

The First Congregational Church of Coventry, Connecticut

Safe Conduct Policy
Standards, Procedures and Evaluation

Originally Prepared May, 2004
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2014 REVISION

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***SAFE CONDUCT POLICY OF THE FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF COVENTRY***

By Resolution of this Congregation concerning the promotion of its ministries and activities in trusting covenant with each other and the community at large, the First Congregational Church of Coventry (hereinafter referred to as FCCC, the “Congregation” or “the Church”) pledges itself unconditionally to the elimination of all forms of personal abuse whether physical, emotional, spiritual, social, sexual or economic through misconduct, exploitation, manipulation or any other means. The Congregation spiritually embraces and affirms all who seek fellowship and expression of faith and recognizes its special role in the protection and nurture of vulnerable persons such as children, youth, the physically infirm, disadvantaged, elderly, victimized and disabled persons.

I. Statement of policy

A. Prohibition of Sexual Exploitation, Physical and Emotional Abuse and Harassment

The First Congregational Church of Coventry is committed to creating and maintaining a worship and work community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Specifically, all persons associated with FCCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation and harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior, which is contrary to this policy and-if necessary-to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

B. Safe Conduct in Ministries and Activities

All persons engaged in the ministry of FCCC (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, and authorized ministers) are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority. Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioner(s) or other individual(s) by anyone engaged in the ministry of FCCC is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Because ministers (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, and authorized ministers) often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry of this church maintain their own psychological, emotional, and spiritual health and that they have adequate preparation and education for helping those individuals they seek to serve in ministry. FCCC encourages its leaders, authorized ministers, employees, and volunteers to nurture

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safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources including educational classes for the improvement of the Church's safe conduct performance.

All individuals with roles of leadership or guidance will be expected to complete and submit a disclosure document along with background verification in a form approved by the Council or the appropriate governing Board. This includes Ministers, teachers and fellowship leaders, among others.

C. Youth Protection Policy

As a particular focus, FCCC is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to ensure this, we expect that all people applying to be volunteers who work with minors will be approved by the Board of Christian Education. It is the policy of the church to provide adequate supervision for all youth activities. We also expect all employees or volunteers who work with minors to complete and submit a disclosure document in a form substantially similar to that of the one accompanying this policy.

D. Definitions

1. **Minister:** a person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers, as well as authorized ministers.
2. **Authorized minister:** a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an association of the United Church of Christ.
3. **Ministerial relationship:** the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.
4. **Church Staff:** Individuals employed by the Church in a compensated or elected capacity with understood authority and performance responsibilities.
5. **Volunteer Leaders:**
 - **Church Officers:** Individuals holding elected offices as proscribed in the Church by-laws.
 - **Elected Board and Committee members:** Individuals holding elected and/or voluntary positions on any standing or ad-hoc board or committee, including chairpersons/leaders.
6. **MISCONDUCT:** Infringement of appropriate conduct in a manner that violates the letter and spirit of these standards and acceptable professional conduct in practicing ministries to others.

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7. ABUSE:

- a. **Sexual exploitation:** sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a minister engaged in the work of the church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister.
- b. **Sexual harassment:** repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation 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:
 - (1) 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;
 - (2) 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
 - (3) 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, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, 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.

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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. For example, 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.

- c. **Physical Harassment:** Exertion of implied or actual physical threats to any individual for any purpose. This includes actual or implied physical bullying.
- d. **Emotional Harassment:** Exertion of psychological or emotional manipulation by any individual on another for any purpose including the use of confidential personal information used or threatened to be used against a person.
- e. **Mandatory Reporters** – Mandatory Reporters are individuals who by virtue of their professional or other roles are obligated by statute to report violations of law to authorities stipulated by law. Regardless of procedures outlined herein, each person who is considered a “mandatory reporter” under the statutes of Connecticut, shall in good faith report physical, sexual, or mental abuse inflicted by a person responsible for a child’s health, welfare or care, or by a person given access to such child by such responsible person.

FCCC prefers that a “mandatory reporter” first report circumstances requiring reporting to authorities to the Moderator and/or Council. Without delay, the highest level leader who is considered to be a “mandatory reporter” shall make the initial report to police or child welfare authorities on behalf of FCCC.

Nothing in this policy shall be considered a restraint of an individual’s statutory obligation to report to authorities. Furthermore, no person shall be restrained from reporting an incident on the basis that she or he is not a “mandatory reporter”.

- f. **Progressive Discipline** - A system of escalating discipline as an alternative to summary termination for a policy infraction, even a minor one. Progressive steps in discipline are as follows:
 - 1. Counseling or a verbal warning -- It is necessary to document that such a meeting occurred. It is sometimes appropriate that more than one supervisory person be present for this step.
 - 2. Written warning -- A formal letter is prepared and delivered to the employee/volunteer, while a copy is maintained in the employee/volunteer file.
 - 3. Suspension or demotion – This may be appropriate for repeated violations of Ministry Standard violations. This step might be skipped for Code of Conduct violations.

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4. Termination – Repeated willful violations of the Code of Conduct or Ministry Standards call for termination of employment, whether employee or volunteer. However, no Minister has authority to terminate an employee or volunteer unilaterally; at least two levels of supervision must make a judgment on termination. No one shall be terminated without the advice of legal counsel.

In extreme circumstances it will be appropriate to skip steps and proceed with immediate termination. However, the same rules apply to a summary termination.

An equivalent to progressive discipline shall apply to children and “vulnerable adults” (clients) served by our church. When clients are observed engaging in inappropriate interactions or sexual contact, it is expected that they will be immediately stopped or redirected to another activity. When violations are repeated and the client is unresponsive, the next step is to engage the parent or guardian in a meeting about the behavior with the expectation that the parent will provide follow-up discussion and discipline of the client. If this step fails to achieve positive results, then additional steps must be taken culminating with expulsion of the client from the church program. Legal counsel shall also be engaged before expulsion, especially if there may be the appearance of unjustified discrimination.

- g. **Suspected Abuse** - Actual abuse consists of physical, sexual or mental abuse inflicted by a person responsible for a child’s health, welfare or care, who may be a parent, guardian or other person having access to a child. Abuse may include neglect of a person’s health as a result of failure to properly feed, clothe or attend to apparent illness or mental well-being. As a caregiver in ministry, one need not directly witness, nor is one likely to directly witness actual abuse. It is sufficient to suspect abuse based upon observations of general health, physical condition, patterns of irregular behavior and environmental factors. Examples of observations might include: bruising on multiple occasions, weight loss, chronic physical illness, and anti-social or excessively withdrawn behavior. Environmental factors may include highly contentious divorce and custody battles, or parental drug use. One must use judgment in assessing multiple factors which lead to suspicion of abuse.

While “suspected abuse” is defined here for the benefit of “mandatory reporters”, the definition, for the purpose of this policy, includes “suspected abuse” of a “vulnerable adult”.

- h. **Vulnerable Adult** -Any adult person who by reason of profound physical disability or dependence, developmental disability, mental illness, relative social power or cultural circumstances may be susceptible to physical abuse, sexual exploitation, financial exploitation or manipulation as a consequence of being unable to physically resist, or render judgments regarding physical, mental, financial or environmental well-being. Such persons may be unable to act independently and may, to their detriment, manifest high levels of trust or fear of persons of perceived power or authority.

MISCONDUCT COMPLAINT RESPONSE PLAN

Guideline Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual, Physical or Other Exploitation or Harassment Against Staff, Employees and Volunteer Leaders

- A. SAFE CONDUCT RESPONSE TEAM (SCRT): A SCRT Leader team with no fewer than two members-one male and one female-will be appointed by the Congregation at its Annual Meeting under advisement of the Nominating Committee. The SCRT leadership team shall be authorized to organize and operate the various levels in the SCRT including preparedness training and reporting to Church Council.
- B. SCRT COMPOSITION: The SCRT will include several levels of response under the oversight of the Church Council and carried out by the SCRT leaders. At a minimum, the following parties are set forth in this process:

<u>SCRT Element:</u>	<u>Role</u>
1.	SCRT Leaders Organize SCRT, Report to Council/Congregation, Act as initial responders to complaints and direct to appropriate authority for action
2.	Church Moderator (or designee) Represent Church to public/media as necessary and provide executive actions, when necessary
3.	Mandated Reporter(s) Report to public authorities suspected criminal or illegal activities, advise Council
4.	Legal Counsel Advises Church/represents Churches legal interests
5.	Insurer Advises on liability issues
6.	Pastoral presence Counseling and spiritual guidance

Particular rules and procedures concerning the complaint response team may be established by the FCCC Council each year at its first meeting, in preparation for the possibility of responding to any complaint under its adopted statement of policy. Individuals selected to participate on the SCRT should understand and be willing to fulfill a job description set forth in “Reference A”, attached hereto. The mission of the SCRT is to:

1. Promptly act to protect all parties, including complainant, target of the misconduct complaint and the general membership, in the initial stages of a complaint procedure
2. Direct the complaint to the appropriate authority for investigation and action.

The response team, will familiarize itself with the terms of this Policy and Plan as well as the established procedures of FCCC for dealing with complaint(s) of

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alleged sexual exploitation or harassment against any employee(s) or volunteer(s) in leadership position(s) in FCCC.

- C. SCRT LEADER QUALIFICATIONS: Individuals with professional background and/or training in conflict and/or crisis management shall have preference for their response roles. Upon request, training will be provided. The SCRT Leader team members needing training in Safe Conduct matters and conflict management will have that provided by FCCC through denominational, insurer or other professional resources.
- D. INITIAL RESPONSE: When any complaint or allegation is made, it is to be directed to the Response Team immediately which shall contact the source at its very earliest possible time. The purpose of the initial contact is to determine the nature of the complaint and establish the means of communication with the complainant. Once this is established, two or more responders are to meet/interview the complainant and determine the nature and details of the complaint under the strictest confidence, with no contact with the target of the complaint whatsoever until action is required for suspension or removal of the alleged offender while investigation of facts ensues.
- E. MISCONDUCT COMPLAINT PROCESS: The purpose of the Safe Conduct Response Team (SCRT) is to handle the initial steps should a complaint arise. Their principle role is to expediently protect all parties and evidence, if applicable-ideally within hours-so that actions including investigation may be taken by appropriate governing boards promptly. A very important responsibility of the SCRT is to eliminate the prospect of manipulation of the process. They are not to act in any way as judges or enforcers of this or any other policy but as portal to authorities that can act for appropriate and fair resolution of the conflict. As a general guideline, the expected steps are:
1. SCRT member(s) shall meet with the complaining individual(s) at the earliest possible time after receiving notification.
 2. Assure the individual registering the complaint of confidentiality and intended objectivity of the process.
 3. Gather all pertinent details and/or evidence of the complaint and verify the intent of the individual.
 4. Determine the highest authority that the complaint will be directed to -not in conflict with the complaint-including, in descending order:
 - a. Church Moderator
 - b. Officers of the Church
 - c. Church Council members
 - d. Senior Minister
 - e. Other Minister(s)
 - f. Legal Counsel (if available)
 5. At earliest possible opportunity, the SCRT shall notify the highest governing authority of the complaint. Honoring the pledge of confidentiality as necessary, the SCRT will present the gathered information to the authority

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contacted. The representative receiving the information will immediately commence actions that may include:

- a. Contacting the individual(s) registering the complaint to verify their intent.
- b. Isolate the parties involved, including immediate leaves of absence, if appropriate.
- c. Commence fact finding.
- d. Seek appropriate legal counsel as appropriate to the governing authorities of the Church and community.
- e. Notify police if criminal conduct may be involved.
- f. Notify the standing Council representatives and convene meeting(s) to ascertain actions necessary to resolve the issue.
- g. Notify the congregation of actions being taken.

6. Once the SCRT has reported to the governing or delegated body, that body shall then have several options in addressing incidents of alleged abuse, sexual exploitation or harassment as pertains to this guideline:

- a. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the individual(s) accused of sexual exploitation or harassment under the oversight of the governing board.
- b. The matter may be reported to public safety officers presiding locally in the community in strict conformance with the public laws and regulations.
- c. If an informal resolution of the complaint(s) does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant(s) may request that the response team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:
 - (1) The governing body shall designate its own response team that shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged abuse(s), exploitation(s) or harassment(s), and from others who may have pertinent information, and present such information to the Moderator and Church Council.
 - (2) The Church Council shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
 - i. 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:
 - (a) Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior, including possible public notification recommending or requiring a program of growth that may include education and/or counseling;
 - (b) Probation, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;

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- (c) Dismissal from employment or volunteer leadership position, and, in extreme cases, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.
 - (d) Other legal actions that may be necessary
 - ii. Finding that no abuse sexual exploitation or harassment actually occurred.
 - 7. If the accused employee or volunteer is an authorized minister (i.e., holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an association of the United Church of Christ) the response team shall inform the appropriate body of the wider United Church of Christ (i.e., conference minister, association committee on the ministry) of the allegation. The First Congregational Church of Coventry, will cooperate fully in any procedures of the United Church of Christ related to the person's ministerial authorization while retaining the right and responsibility to employ or designate leadership within The First Congregational Church of Coventry as it determines best.
 - 8. If allegations of possible child abuse are included in the complaint(s), the response team shall notify appropriate secular authorities and The First Congregational Church of Coventry shall cooperate fully in any investigation. This policy shall continue to be followed to determine the continuance of the individual(s) in leadership positions in The First Congregational Church of Coventry.
- F. **RECORDS:** A written summary of the supervisory board's and Council's proceedings in such cases will be securely maintained with the records of the Church.
- G. **OBJECTIVITY:** 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.
- H. **PROTECTION OF THOSE MAKING COMPLAINT:** 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, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.
- I. **DISCRETION OF THE COMPLAINANT:** If the complainant(s) or accused person(s) is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the body pursuing resolution of the case, he or she has the right to appeal to any higher authority within the polity of the Church, Connecticut Conference of the UCC or other legal avenue at their disposal, if they so choose.

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REFERENCE "A"

Job Description	
Date: 2013	
Position/Title: Safe Conduct Response Team	
Report To: Church Council	
Reviewed By: Board of Christian Education	
Goals/Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To insure that all who attend First Congregational Church of Coventry's services and activities are free from inappropriate conduct. 	
Description of Assigned Responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be available to receive complaints and to respond within 24 hours. • To be able to direct complaints through the proper channels to insure resolution. • To be able to stand up to church leadership when needed. • To be available for monthly committee meetings. 	
Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate in online training offered by UCC's Insurance Board. • To be available for continuing education and group training. 	
Notes/Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to provide personal information for a background check. 	
Response Team Member's Certification I acknowledge that I have read and understand the responsibilities required to be a member of the Response Team.	
Signature	Date

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Authorized Adult Employee & Volunteer
Application and Disclosure Form

NAME:

LAST

FIRST

MIDDLE

ADDRESS:

STREET

CITY

STATE ZIP CODE

DAYTIME PHONE

EVENING PHONE

EMAIL

References: *One reference must be related to you and the other references must not be related to you.*
(Attach additional page(s) as necessary.)

NAME (1)

RELATIONSHIP

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

NAME (2)

RELATIONSHIP

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

NAME (3)

RELATIONSHIP

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

I have been a member of this church since

I have been a friend of this church since

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APPLICANT:

I have never been convicted of, nor pled guilty or no contest to a crime. (*Exclude convictions that have been sealed, expunged or legally eradicated, misdemeanor convictions for which probation was completed and the case was dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state*)

True

Not true

If not true, please briefly describe the nature of the crime(s), the date and place of conviction and the legal disposition of the case. The church will not deny a position to any applicant solely because the person has been convicted of a crime. The church, however, may consider the nature, date and circumstances of the offense, as well as whether the offense is relevant to the duties of the position applied for.

Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide a brief explanation.

The covenants between persons seeking authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the church. To that end, I attest that the information set forth in this application is true and complete. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the position I am seeking to fill. I acknowledge that it is my duty in a timely fashion to amend the responses and information I have provided if I come to know that the response or information was incorrect when given or, though accurate when given, the response or information is no longer accurate.

Beginning such relationships with an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for a continuing and healthy covenant between volunteers and the church they seek to serve. To that end, I authorize First Congregational Church of Coventry, Connecticut (“**FCCC**”) and/or its agents to make inquiries regarding my character and qualifications, including all statements I have set forth above. I also authorize all entities, persons, former employers, supervisors, courts, law enforcement, and other public agencies to respond to inquiries concerning me, to supply verification of the statements I have made, and to comment on and state opinions regarding my background, character, and qualifications. To encourage such persons and entities to speak openly and responsibly, I hereby release them from all liability arising from their responses, comments, and statements.

FCCC authorized volunteer recruitment process involves the sharing of information regarding applicants with those persons in a position to recruit, secure, and supervise both the position I am seeking to fill and program I am seeking to participate in. To that end, I authorize **FCCC** and its agents to circulate, distribute, and otherwise share information gathered in connection with this application to such persons for these purposes. I understand that **FCCC** will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

If I am offered and accept employment or volunteer service with the church, I agree to comply with its published policies and rules, including those related to harassment of employees, reporting known or suspected child neglect or abuse and similar requirements. If requested to do so, I will cooperate with any church investigation of a possible violation of church policies and rules by providing complete and truthful information in an oral and/or written statement.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the **FCCC SafeConduct™** Policy.

PRINT NAME & SIGN

DATE

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Background Investigation Results

EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER APPLICANT:

Personal interview conducted by _____ on _____
DATE

Reference inquiries completed by _____ on _____
DATE

A criminal background check was conducted on the candidate using the following sources:

- National multi-state criminal records search
- National sex offender registry search
- Social security number trace and alias search
- County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked over the past (__) years:
- Motor Vehicle Record

- Other (Identify)

The (Employment Committee) has reviewed the investigation with the following result:

We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant would be acceptable for the position.”

OR

We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is not acceptable for the position.”

This clearance shall remain as a permanent record in the employment file.

MEMBER _____
Signature Date

MEMBER _____
Signature Date

MEMBER _____
Signature Date