

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Christ United Methodist Church
Amherst, New York

Principles and Practices Upholding
The Highest Standards of Sexual Conduct and Response to any Incidence of
Sexual Abuse, Misconduct, or Harassment

1 PRINCIPLES

- We are committed to providing children and youth with the most wholesome environment possible.
- As a church, we are committed to the highest standards of sexual conduct as held up for us in the Christian Bible.
- We understand sexuality to be a Holy and wholesome God-given gift.
- We have zero tolerance for any and all forms of sexual abuse, misconduct, or harassment on the part of:
 - Pastors
 - Staff
 - Volunteers
 - Members and friends of the congregation
 - Parties using our facilities
- We are especially sensitive to our responsibility and trust in regard to children and youth. While we expect the principles set forth in this policy to apply in all situations, the practices set forth in this policy are aimed at protecting minors from abuse by adults or other minors, and do not necessarily address protecting adults from other adults.
- The terms children, youth, and minors are used interchangeably and encompass the following individuals:
 - Those under the age of sexual consent according to local laws
 - Those over the age of sexual consent who are identified by their legal guardians as being unable to legitimately offer sexual consent
 - Those under the age of 21 who are participating in church activities in a non-leadership capacity.
- We are committed to providing children and youth with the most careful protection possible against any and all forms of sexual abuse, misconduct, or harassment.
- We are working with these understandings and definitions:
 - **Sexual abuse** includes sexual invasion or attempted invasion of the body by force, as well as other criminal sexual activities. Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to rape, sexual assault, incest, indecent exposures, statutory rape, indecent assault, and aggravated indecent assault.

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- **Sexual misconduct** occurs when a person within a leadership role (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or other position of leadership) uses the implied or perceived authority inherent in that position to engage in sexual abuse, sexual contact, or sexualized behavior of a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker, or volunteer within the ministerial relationship.
 - **Sexual harassment** is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment may be an exploitation of a power relationship rather than an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. Sexual harassment within extends to harassment of minors by other minors.
- No set of practices can be crafted to cover all possible situations. We therefore expect that all of our church leaders will exercise the spirit of the principles embodied by this policy regardless of whether or not a specific practice exists to cover a situation that they encounter. Likewise, we expect that adults will recommend improvements to this policy when it is found to be inadequate.

2 PRACTICES

2.1 Reporting

All alleged incidences or evidence of sexual misconduct, abuse, or harassment, must be immediately reported as follows:

- If the allegation is against a member of the pastoral staff, the allegation must be reported to the District Superintendent.
- If the allegation is against someone other than a member of the pastoral staff, the allegation must be reported to a member of the pastoral staff. The pastoral staff is required to report the allegation to the Senior Pastor, or to the District Superintendent at the discretion of the staff member receiving the report.
- If the allegation involves one of more minors, the allegation must also be immediately reported to the appropriate public officials (police) as well as each minor's legal guardian.

These reporting requirements apply to all allegations of sexual misconduct, abuse, or harassment, regardless of whether the alleged incident occurred before or after adoption of this policy.

2.2 Background Checks

Background checks occur to help reduce the risk of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment.

- Background checks are required for:
 - All clergy

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- All staff and volunteers working directly with minors and all other staff members
- The Director of Christian Education of this church will evaluate the results of each background check considering only reports of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and serious criminal activity and determine subject's acceptability.
- The results of the background checks will be held in confidence.
- Background checks will be conducted through a public agency deemed acceptable by the Upper New York Conference.

2.3 Two Adult Rule

One adult must never be alone with minors. An adult is considered to be alone with minors if:

- The adult and the minors are in close proximity with no other adults in close proximity
- The adult and the minors are both in a room with a closed door regardless of the presence of other adults in close proximity.

The rule does not exclude one adult from being alone with minors in a room with an open door if there are other adults in close proximity.

Youth of 16 and older with permission from their parents may be accepted as adults providing childcare during hours for worship and education when other adults are present.

Otherwise, minors must never be alone with other minors. Minors are considered alone with other minors if the minors are in close-proximity with each other without also being in close-proximity to at least two adults.

During normal FaithXpress and Youth Group hours at our church, the on-duty coordinating staff satisfies the requirement for close-proximity adults for the sanctuary and all classrooms.

2.4 Counseling

Adult counseling of minors must occur under the two person rule. At the start of any counseling session, minors will be informed of the two person rule.

2.5 Signed Agreements

All staff and all volunteers working with minors will be given a copy of this policy and required to sign our agreement to support and follow it completely at the beginning of their service.

2.6 Persons/Groups Using Our Facilities

Any persons or groups using our facilities—either for hire or as a courtesy—must read this policy and sign an agreement that they will conduct themselves in accord with this policy's principles and practices. Persons or groups using our facilities are themselves responsible for monitoring and applying the principles and practices; the church will not be responsible for oversight of the persons' or groups' behavior.

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2.7 *Off-Site Situations*

The principles and practices stated in the policy apply to all church activities whether they occur on church property, at an off-site event site, or during transportation between church property and an off-site event site, or during transportation between church property and an off-site event. We recognize that some special situations may arise in off-site situations. While it is impossible to address all special situations, the following cases can be addressed in advance:

- Should sleeping arrangements be involved, persons of the same gender must be housed in segregated circumstances. Should minors be involved, there must be at least two adults in close proximity and present for supervision.
- Adult supervisors from this church will provide oversight so that all minors involved in an off-site situation are not alone with another minor or adult from our church group of the group we are visiting or serving.
- Adult volunteers from this church involved in an off-site setting will not be alone with a minor, or the group we are visiting or serving.

2.8 *Ministry with Children and Youth*

- All volunteers must have attended our church for at least 6 months prior to any involvement with church school leadership or service and received supervised experience under the minister's direction. As circumstances may warrant, the pastor staff may make an exception to the 6 month rule (for example, in the case of transfer of membership from another United Methodist Church in which the volunteer had been approved for ministry under a policy consistent with this policy).
- Our standard practice is to always have two adults present in all classes and activities.
- If for a brief period it is impossible for two adults to be present, the classroom door must be left open and another adult must be in close proximity.
- All classroom doors will have un-obscured windows.
- Rest room visits by children up through second grade require an escort by an approved volunteer. During normal church school hours, a member of the church school coordinating staff will be available for escorting children to the rest room.
- The FaithXpress coordinating staff will maintain a presence in and monitor all hallways while church school is in session.
- We understand that parents and guardians are the primary educators in regard to sexual matters and standards.
- Parents and guardians are responsible for identifying vulnerable adults to the minister.
- While youth ministries often occur in a more informal setting than normal FaithXpress activities, youth ministries are not exempt from these practices. Adult leaders of youth ministries must ensure that the requirements can be met in their youth group sessions.

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2.9 *Advance Notice to Parents*

A basic rule for ministry with children and youth is to always give the parents and guardians advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children or youth will be participating. Before the event(s), parents and guardians must give written permission for their child's participation in said event(s). This includes event(s) where a child(ren) will be picked up or returned home from an event(s)/carpool(ed). Doing this protects the church and it proves that parents and guardians were informed of the event(s), warned of the situation, and given the chance to prevent their child from being alone with a church staff person, adult volunteer, or congregant.

2.10 *Congregational Awareness*

- A copy of this policy will be given to each new member of the church at their New Member Orientation Session.
- This policy will be posted on the church's website.
- All leaders will review this policy with their membership at the beginning of the program year (September) and with newly-elected members.
- Leaders of short-term or one-time events will review this policy with their membership at the beginning of said event.
- This policy will be reviewed annually
- This policy will be presented for approval at the church's annual charge conference and will be revised as necessary to meet any Annual Conference requirements that are more stringent than those of this policy.

2.11 *Adjudication of Allegations*

Allegations do not constitute proof of guilt, and it is important to balance the church's role in balancing protection of individuals from abuses under this policy with the protection of innocent volunteer or staff members from the consequences of untrue allegations.

Allegations of a staff member's violation of this policy will be judged and disciplined according to the established procedures of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Allegations of a volunteer's violations of this policy will be judged by the pastoral staff. Volunteers accused under this policy will be suspended from ministry when an allegation is made. The pastoral staff is not required to exercise the legal standard of proof beyond a shadow of a doubt in deciding guilt, but is urged to act in a manner that best protects the alleged victims.

When under this policy an allegation requires reporting to public officials, the church will fully support the investigation of the allegation by the officials, and any internal church finding of guilt or innocence will have no bearing on the public investigation.