

Summary Safe Church Policy of Fishers Island Union Chapel (United Church of Christ)

Introduction

Fishers Island Union Chapel (United Church of Christ) is dedicated to ensuring a Safe Church environment where everyone, particularly youth aged 18 or younger and vulnerable adults, can safely participate in church activities. Our new policy sets out strict standards and protocols designed to prevent and address any form of abuse or misconduct.

Core Principles

- **Zero Tolerance for Abuse:** Union Chapel prohibits all forms of abuse—physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional. Any confirmed abuse will result in immediate disciplinary actions, including possible dismissal from church events.
- **Behavioral Expectations:** Participants are required to uphold the highest standards of conduct, exhibiting behaviors that align with Christian values and respect for personal boundaries.
- **Active Monitoring and Supervision:** The church closely monitors and supervises activities involving youth and vulnerable adults to prevent abuse.
- **Comprehensive Screening and Training:** All employees and volunteers undergo thorough background checks and mandatory training on abuse prevention.

Detailed Guidelines

- **Physical Interactions:**
 - **Appropriate:** Side hugs, shoulder-to-shoulder hugs, back pats, handshakes, high-fives, verbal praise, and non-invasive touches.
 - **Inappropriate:** Full-frontal hugs, kisses, lap sitting, wrestling, piggyback rides, tickling, any massages, and secluded affectionate behaviors.
- **Verbal Interactions:**
 - **Appropriate:** Positive reinforcement, encouragement, praise, and respectful jokes.
 - **Inappropriate:** Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, or humiliating comments, discussions of sexual encounters, personal problem sharing with youth, cursing, and sexual jokes.
- **Electronic Communication:**
 - **Appropriate:** Emails and texts to youth that copy their parents or guardians, use of public social media groups, and supervised online meetings.
 - **Inappropriate:** Private messages, unsupervised posting of pictures, friending youth on personal social media, and secretive communications.

Supervising Youth

- **Dual-Adult Requirement:** With very few exceptions, interactions between adults and a youth must involve at least two approved adults in order to protect all participants and prevent misunderstandings or inappropriate behavior.

- **Off-Site Contact:** Requires parental permission and must be supervised by multiple adults. Activities must not occur in private settings without additional adult presence.

Crisis Management Plan

- **Immediate Response Team:** Comprised of the Pastor and two trustees, this team will manage any serious incident promptly and effectively.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** The team will assess the situation, coordinate with law enforcement if necessary, and communicate with the community to manage the crisis.

Regular Policy Review and Updates

- **Annual Review:** The Safe Church Policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant. This review will incorporate feedback from the congregation and reflect changes in legal requirements.

Feedback Mechanism for Policy Improvement

- **Feedback System:** A formal mechanism will be established for congregation members to provide feedback on the Safe Church Policy, identifying areas for improvement.

Inclusion and Diversity Training

- **Training Modules:** Additional training on diversity and inclusion ensures all members feel welcomed and valued, regardless of background. We recommend Easy Llama (<https://www.easylama.com/>), which several island organizations including the library, the ferry, and the transfer station use to train their employees, board members, and volunteers.

Legal Compliance and Updates

- **Legal Expertise:** Regular updates to the policy will reflect the latest child protection laws and mandatory reporting requirements, with input from legal experts.

Responding to Allegations

- **Administrative Leave:** Any staff or volunteer charged with misconduct will be placed on administrative leave pending resolution of the allegations. This measure is to ensure the integrity of the investigation and the safety of all church participants.

Conclusion

The expanded and detailed Safe Church Policy of Fishers Island Union Chapel (United Church of Christ) underscores the church's commitment to the safety and well-being of its members, especially youth and vulnerable adults. By incorporating comprehensive measures and protocols, the policy ensures a proactive approach to creating a secure and respectful environment conducive to spiritual growth and community engagement.