God desires a world in which our bodies, spirits, and relationships can flourish freely. Thus, our vision is to build a community of nurturing and wholeness, one free of harassment, exploitation, intimidation, or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, national origin/immigration status, ability, or religion.

The following Policy is modeled partially on the SafeConduct™ template provided by the Insurance Board. Every member of the Congregation has a role in upholding the highest standards of SafeConduct™ within our community. It is the intention of United Church of Chapel Hill to affirmatively nurture good behavior, prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this Policy, and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this Policy.

## II. GLOSSARY

- a. **Abuse** is aggressive behavior that is intentional, repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Anyone who sees an act of abuse, and who then encourages it, is also engaging in abuse. Abuse comes in many forms, including but not limited to:
  - i. **Sexual abuse**: inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, initiating inappropriate sexually-oriented conversations, or engaging in any non-consensual contact of a sexual nature.
  - ii. **Physical abuse**: bodily injury that is intentionally inflicted upon another person, including but not limited to hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, or application of unnecessary restraints.
  - iii. **Verbal abuse**: language that is degrading, threatening, or cursing.
  - iv. **Mental** or **emotional abuse**: injury to another (e.g. shaming, humiliation, cruelty) that results in an observable and material impairment in their mental and/or emotional growth, development, or psychological functioning.
  - v. **Neglect**: the failure to provide for a minor or vulnerable adult’s basic needs (e.g. withholding food, water, shelter, etc.) or the failure to protect a minor or vulnerable adult from harm.
- b. An **Adult Leader** is any congregant who has been trained to volunteer with minors and vulnerable adults at UCCH.
- c. **Bullying** also comes in many forms. Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is also engaging in bullying. Bullying includes but is not limited to:
  - i. **Physical bullying**: when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.

- ii. **Verbal bullying**: when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
  - iii. **Nonverbal** or **relational bullying**: when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using antagonistic gestures.
  - iv. **Cyberbullying**: the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, social media, or other online postings. Cyberbullying can involve:
    - 1. Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
    - 2. Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
    - 3. Pretending to be someone else in order to manipulate or make another person look bad.
    - 4. Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
  - v. **Hazing**: an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
  - vi. **Sexualized bullying**: when bullying of any kind involves behaviors that are sexual in nature.
- d. **Clergy** or **Authorized Clergy** includes any person who is admitted to ministry by the United Church of Christ (or other ordaining body), who serves the congregation in any capacity, whether on pastoral staff or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, temporary, guest, or volunteer capacity.
- e. **Congregants** include anyone who gathers at UCCH or who participates in a UCCH program on- or off-site.
- f. **Contact of a sexual nature** includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify one's sexual desires.
- g. To **Document** an unusual occurrence with the Safe Conduct Committee is to file an informal record of an incident that is out of the ordinary but contextually appropriate. While documenting an incident is not intended to move the Safe Conduct Committee to action, documentation that reveals a pattern of inappropriate behavior may lead to an investigation and other appropriate action. See Section VI of this Policy.
- h. **Grooming** is the cultivation of emotional attachment with a minor or vulnerable adult for the purpose of sexual abuse. This can include building trust with a minor or vulnerable adult's family for the purpose of access as well as seemingly innocuous behaviors like giving gifts, providing private emotional support, etc. Many of the "inappropriate" behaviors outlined in this Policy are the for explicit purpose of preventing grooming, and the documentation of unusual occurrences is central to tracking potentially suspect behaviors.

- i. A **Mandatory Reporter** is someone required by North Carolina law to report suspected abuse to police or child welfare agencies.
- j. A **Minor** is anyone under the age of 18. This term includes those typically categorized as “children” and “youth” within UCCH’s system.
- k. **Non-consensual** contact is any unwanted physical or sexual touch. All contact of a sexual nature between minors and adults is considered non-consensual, as is any contact of a sexual nature between minors four or more years apart in age.
- l. **Observable and Interruptible** describes the conditions by which clergy, staff, and (in rare circumstances) adult leaders may interact one-on-one with a minor. It means that any such interaction occurs in a place that is easily monitored and accessible by passersby.
- m. To **Report** suspicious or inappropriate behavior or violations of Policy protocol is to submit a formal record with the Safe Conduct Committee, which will then review the report, investigate the incident, and take appropriate action. See Section VI of this Policy.
- n. The **Rule of Three** ensures that no minor and adult are alone together at any given time. Preferably, this means that one minor is accompanied by two or more non-related adults. In some cases, this means that one adult leader (in order to avoid being alone with one minor) may accompany two or more minors.
- o. An **Unusual Occurrence** is when, despite having appropriate safeguards in place, something happens with a minor or vulnerable adult that is out of the ordinary but not suspicious or inappropriate. An example could be a medical emergency that requires physical contact with a child in a way that would, in other circumstances, be considered inappropriate. It is important, for the protection of all involved, to document such occurrences with the Safe Conduct Committee.
- p. A **Vulnerable Adult** is anyone aged 18 or over, who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness; this includes any adult who, for whatever reason, is unable to take care of themselves or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

### III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF SAFE CONDUCT

*These principles set forth specific expectations of the UCCH community including, but not limited to, all clergy, church staff, volunteers, adult leaders, and other congregants.*

- a. All people will be treated with respect at all times. UCCH is committed to a culture of respect across the lifespan. This means that children, youth, and adults have the right to establish personal boundaries and expect that these boundaries will be respected.

- b. All people will be treated fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, national origin/immigration status, ability or religion.
- c. No possession of pornography, alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarette and vaping products, or illegal drugs will be tolerated on UCCH property.
- d. No form of abuse, bullying, or non-consensual contact will be tolerated.
- e. All people will conduct themselves appropriately, meaning their verbal and physical interactions with others are respectful and consensual at all times. Examples of appropriate and inappropriate verbal and physical interactions include, but are not limited to the following:

Examples of Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Examples of Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive reinforcement</li> <li>- Appropriate jokes</li> <li>- Encouragement</li> <li>- Praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name-calling</li> <li>- Discussing sexual encounters in an inappropriate context</li> <li>- Excessive cursing</li> <li>- Off-color or sexual jokes</li> <li>- Shaming or belittling</li> <li>- Derogatory or demeaning remarks</li> <li>- Harsh language that may frighten, threaten, intimidate, coerce, or humiliate others</li> <li>- Comments (positive or negative) relating to another’s physique or body</li> <li>- Microaggressions related to race or ethnicity (e.g. “Where are you <i>really</i> from?”)</li> </ul>

Examples of Appropriate Physical Interactions	Examples of Inappropriate Physical Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Side hugs</li> <li>- Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>- Handshakes</li> <li>- High-fives</li> <li>- Pats on the head, when culturally appropriate</li> <li>- Touching hands, shoulders, arms</li> <li>- Arms around shoulders</li> <li>- Holding hands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any form of affection or touch that is unwanted</li> <li>- Forceful or lingering hugs</li> <li>- Kisses</li> <li>- Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>- Lap sitting (except with young children in public, group situations and when child-initiated)</li> <li>- Piggyback rides between minors and adults</li> <li>- Tickling</li> <li>- Any type of massage</li> <li>- Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> </ul>

- f. All people will take responsibility for the safety of the UCCH community, especially its most vulnerable members. This means all will adhere to the principles, protocols, and processes outlined in this Policy.

#### IV. WORKING WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

*These policies and protocols are to be followed by anyone involved in programming with minors and vulnerable adults in addition to the general principles outlined above.*

##### **a. General Behavioral Expectations for Adult Leaders Working with Minors or Vulnerable Adults**

- i. Clergy, employees, and volunteers working with minors or vulnerable adults may not be a Registered Sex Offender and may not have engaged in, been accused (and not sufficiently cleared) of, or convicted of abuse, indecency, or injury to minors or vulnerable adults.
- ii. Adults must not involve minors or vulnerable adults in personal problems or issues.
- iii. Adults must not discuss their own sexual activities. They are not to initiate sexually-oriented conversations with minors or vulnerable adults except in group settings within the context of congregation-sponsored sexual education (e.g. Our Whole Lives).
- iv. Adults must not become romantically involved with minors or vulnerable adults.
- v. Adults will not ask minors or vulnerable adults to keep secrets.
- vi. At any off-site event sponsored by the Board of Children's Ministries or the Board of Youth and Young Adults Ministries, no adult who is supervising minors or vulnerable adults will be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- vii. All Clergy, staff, and adult leaders will:
  1. Undergo church-sponsored training through Stop It Now!®.
  2. Know and follow UCCH policies and procedures that protect minors and vulnerable adults against abuse.
  3. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
  4. Be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse.
  5. Follow documenting and/or reporting procedures outlined in Section VI.
  6. Follow state specific mandatory reporting requirements and (when necessary) report suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
  7. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.

##### **b. Monitoring and Supervising of Programs with Minors or Vulnerable Adults**

*While in the UCCH building or on its grounds, or for Board of Children's Ministries and/or Board of Youth and Young Adult Ministries-sponsored events off-site, minors and vulnerable adults will be supervised at all times. It is strongly encouraged that all adult leaders wear nametags so that minors and parents/guardians can easily recognize them.*

- i. **Ratios:** UCCH strives to maintain the Ministry Architects-suggested ratio of 1 adult staff/volunteer to 5 minors.
- ii. **Mixed Age Groups:** Clergy, employees, and volunteers must be aware that close line-of-sight supervision is required when monitoring programs that mix age groups.
- iii. **Registration Forms:** A parent/guardian will complete a form including identifying information, the minor's date of birth, special medical or behavioral circumstances, legal indemnifications, and emergency contact information for each minor engaging in any activity at UCCH where the parent/guardian will not be present. This form should be completed at the beginning of each program year or before the minor participates in any activity. For overnight activities and some off-site activities (e.g. activities that include UCCH-organized transportation, activities that are a significant distance from UCCH, activities that include non-UCCH facilitators, etc.) parents/guardians will be provided written information and must sign a permission form for that specific activity. Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring UCCH has the most up-to-date medical and behavioral information about their child.
- iv. **Behavioral Expectations of Middle and High School Youth:** At the beginning of each program year, middle and high school youth and their parents/guardians will be offered a training on this Safe Conduct Policy. This training will outline the community's behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This training will also include a transparent, systematic disciplinary Policy, which explains that youth may be suspended or dismissed from UCCH programming for certain Policy violations. Clergy, staff, and adult leaders are also encouraged to craft a covenant or code of conduct collaboratively with youth. A signed acknowledgement of this Safe Conduct Policy as well as any additional covenant/code of conduct must include both the youth and their parents/guardians.

### c. Monitoring High-Risk Activities

- i. Bathroom Use During On- or Off-Site Programming
  1. Minors/vulnerable adults of different ages (eg. 2<sup>nd</sup> graders and 10<sup>th</sup> graders) are discouraged from using the restroom at the same time.
  2. **For younger children:** When supervising restroom use, adult leaders should take groups of two or more minors to the bathroom, following the Rule of Three. Adult leaders should quickly scan restroom before allowing minors or vulnerable adults to enter. Adult leaders should stand outside bathroom door but remain within earshot. If assisting a young child in the stalls, adult leaders should never be alone with a child in the restroom. The adult should keep the stall door open and be observable and interruptible by other adult leaders.
  3. **For older children/youth:** Adult leaders should remain aware of who is in (and/or traveling to/from) the restroom at any given time. Adult leaders should periodically check restrooms. Adult leaders should never be alone with a youth in the restroom. Youth should use the "buddy system" in bathroom trips out of the line of vision of adult leaders.
  4. UCCH affirms our trans\*, genderqueer, gender-nonconforming, agender, two-spirit, and otherwise-identified queer children and youth. Our adult leaders commit to

supporting their use of bathrooms that best align with their gender identity both at UCCH and off-site. We also commit to helping minors navigate difficult and sensitive questions of safety, particularly during trips away from our campus.

**ii. Shower Use at UCCH or Off-Site**

1. UCCH has single-room showers available for overnight events. No more than one person should ever be in the shower room at the same time. Adult leaders should monitor shower access closely.
2. For off-site shower use, configurations can vary. Therefore, all adult leaders/chaperones should work together to assess off-site shower facilities upon arrival and establish appropriate rules for privacy and shower use. Adult leaders should never be alone with a minor in a shower room.

**iii. UCCH Playground**

1. UCCH playground equipment is to be used only by children 8 years old and younger.
2. Children must remain in staff or volunteers' line-of-sight at all times.
3. Adult leaders should frequently move about to monitor difficult areas around playhouses and other visual barriers.
4. Adult leaders should take frequent head counts to make sure all children are accounted for.
5. Adult leaders should follow bathroom procedures outlined above. There should be enough adult leaders to monitor the playground and to supervise movement to and from the restroom.

**iv. Transportation**

1. Written permission from parents/guardians for all minors being transported is required. Adult leaders will take these permission forms, informational forms, and any other releases with them on the trip.
2. Adult leaders will have a list of minors on the trip and should take headcounts before and after each portion of travel.
3. It is strongly suggested that two unrelated adult leaders be in any vehicle transporting youth. At a minimum, however, the Rule of Three must be used.
4. Adult leaders should sit in seats that permit maximum supervision.
5. Mixed age groups should be discouraged from sitting together.
6. Outside of emergencies or general bathroom breaks, drivers will not make unplanned or unauthorized stops.

**v. Overnight Events at UCCH or Off-Site**

1. Physical boundaries of the building(s) and grounds will be clearly defined and explained to minors, who will be encouraged to maintain the "buddy system" at all times.
2. Each staff member or volunteer will be assigned to a specific group of minors to supervise. Head counts should be routinely conducted by adult leaders throughout the event.



3. Adult leadership will be assigned to high risk areas, such as bathrooms, entrances and exits, hallways, etc. If it is not possible to assign specific adults to these areas, they will be assigned to conduct periodic facility walk-throughs.
4. When performing room checks, adult leadership should always go in pairs.
5. Groupings of minors should be made with careful consideration of age. Gender divisions of rooms should always be sensitive to the needs of our LGBTQIA+ young people. Groupings should be discussed and determined prior to the event.
6. All adult leaders are to be awake and on duty at night until an hour after lights out and all rooms are quiet.
7. Some off-site housing configurations will require special care and planning. In hotel rooms or rental housing, adult leaders should not room with minors. In a cabin, hostel, dormitory, or other bunking situation where adult leaders must share rooms with a group of minors or vulnerable adults, adults must have their own beds. (This is an example of an “unusual circumstance” that should be reported.) Adult leaders should be situated as to maximize supervision in a way that decreases the chances of minors sneaking out.

#### **d. One-on-One Interactions and Pastoral Care Guidelines**

*Clergy and staff can meet one-on-one with minors and vulnerable adults only if they observe the following guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse. Adults other than Clergy and staff generally should not meet one-on-one with minors or vulnerable adults. (In rare circumstances, other adult leaders may be approved by Clergy and staff to meet one-on-one with minors or vulnerable adults following these same guidelines. This is an “unusual occurrence” that should be documented.)*

- i.* Accepted ministerial guidelines (Ministerial Code of Conduct, Boundary Training standards, etc.) for one-on-one meetings will be followed with special care when meeting confidentially with a minor or vulnerable adult.
- ii.* When meeting one-on-one with a minor or vulnerable adult, clergy and staff must always do so in a space that is observable and interruptible. Clergy and staff will use common areas when working with individual minors and vulnerable adults whenever possible. But in cases where confidentiality is a concern, clergy and staff must make their meeting as observable and interruptible as possible. For example, if meeting in a conference room or office, leave the door and/or blinds open so passersby can see in.
- iii.* Avoid physical contact that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to appropriate interactions as described above.
- iv.* Inform other Clergy and staff that you are alone with a minor or vulnerable adult and ask them to drop in or walk by randomly.
- v.* If disclosures of abuse or maltreatment arise from these sessions, clergy and staff are required to report suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
- vi.* As always, unusual occurrences, violations of Policy protocol, or suspicious/inappropriate conduct in such sessions should be documented or reported immediately.

**vii. Guidance for ongoing sessions:** Clergy and staff must have supervisor and parent/guardian approval for any ongoing sessions, such as music lessons, private tutoring, or counseling. Such ongoing sessions may not occur off-site. Clergy and staff must keep a schedule of these sessions, which should include times, minors or vulnerable adults involved, and on-site location of sessions. This schedule must be provided to the Church Administrator (and Safe Conduct Committee, upon request). Sessions should be scheduled only when other people are in the building.

**e. Off-site Contact between Adult Leaders and Minors or Vulnerable Adults Outside of UCCH Programming**

*Clergy and staff must take special care when connecting with youth and their families off-site. While such signs of support from clergy and staff are important, they should be limited and planned with parents/guardians. Under no circumstances should clergy and staff connect with minors alone off-site. Examples of appropriate and inappropriate outside contact include, but are not limited to, the following:*

<b>Examples of Appropriate Contact Outside of UCCH Programs</b>	<b>Examples of Inappropriate Contact Outside of UCCH Programs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult leader attends functions at a minor or vulnerable adult’s home with parents/guardians present</li> <li>- Adult leader attends public extracurricular activities (dance recitals, youth sporting events, etc.) with parents/guardians present</li> <li>- Adult leader visits minor in hospital with explicit consent of parents/guardians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult leader takes one minor or vulnerable adult on an outing</li> <li>- Adult leader visits one minor or vulnerable adult in their home (or adult leader invites them to their own home) without parents/guardians present</li> <li>- Adult leader hosts lone minor or vulnerable adult for an overnight</li> </ul>

**f. Communication with Minors and Vulnerable Adults via Social Media, Phone, Text, Email, and Other Internet Communication Platforms**

*Recognizing our society’s increased dependence on technological communication, and the need for minors and vulnerable adults to have trusted adults in their lives other than their parents/guardians, UCCH allows electronic communication with minors and vulnerable adults, but only with the following guidelines. These guidelines apply to Clergy, staff, and other adult leaders as well as any adult affiliated with UCCH.*

- i.* All guidelines for appropriate in-person interactions apply to electronic and social media interactions as well. Electronically communicated bullying, abuse, or inappropriate contact of a sexual nature is prohibited. All virtual gatherings (e.g. Zoom) must adhere to the same protocols of adult-to-minor contact on-site.
- ii.* No adult should initiate connection with minors (such as following, friending, or otherwise) on social media sites, though they may accept such minor-initiated requests with the approval of the minor’s parents/guardians.

- iii. No pictures of minors may be shared or posted without their explicit consent and the explicit consent of their parents/guardians. (Avoid sharing photos with physical nametags and do not digitally “tag” individual photos.)
- iv. Whenever possible, adults should include parents/guardians and/or other adult (unrelated to them) in all direct electronic communication with minors/vulnerable adults.
- v. Communications through UCCH-organized group spaces like Facebook groups, GroupMe, and other public forums are acceptable if they follow the General Safe Conduct Policy guidelines.
- vi. Clergy and staff engaging in pastoral care may occasionally reach out to minors/vulnerable adults directly via electronic communication (e.g. text message), but all such communications are subject to review by the Safe Conduct Committee.
- vii. As always, unusual occurrences, violations of Policy protocol, or suspicious/inappropriate conduct should be documented or reported immediately.

**g. Gift Giving to Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

- i. Adult leaders may give gifts to groups of minors and vulnerable adults as part of community rituals/rites of passage.
- ii. Under limited circumstances, personal and meaningful gifts may be given to individual minors and vulnerable adults after permission is obtained from parents/guardians. (This includes “Secret Pals”, Confirmation Mentors, and other UCCH intergenerational activities.)
- iii. In difficult or complicated circumstances, Clergy and staff may consult with one another to determine the appropriateness of a gift given to a minor or vulnerable adult without permission from parents/guardians. For example, a queer-affirming book gifted to a minor who does not wish to be outed to parents/guardians. Such unusual occurrences should be documented.

**V. SCREENING AND TRAINING ADULT LEADERS WHO WISH TO WORK WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

*Background checks for Clergy and staff are not included here because those checks are handled by the Personnel Committee. Being a Registered Sex Offender or conviction for sexual abuse or neglect of a minor or vulnerable adult shall be considered a barrier to employment or volunteer work with minors and/or vulnerable adults.*

**a. Screening Volunteers (Adults Leaders)**

- i. Connection to UCCH:** Volunteers must be active in the UCCH community for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work with minors and vulnerable adults. This six-month requirement may be waived only with appropriate Board approval.
- ii. Reference Checks (Optional):** Reference checks may be conducted for potential volunteers prior to approval; a minimum of two references will be required. The person responsible for contacting references should inform the referent that the applicant is applying to volunteer at UCCH and will explain that the person will have access to a

vulnerable population. Reference checks are especially recommended for volunteers who have been part of the UCCH community for less than six months.

- iii. Drug Screenings and Drivers' License Checks (Optional):** UCCH may request that an applicant undergo a criminal drug screening prior to employment. Also, adult leaders who will be responsible for transportation may have a driver's license check performed to identify past driving concerns and will be required to complete and sign a Driver Qualification Form.
- iv. Background Checks (Required):** Background checks, including criminal history and sexual offender registry, will be conducted for all potential volunteers before working with minors and vulnerable adults. Generally, the information should be obtained prior to volunteer service; however, if the length of time needed to receive the results of these checks is unduly long, the applicant may start volunteering and remain in the position until the criminal background results are obtained and reviewed. Volunteers will not be left unsupervised with minors until the criminal history results are returned. Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each potential volunteer prior to executing the check.
- v.** The background check(s) will include the following:
  - 1.** National multi-state criminal records search;
  - 2.** National sex offender registry search;
  - 3.** Social security number trace and alias search
- vi.** Where a criminal record exists, consideration by the appropriate Board and Safe Conduct Committee shall be given to the following factors before determining if a volunteer may work with minors or vulnerable adults:
  - 1.** Seriousness of the crime, particularly violent crimes, drug offenses, or driving offenses (depending on the position requirements)
  - 2.** Statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors
  - 3.** Length of time since the last offense
  - 4.** Pattern of criminal activity
  - 5.** Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred
- vii.** Arrest records are not grounds for disqualification, only convictions

**b. Training for Volunteers, Clergy and Staff**

- i.** New staff and new volunteers working with minors and vulnerable adults must complete safe conduct training within 30 days of service. The content of this training will be determined by UCCH staff.
- ii.** Training for volunteers will review procedures of this Policy, including updated information about the UCCH Safe Conduct Committee and how to report to them.
- iii.** All staff and volunteers should complete training every two years after their initial training.
- iv.** The UCCH Safe Conduct Committee should collaborate with staff to ensure that volunteers are trained and that training is renewed per this protocol.

**VI. DOCUMENTING, REPORTING, AND RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS**

*If a Clergy member, employee, volunteer, adult leader, minor, or other congregant observes any unusual occurrences, suspicious or inappropriate behavior, and/or Policy violations, they must immediately document or report their observations with the Safe Conduct Committee. All reports of abuse or bullying will be taken seriously. Confirmed abuse or bullying will result in immediate dismissal from leadership or employment at UCCH. Any inappropriate physical contact by Clergy, employees, and volunteers toward minors or vulnerable adults in the organization's programs will result in disciplinary action up to and including in immediate dismissal from leadership or employment at UCCH.*

**a. UCCH Safe Conduct Committee**

- i.** At the beginning of each program year, the Board of Children's Ministries and the Board of Youth and Young Adult Ministries will each appoint one congregant to serve on the Safe Conduct Committee. There are no term limits for service on this Committee. The Safe Conduct Committee will also include the Senior Pastor and the Church Moderator for a total of 4 members.
- ii.** Training for adult leaders will include updated information about the Safe Conduct Committee and how to document and report an incident with them.
- iii.** A description of the Safe Conduct Committee's role and the contact information of its members will be posted in a conspicuous place available to all adults and minors affiliated with UCCH.
- iv.** The Safe Conduct Committee will establish guidelines for documenting and reporting incidents as well as a protocol for timely communication after they are received.

**b. Responding to Unusual Occurrences**

- i.** It is important that clergy, employees, volunteers, adult leaders, minors and other congregants who witness or take part in unusual occurrences document them with the Safe Conduct Committee as soon as possible. This is not an official report intended to prompt the Committee to action (as in the case of violations of Policy protocols or suspicious/inappropriate conduct); rather, it is a detailed record of the incident as it occurred for the Committee's review.
- ii.** The Safe Conduct Committee must keep a confidential record of all unusual occurrences. They may initiate a more formal response if these occurrences reveal a suspicious pattern of behavior.

**c. Responding to Violations of Protocols Outlined in this Policy**

- i.** Clergy, staff, volunteers, adult leaders, minors, and other congregants who witness violations of this Policy's protocols should:
  - 1. Interrupt** the behavior.
  - 2. Protect** any alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
  - 3. Report:** Immediately alert your supervisor and provide a detailed report of the allegation or incident to the Safe Conduct Committee. *(If the report is about someone on the Safe Conduct Committee, first privately contact other members of the*

*Committee without using communication that would be accessible to all Committee members.)*

4. **Follow Up:** Check back with the Safe Conduct Committee to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again.

**d. Responding to Suspicious/Inappropriate Conduct**

- i. Clergy, staff, volunteers, adult leaders, minors, and other congregants who suspect suspicious/inappropriate conduct and/or abuse by an adult should:
  1. **Interrupt** the behavior.
  2. **Protect** any alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
  3. **Report:** Immediately alert your supervisor and provide a detailed report of the allegation or incident to the Safe Conduct Committee. *(If the report is about someone on the Safe Conduct Committee, first privately contact other members of the Committee without using communication that would be accessible to all Committee members.)*
  4. **Reporting Abuse or Neglect to Child Protective Services or Law Enforcement:** As required by mandated reporting laws, suspected or known abuse or neglect must be reported to the Department of Social Service (DSS) or law enforcement; this includes any and all suspected abuse or neglect —whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by clergy, staff, volunteers, adult leaders, or others.
    - The Safe Conduct Committee will be responsible for reporting to DSS or law enforcement.
    - For more information on reporting requirements in North Carolina, see <http://nccasa.org/resources/mandatory-reporting/>
  5. **Follow Up:** Check back with the Safe Conduct Committee to make sure appropriate steps were taken.

**e. Safe Conduct Committee Response to Reports**

- i. **Receive and Review:** Reports should include name of reporter (or “report submitted anonymously”), name of alleged victim, nature of alleged abuse, date and location of alleged abuse.
- ii. **Protect:** Protect any alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- iii. **Inform:** The Committee will inform the individual who is the subject of a report that a report has been made, and that a process of review has begun.
- iv. **Review:** The Committee will determine whether similar complaints are already on file about the individual in question.
- v. **Secure:** The report in question should be filed in a secure location.
- vi. **Suspend:** If appropriate, the accused individual should be suspended until the investigation is completed.
- vii. **Alert:** If appropriate, parents/guardians should be alerted. If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, the Department of Social Services or law enforcement should be alerted.
- viii. **Assure** the individual who reported the behavior that it was correct to tell to you and that the report is being taken seriously.
- ix. **Action:** Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

1. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, adult leader, or program.
2. If Policy violations are confirmed, the employee, volunteer, or adult leader must be subject to disciplinary action which may include termination and/or prosecution.
3. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other clergy, employees, and volunteers or minors.

**f. Responding to minor-to-minor sexual abuse or sexualized behaviors at UCCH or during UCCH-sponsored activities**

*Serious incidents of minor-to-minor abuse are often preceded by more subtle incidents such as name-calling, taunting, or roughhousing. Interrupting these interactions early and establishing and communicating standards of conduct can keep the program environment safe. While many situations involving minors engaging in age-appropriate, consensual sexual activity is considered inappropriate behavior in a community setting, they may not fall into the category of a reportable offense. Adult leaders should use their discretion to determine how best to address the behavior.*

**i. Guidelines for Clergy, Staff, and Volunteer Response to Minor-to-Minor Sexual Activity or Sexualized Behavior:**

1. **Interrupt:** If you observe sexual or sexualized activity between minors, you should separate them or interrupt their interaction.
2. **Explain:** Calmly explain that such interactions are problematic. Let them know to whom you will report the interaction.
3. **Protect:** Confirm that the minors involved are in situations where they will be safe and supported in their efforts to make healthy decisions. In the case of sexual harassment, abuse, or assault attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.
4. **Document/Report:** As soon as possible, document or report to the clergy/staff responsible for overseeing the program and the UCCH Safe Conduct Committee. This Committee is responsible for making decisions about informing parents/guardians and/or contacting authorities.
5. **Follow Up:** Check back with the Safe Conduct Committee to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again.
6. **Offer Compassion:** Offer grace and compassion, and an open line of communication, to the minors involved in this incident.

**ii. Guidelines for UCCH Safe Conduct Committee Response to Minor-to-Minor Sexual Activity or Sexualized Behavior:**

1. **Receive and Review:** The Safe Conduct Committee receives documentation or report of an incident. Any report should include name of reporter (or “report submitted anonymously”), names of minors involved, nature of alleged incident, date and location of alleged incident, and how the conduct was addressed by adult leaders. If incident involves serious abuse of a minor, it must be reported to the Department of Social Service (DSS) or law enforcement.

2. **Protect:** Confirm that the minors involved are in situations where they will be safe and supported in their efforts to make healthy decisions. In the case of sexual harassment, abuse, or assault attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.
3. **Review and Consult:** Review the steps already taken by adult leaders. Review the incident report to confirm it is accurate and thorough. Consult with other Clergy or staff as appropriate.
4. **Meet:** Clergy and/or staff meet with parents of the minors involved; consider involving the minors. Determine what steps should be taken to support the minors in making healthy decisions. See section below on notification of parents/guardians.
5. **Individual Action:** Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan for the minors involved in response to the incident.
6. **Organizational Action:** Review the need for additional supervision, revised policies or procedures, and/or additional training of adult leaders.

**iii. Guidelines for notifying Parents/Guardians about Minor-to-Minor Sexual Activity or Sexualized Behavior:**

1. A minor may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a child is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a minor-to-minor incident. Violation of Policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents/guardians in such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required. While communicating with a parent/guardian, and being mindful of the importance of timely communication, care shall be given to assessing:
  - The specific facts
  - Whether a disciplinary or termination process is required
  - Whether a minor should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians)
  - Whether “mandatory reporting” is a factor
  - Who will communicate with the parent/guardian, and in what manner
  - Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident

**VII. REGISTERED SEX OFFENDER POLICY**

As a community of faith, we seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing and fellowship among us. We accept that there are risks to be born in our deliberate association with and ministry to sex offenders and we agree to honor the needs of the congregation and our community to have reasonable assurance that a sex offender in our care will not have an opportunity to re-offend as a result of lapses of implementation of our Safe Conduct Policy.

Anyone who has engaged in, been accused (and not sufficiently cleared) of, or convicted of abuse, indecency, or injury to minors or vulnerable adults, or who is a Registered Sex Offender, is not permitted to be an adult leader for minors or vulnerable adults.



We shall consider limited participation or membership of a sex offender in our congregation with utmost care, including the following elements:

Document understanding of the statutory limitations applying in the State of North Carolina to the movement and activities of a sex offender, taking into account the programs of the church or the operations of other users (such as the United Church Preschool).

Consider and understand the character of the crimes which have resulted in requiring an individual to register as a sex offender, the passage of time without repeated conduct or behavior, and the risk and opportunity of re-offending that is presented by the particular programs of our congregation.

Document understanding of limitations and prohibitions placed upon the offender by courts and probation authorities. The opinion of a mental health professional regarding the suitability of the person to participation in the life of the church shall be obtained. In all cases where probation is in force, we shall obtain the explicit approval of and conditions of participation specified by the probation officer. A recommendation by Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or mental health professionals to deny participation to an offender shall be honored in all cases.

Given that criminal convictions are a matter of public record, there shall be no expectation of secrecy on the part of the offender. As a condition of participation in our faith community, the offender must agree that the leadership of the church may make the conditions and limitations that apply to participation in the life of the church known to the members and other users of the church.

The conditions of participation by a registered offender shall be defined by a “limited access agreement” executed by the offender and church. Such agreement shall be approved by probation authorities as may be necessary. The agreement shall be reviewed annually to validate ongoing eligibility. Violation of the agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the agreement.

The following additional considerations shall apply:

**Victims in the congregation** – In such case as the victim of a RSO (registered sex offender) is a member of the congregation, employee, or is a client of other services provided by the congregation, the RSO shall not be permitted to attend the church or church activities.

**Clergy-penitent privilege** – “Clergy-penitent privilege” is a “Rule of Evidence” defining or limiting information which clergy may reveal in a court of law only. “Clergy penitent privilege” does not prevent clergy from informing the congregation of matters which may be relevant to their safety; it does not require clergy to hold information in secrecy. Ordained clergy shall assume responsibility and take extraordinary care to understand the scope and limitations of clergy-penitent privilege in the State of North Carolina, and the parameters of confidence and privilege as defined by the United Church of Christ. Authorized clergy shall inform the

leadership of the church of the general principles of confidence and privilege under which they perform clerical duties.

**Escorts** – Conditions of limited access for an RSO will commonly require that the offender have an escort while on the church premises or at church events elsewhere. A person serving as an escort shall not be a spouse, partner, or relative of the offender.

**Approval & Supervision** – With the advice and prior approval of the Church Council, a Limited Access Agreement with a known RSO may be signed only by the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor, in association with other pastoral staff who shall be named in the Limited Access Agreement, shall be responsible for the general supervision of the Petitioner in all of the latter's activity in relation to the church. Elements of supervision shall include the following:

- Knowledge of the terms of the Limited Access Agreement, including activity limitations placed upon the registered offender.
- Knowledge of the offense history sufficient to understand the risks of association with the church and its ministries.
- Willingness to assert activity limitations and to report any violation of restrictions placed upon the registered offender.
- Willingness to intervene in any onset of a risky or problem behavior.
- Willingness to report all cases of non-compliance to the Senior Pastor and Safe Conduct Committee.

**Professional privacy** – Members who are employed in certain occupations may have a statutory obligation to maintain privacy around the criminal history of their clients who may also be congregants. Such members shall decline to accept leadership roles which may put them in a position of decision-making regarding individuals who may be their professional clients.

**Juveniles** – While the criminal record of a juvenile is ordinarily concealed by the courts, the church may come to know the juvenile's history by other means. Honest disclosure by a juvenile and parents in the volunteer application and screening process may reveal that a record exists without knowing the specifics. While a limited access agreement will be required for the juvenile, as for others, every precaution will be taken to preserve the privacy and confidentiality which the law affords a juvenile.