

**Union Chapel United Church of Christ  
Fishers Island, New York**

**Safe Church Policies and Procedures**

**Working Draft, May 1, 2024**

This draft is gathered from many sources including a church that has graciously shared their policy with us as a starting point. We welcome all feedback and suggestions emailed to [office@fiunionchapel.org](mailto:office@fiunionchapel.org) or directly to our Pastor or any Trustee.

**Adopted:** Date

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## Statement of Policy

As a community of Christian faith, Union Chapel is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, clergy, employees, and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. The congregation of Union Chapel supports principles of Safe Church, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith. Union Chapel strongly opposes and prohibits sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and any form of exploitation or abuse of others regardless of race, socio-economic status, sex, sexual or gender orientation or expression, physical and/or mental capacity, age or religion. It is the intention of our congregation to affirmatively nurture good behavior, and to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Union Chapel is in a covenantal relationship with the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. As such, Union Chapel respects the work that has been done in the United Church of Christ with regards to Safe Church and is grateful for the support of the Southern New England Conference.

Every member of the congregation, whether clergy, ministry leader, lay staff, volunteer or parent, has a role and responsibility to lead those who look to them individually for guidance, to monitor their behavior and redirect them if they cross boundaries of Safe Church. Our congregation shall nurture good conduct as demonstrated by personal behaviors that are consistent with our Christian values.

## General Definitions

1. Physical abuse is injury that is intentionally inflicted upon any individual and may include a violation of spatial boundaries.
2. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a youth and an adult or between two youths. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the other youth.
3. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to any individual that results in an observable and material impairment in a youth's growth, development, or any individual psychological functioning.
4. Neglect is the failure to provide for a youth or vulnerable adult's basic needs or the failure to protect a youth from harm.
5. A Minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as a youth throughout this policy).

6. 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, and who is or may be unable to take care of himself or herself, or unable to protect himself or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
7. Mandatory Reporters are those persons required by New York State law to report suspected abuse or maltreatment to police or youth welfare agencies.
8. Authorized Clergy includes any clergy who is admitted to ministry by the United Church of Christ, who serves the congregation in any capacity whether called as pastor or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, or volunteer capacity.

## **Code of Conduct with Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

The following Code of Conduct is intended to assist Clergy, employees, and volunteers in making decisions about interactions with youth and vulnerable adults. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact the Pastor.

Union Chapel is committed to creating an environment for youth and vulnerable adults that is safe, nurturing, and empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated, and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal from Union Chapel. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth or a vulnerable adult or allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. Union Chapel will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

As we strive to accomplish our mission together, the following are specific expectations of clergy, employees, and volunteers:

1. Youth and vulnerable adults will be treated with respect at all times.
2. Youth and vulnerable adults will be treated fairly regardless of race, socio-economic status, sex, sexual or gender orientation, physical and/or mental capacity, age or religion.
3. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined by Union Chapel on page 9 of this policy.
4. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will avoid affection with youth and vulnerable adults that cannot be observed by others.
5. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions as outlined by Union Chapel.
6. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not stare at or comment on youth and vulnerable adults' bodies.
7. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not date or become romantically involved with youth and vulnerable adults.
8. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of youth and vulnerable adults.

9. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not have sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on Union Chapel's property.
10. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not have secrets with youth and vulnerable adults and will only give gifts with prior permission.
11. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will comply with Union Chapel's policies regarding interactions with youth and vulnerable adults outside of our programs.
12. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with youth and vulnerable adults.
13. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with youth and vulnerable adults in a private setting. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will use common areas when working with individual youth and vulnerable adults.
14. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not abuse youth and vulnerable adults in any way including (but not limited to) the following:
  - a. *Physical abuse*: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints
  - b. *Verbal abuse*: degrading, threatening, cursing
  - c. *Sexual abuse*: inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations
  - d. *Mental abuse*: shaming, humiliation, cruelty
  - e. *Neglect*: withholding food, water, shelter, failing to maintain safety
15. Union Chapel will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult. In addition, Union Chapel will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior. Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all youth and vulnerable adults, clergy, employees, and volunteers. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
  - a. *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
  - b. *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
  - c. *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 gestures.
  - d. *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, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
    - i. Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.

- ii. Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
  - iii. Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
  - iv. Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
- e. *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.
  - f. *Sexualized bullying* – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.
16. All clergy, employees, and volunteers must follow state specific mandatory reporting requirements. They should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. They will:
- a. Be familiar with the symptoms of youth abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
  - b. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youth and vulnerable adults against abuse.
  - c. Report suspected youth abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
  - d. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.
17. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will report concerns or complaints about other employees, volunteers, adults, or youth to Union Chapel's Pastor and/or a Trustee.
18. Union Chapel cooperates fully with the authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse. Any clergy, employee, or volunteer shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any external investigation by outside authorities or internal investigation conducted by the organization or persons given investigative authority by the organization. Failure to cooperate fully may be grounds for termination.
19. Prior to employment or before being granted a leadership role, background checks will be completed to establish that clergy, employees, and volunteers may not have engaged in or been accused or convicted of youth or vulnerable adult abuse, indecency with a youth or vulnerable adult, or injury to a youth or vulnerable adult.

## Policies for Working with Youth

Policies define the bandwidth of acceptable behavior in an organization. Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to youths, when staff know and understand policies, they can identify, interrupt, and report policy violations. Simply interrupting a policy violation can prevent a false allegation of abuse or put an offender on notice that no one works in private, the rules apply to everyone, and violations will be detected.

### Physical Contact

Union Chapel’s physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting youths, clergy, employees, and volunteers. Union Chapel encourages appropriate physical contact with youths and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by clergy, employees, and volunteers towards youths in the organization’s programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer status.

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Side hugs</li> <li>● Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs</li> <li>● Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>● Handshakes</li> <li>● High-fives and hand slapping</li> <li>● Verbal praise</li> <li>● Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li> <li>● Touching hands, shoulders, and arms</li> <li>● Arms around shoulders</li> <li>● Holding hands (with young youth in escorting situations or praying)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full-frontal hugs</li> <li>● Kisses</li> <li>● Showing affection in an isolated area</li> <li>● Lap sitting</li> <li>● Wrestling</li> <li>● Piggyback rides</li> <li>● Tickling</li> <li>● Allowing a youth to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg</li> <li>● Any type of massage given by or to a youth</li> <li>● Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer</li> <li>● Compliments relating to physique or body development</li> <li>● Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> </ul>

## Verbal Interactions

Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youths in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youths and are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youths.

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<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 or in any way involving youths in the personal problems or issues of Clergy, employees, and volunteers</li><li>• Sharing secrets</li><li>• Cursing</li><li>• Sexual jokes</li><li>• Shaming</li><li>• Belittling</li><li>• Derogatory remarks</li><li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youths</li><li>• Derogatory remarks about the youth or his/her family</li></ul>



## One-on-One Interactions

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. Union Chapel aims to eliminate these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions.

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved and/or necessary clergy, employees, and volunteers are encouraged to observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

<b><i>Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If meeting one-on-one with a youth, do so where you can be observed (e.g. outside, in an office with a window) and keep a table and/or physical distance between you and the youth.</li> <li>• Avoid physical affection. If a youth requests a hug, use a side or temple hug. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.</li> <li>• Consider who it might be advisable to inform about the meeting.</li> <li>• Document any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted. Consider if a state agency, local authority, church leader and/or parent needs to be notified. Convene the church response team as needed.</li> </ul>

## Off-Site Contact

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put clergy, staff, volunteers, and Union Chapel at increased risk. The following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<b><i>Appropriate Outside Contact</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking groups of youths on an outing</li> <li>• Attending school or sporting activities with groups of youths</li> <li>• Attending functions at a youth's home, with parents present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents' written permission</li> <li>• Visiting one youth in the youth's home, without a parent present</li> <li>• Hosting one youth in the home of staff or volunteers (ex. hiring youth to do work at member's house without express written permission from parents for that date and time)</li> <li>• A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers</li> </ul>

## Electronic Communication

Any private electronic communication between clergy, staff, volunteers and youths, including the use of social networking websites — such as, but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat — instant messaging, texting, social media of any kind, and telecommunication platforms — such as, but not limited to Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc. — is prohibited. All communication between staff and youths must be transparent.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication:

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youths ONLY when copying in a supervisor or the youth’s parent</li> <li>• Communicating through “organization group pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums</li> <li>• “Private” profiles for Clergy, employees, and volunteers which youths cannot access.</li> <li>• Meeting online with youths when another volunteer or parent is present.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments</li> <li>• Sexually oriented conversations</li> <li>• Private messages between Clergy, employees, and volunteers with youths</li> <li>• Posting pictures of organization participants on social media sites</li> <li>• Posting inappropriate comments on pictures</li> <li>• Initiating “Friending” participants on social networking sites</li> <li>• Meeting online 1 on 1</li> </ul>

## Gift Giving

Molesters routinely groom youths by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to the youth. They might instruct the youth to keep the gifts a secret, which then starts teaching the youth to keep secrets from parents. For this reason, clergy, employees, and volunteers should only give gifts to groups of youths, and only if the Pastor is aware of and approves the gift and if parents are notified.

## Screening and Selection of Employees and Volunteers

The process of screening and selecting employees and volunteers is an essential element of management due diligence. There are several elements required which serve a number of purposes. Criminal background checking by itself is inadequate simply because very few predators, or people who would become predators, have been through the penal system. A would-be predator requires three things: Access, Privacy & Control.

**Standing of “Authorized Clergy”:** Each denomination served by the Insurance Board has a process of granting professional standing to clergy. Employment of clergy who do not fulfill denominational requirements may have an impact on insurance programs.

The following screening and selection procedures are strongly recommended for all clergy, employees, and volunteers.

*Note: Each board member, employee or volunteer now serving and regardless of length of service must be willing to set an example for all others who follow in their ministry. Therefore, at the time this policy is first adopted, all incumbent board members, employees and all incumbent volunteers who work with youth shall execute the following procedures.*

## Standardized Application

All applicants should be expected to complete an application prior to working at Union Chapel. The application should be reviewed by at least three church leaders (paid or unpaid) for completeness and evaluated for potential risks. If the application is not 100% complete, the applicant may be screened out, the applicant may be asked to complete the application, or the missing information may be obtained during an interview. However, Union Chapel should endeavor to follow a consistent approach to applications' missing information.

Volunteers must be known to the church and have actively been involved and participated in the life of Union Chapel or a relevant organization on Fishers Island for a minimum of six months and complete a background check before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs. There should be **no exceptions** to this policy, even when volunteer candidates come from another church with similar programs.

## Interviews

All applicants should be interviewed during the selection process and prior to volunteering and/or employment. The purpose of the interview is to determine whether the applicant possesses the skills needed to perform the volunteer/job requirements and whether the applicant demonstrates characteristics of a potentially abusive person. The interview should also provide the applicant with information about volunteer/ job responsibilities and expectations and should specifically discuss the church's commitment to protect youth and other vulnerable persons from abuse. Interview notes shall be maintained in the church's files.

## Reference Checks

Reference checks will be conducted for all applicants prior to employment or engagement as a volunteer. A minimum of three references is required. If the person responsible for screening the applicant does not believe the references are appropriate, he or she can ask for different ones. Reference checks should be conducted by telephone or in person. The person responsible for the screening will explain that the applicant will have access to a vulnerable population. Notes from these calls shall be maintained in the church's files.

## Background Checks

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks will be conducted for all volunteer and employment applicants. The information will be obtained prior to volunteering or employment of the applicant.

The background check(s) will include the following:

- National multi-state criminal records search;
- National sex offender registry search;

- Social security number trace and alias search; and
- County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked for the past 7 years

Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each applicant prior to executing the check.

## Employment Decisions

The church leaders reviewing applications will review each background check, and agree that the applicant is eligible for employment as clergy or paid employee. Conviction for violent crimes, drug offenses, those involving sexual assault, sexual abuse, or neglect shall be considered barriers to employment.

The employment process will last a sufficient length of time to allow for careful collection and evaluation of information about applicants and to allow the applicant time to self-select out of the process if they have concerns.

## Training

Union Chapel's first priority is to prevent abuse of youth and vulnerable adults. It is difficult to comprehend that those among us, our friends and family, would commit such acts willingly. Nevertheless, persons who have been presented with no behavior standards and do not understand boundaries may unwittingly engage in behaviors that may be perceived as predatory. Their personal reputations and that of Union Chapel are then at risk.

To fulfill our leadership obligation, each new employee and new volunteer shall complete a specific program of training prior to assuming duties. Fulfillment of training requirements shall be documented in the church files. Training shall be repeated annually and training records shall be audited annually by the designated ministry member. For paid employees – this would be part of their performance evaluation. Training for volunteers will be determined by the ministry members.

Abuse prevention curriculum shall include:

1. Organization level
  - a . Review of expected conduct and boundaries defined in this policy.
  - b . Review of standards applicable to ministry.
  - c . Explanation of procedures for reporting violations of standards of conduct and suspected youth abuse.
  - d . Explanation of individual statutory reporting obligations.
  - e . Identifying and managing high-risk situations such as bathroom use, transition times, and free times.
  - f . Physical security procedures.
2. Abuse prevention education:
  - a . Effects of sexual abuse.

- b. Types of youth molesters.
- c. Characteristics of abusers.
- d. How youth molesters operate: access, privacy, and control.
- e. Protecting oneself from false allegations.
- f. Examples of youth-on-youth sexual abuse, even among young youth/youth.
- g. Characteristics of youth more likely to act out sexually.
- h. Characteristics of youth more likely to be abused.
- i. High-risk activities and circumstances.
- j. Specific monitoring and supervision activities to prevent youth-on-youth sexual activity.
- k. How to respond to incidents of sexual activity between youth.

Employee supervisors and designated ministry members shall ensure that each employee and volunteer has mastered requirements and provide additional supervision and guidance to ensure required conduct.

## I. Monitoring and Supervision

When clergy, employees, and volunteers are adequately supervised, potential offenders are less likely to act on their impulses because they face detection. When youths are adequately supervised, they too are less likely to engage in inappropriate interactions with others. Similarly, the facility must be monitored, particularly out-of-the-way locations or locations that might permit an offender undue access to or privacy with a youth. Effective supervision and monitoring require that a variety of methods be used frequently, at both scheduled and random times.

### General Supervision

General supervision procedures:

1. **Visits to Youth Programs-** A designated parish leader will regularly visit youth programs to ensure that activities are well-managed and youth policies observed by all in attendance.
2. **Ratios-** There will be at least two adults leading youth activities.
3. **Mixed Age Groups-** In most incidents involving one youth abusing another youth, the youths are from different age groups. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must be aware that close line of sight supervision is required when monitoring programs that mix age groups.

### Monitoring Youth in Facilities

Because Union Chapel is responsible for all youths in the facility, we recommend implementing the following practices:

1. Require a parent or legal guardian to complete a participation form which includes identifying information, any special medical or behavioral circumstances, any youth custody or other legal issues, the youth's date of birth, and emergency contact information, once yearly for each youth and updated as needed.

2. Require youths to sign a Code of Conduct that outlines the program’s behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This Code of Conduct should also include a systematic disciplinary policy which explains that youths will be suspended or dismissed from the program for policy violations. Require parents or legal guardians to sign this Code of Conduct as well, so that they are aware of the program’s policies and progressive disciplinary procedures.
3. While an orientation may not be feasible in all circumstances, we recommend encouraging parents and legal guardians to attend an information session with a program representative. This meeting will provide an opportunity to review expectations and requirements, and the chance to establish a relationship with them. This can be helpful if any problems arise in the future.
4. Train all staff:
  - a. To greet youths that enter the facility; to direct youths to the structured activities or authorized areas; and, to redirect youths who are not in an authorized area or who are not participating in a structured activity.
  - b. To be aware of the risks involved with mixing age groups and how to monitor activities involving mixed age groups.
  - c. To routinely monitor high risk areas (such as bathrooms and unused rooms).

Ultimately, all youth must be supervised at all times, regardless of age. The key to remember is that they can be supervised directly in structured activities and indirectly when they are in authorized areas.

## Monitoring High Risk Activities

### Bathroom Activities

Most incidents of youth-to-youth abuse occur in the bathrooms. Therefore, the following supervision guidelines are recommended:

- Only one person may be in the bathroom at any time.
- Youths must ask permission to use the bathroom.
- Staff should frequently check bathrooms.
- If assisting a youth in the bathroom, the adult should keep the hallway door open.
- Parents/ caregivers are responsible for changing diapers.

### Transition Times and Free Times

Transition times and free-choice times (or free times) pose a high risk for incidents because during these times, clergy, employees, and volunteers may not be assigned a particular group of youths to supervise. To decrease the risk of incidents, implement the following procedures:

- a. Require youths to remain in line-of-sight of staff at all times.
- b. Ensure that all adults are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).

- c. Include bathroom procedures.
- d. Require supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and sweeps of the entire activity area and ensure all youths are accounted for.

### Off-Site Activities

The Pastor should approve all off-site activities and require parental or legal guardian approval. Planning should include:

1. Specifying youth to adult leader ratios and if there will be both male and female adult leaders. Especially off of Fishers Island, adult leaders and youths should be easily identifiable.
2. Bathroom procedures as applicable to outing.
3. Transportation procedures.
4. Recommendations based on the location and type of activity (for example, Amusement parks, Water Parks, Arcades, etc.).

### Transportation Activities

Transporting youths may increase the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse because clergy, employees, and volunteers may be alone with a youth or may make unauthorized stops with youths. In addition, transportation activities may provide a time for unsupervised youths to engage in youth-to-youth sexual activity.

Parents or guardians must give written permission for youths to take part in a trip; youths must never be transported without written permission.

Bus transportation guidelines:

- a. Chaperones will have a list of the youths on the trip and will take roll when boarding or exiting a bus and periodically throughout the trip.
- b. Chaperones should sit in seats that permit maximum supervision.
- c. Chaperones should document any unusual occurrences.

In situations where clergy, staff or volunteers transport youths in their own vehicles:

- a. Use the “rule of three” when transporting youths: At least two adults must transport a single youth, or at least two youths must be present if transported by a single adult. If for an unseen reason, one youth is in a vehicle with one adult, the adult will call the parent or guardian and maintain cell phone contact with them for the remainder of the journey.
- b. Youths must be transported directly to their destination, with no unauthorized stops.
- c. Off of Fishers Island, trip leaders must document beginning and ending times and mileage, the names of youths, and other clergy, employees, and volunteers who are involved in transportation, purpose of the transportation, and destination.
- d. Adults must avoid unnecessary physical contact with youths while in vehicles.
- e. When possible, adults should avoid engaging in sensitive conversations with youths.

## Overnight Activities

Overnight stays present unique risks to youths, clergy, employees, and adult volunteers. They often involve changing clothes, groups of both genders and different ages in a more intimate atmosphere than usual, more unstructured activities, and increased supervision demands for adult leaders.

### 1. Supervision Guidelines:

- a. All overnight activities must be documented and approved in writing by the appropriate supervisor.
- b. Staff or adult volunteers are expected to regularly and randomly observe overnight activities on a scheduled and periodic basis.
- c. The Pastor or Ministry Leaders should appoint a “lead” staff or adult volunteer to supervise the overnight. A meeting with all staff and volunteers is conducted to discuss the unique risks of overnight trips, unique elements of the specific overnight trip and to review the specific policies and procedures.
- d. Provide parents and legal guardians with written information about the overnight activity. All parents and guardians must sign a permission slip for their youths to attend the overnight activity.
- e. Determine the appropriate adult leaders-to-youth ratios before the event and schedule adult leaders accordingly.
- f. Meetings with the group should be hosted in open and observable areas; meetings should not be hosted in adult leaders or youth rooms.

### 2. Overnights at the Church:

- a. Physical boundaries within the organization must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- b. Assign pairs of adult leaders to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each adult leader should then maintain a roll sheet that lists all of the youths in their group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the evening.
- c. Assign staff to conduct periodic facility “walk-throughs”.
- d. With regards to sleeping arrangements, separate youths of different genders into separate rooms and post adult leaders at the entrances and exits to these rooms. If this is not feasible, separate genders by as much space as possible. Configure the sleeping arrangements to ensure that all youth feel sexually safe.
- e. When performing room checks, adult leaders should always go in pairs.

### 3. Overnights Away from the Church:

- a. Overnight stays at private homes are prohibited unless approved by the Pastor and a Trustee.
- b. Physical boundaries at the off-site location must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- c. A pair of adult leaders must be assigned to a specific group of youths to supervise. Adult leaders should then maintain a list of the youths in their group. Head counts/roll calls should be conducted routinely throughout the event.



- d. If in a cabin type setting, adult leaders should be placed in bunks to maximize supervision around the cabin and in a way that decreases the chances of youths sneaking out (such as by the door).
- e. In hotel rooms, youths should be assigned to rooms based on age and gender. Adult leaders should have their own rooms. If adult leaders must share rooms with youths, they must have their own beds and never change clothes in front of youths.
- f. All adult leaders are to be on duty in the halls or cabins at night until an hour after lights out and all rooms are quiet.

## Teen Leadership Program

Older youths who participate in teen leadership programs are still youth participants and not staff or volunteers. Therefore, even though they are often given more responsibility, teens in leadership programs must be provided with guidelines regarding appropriate behavior, and then supervised accordingly. Best practice indicates that there should be a five year age difference between a teen leader and the youth he or she assists. In addition, clergy, employees, and volunteers must understand and recognize that these teens are still youths and not their peers. Therefore, the following guidelines will be followed for teen leadership programs:

- a. A screening process for teen leaders which includes
  - A standard application
  - An interview with behaviorally based interview questions
  - References (from teachers, counselors, family friends, etc.)
- b. Training for teen leaders for their role in programs and on program policies about appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This training should include the following information:
  - Appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions and the importance of maintaining behavioral boundaries between teen leaders and younger youths and between teen leaders and clergy, employees, and volunteers.
  - Prohibiting teen leaders from being one-on-one with youths.
  - Prohibiting teen leaders from escorting youths to the bathrooms.
  - Prohibiting teen leaders from assisting youths with changing their clothes.
  - Prohibiting youth sitting on laps of teenagers
- c. A system to monitor the teen leaders.
  - Designate a specific employee or volunteer who is in charge of the teen leadership program and its participants.

## Responding

How an organization responds to suspicious or inappropriate interactions, policy violations, and incidents or allegations of abuse can dramatically affect the harm to the individuals involved and the damage to the organization. Once a clergy member, employee, volunteer, youth, or parent has expressed a concern or made an allegation about the treatment of a youth, swift and determined action must be taken to reduce any subsequent risk to the youth, to the accused staff member or volunteer, and to the organization. Organizations must establish precise, unequivocal requirements for reporting to the authorities and for adhering to a serious-incident response plan.

## Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations

Because Union Chapel is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that everyone actively participates in the protection of youths. In the event that a clergy member, employee, or volunteer observes any suspicious or inappropriate behavior and/or policy violations on the part of others, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations.

Remember, at Union Chapel the policies apply to everyone.

### ***Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors Between Employees/Volunteers and Youth***

- Violation of the abuse prevention policies described above
- Seeking private time or one-on-one time with youths
- Buying gifts for individual youths
- Making suggestive comments to youths
- Picking favorites

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youths will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

### **Employee and Volunteer Response:**

If an employee or volunteer witnesses suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from another employee or volunteer, they are instructed to do the following:

### ***Guidelines for Employees/Volunteers Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations***

- Interrupt the behavior.
- Report the behavior to the Pastor, ministry leader or Trustee
- If you are not comfortable making the report directly, make it anonymously.
- If the report is about a supervisor or administrator, contact the next level of management.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

### **Supervisor and Administrator Response:**

When a church leader receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member or volunteer, they are instructed to do the following:

#### ***Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations***

- Convene the Response Team, to be designated annually by the Trustees, to respond to the concern. The Response Team will do the following:
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report. Until the report is resolved/closed, the employee/volunteer must be removed from duties related to supervising youth, young adults, and/or vulnerable adults.
- Speak with the employee or volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact New York authorities and file a report.
- If appropriate, notify parents and/or guardians.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- b. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Progressive Disciplinary Process outlined in this manual.
- c. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other clergy, employees, and volunteers or youths.

### **Organizational Response:**

#### ***Guidelines for Organizational Response***

Within 30 days from the close of the report, the Response Team will:

- Review the need for increased supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.
- Turn over review materials and findings to the Trustee Chair for their review.

## Responding to Suspected Abuse by an Adult

### **Employee or Volunteer Response to Abuse:**

As required by mandated reporting laws, clergy, employees, and volunteers must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a youth—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by employees, volunteers, or others—to state authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice.

In addition to reporting to state authorities, clergy, employees, and volunteers are required to report any suspected or known abuse of youths perpetrated by employees or volunteers directly to the Pastor or a Trustee so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk.

#### ***Additional Guidelines for Employee/Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse***

- If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that he or she was correct to tell you.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- Immediately report the allegation or incident to the proper organization authorities (based on mandatory reporting requirements) and the designated authority.\*
- Be sure to document the incident, disclosure, or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse. State only the facts.
- It is not your job to investigate the incident but it **IS** your job to report the incident to in a timely manner.
- Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again to the Pastor or a Trustee.

Department of Youth and Families hotline (800) 649-5285; Umbrella 802-748-8645; or Adult Protective Services hotline (800) 564-1612)

### **Supervisors and Administrators Response to Abuse:**

#### ***Guidelines for Supervisor and Administrators Responding to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse***

- First, determine if the youth is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.

- Gather as much information about the allegation as you can. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc.
- Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.
- Contact the appropriate local authorities as indicated by your mandatory reporting procedures. Make sure you get a case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you speak at the reporting agency.
- If the alleged abuse involves an employee or volunteer, notify the Pastor or a Trustee and follow the crisis management plan. (to be developed)
- Suspend the accused employee or volunteer until the investigation is completed.

**Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Abuse and Sexualized Behaviors**

The thought that one youth may sexually abuse another youth does not occur to many people. Unfortunately, abuse between peers has increased 300% in the past few years. Youth-to-youth sexual activity and sexualized behaviors often remain unreported in organizations because clergy, employees, and volunteers are not comfortable documenting these situations, or may not know how.

Most serious incidents of youth-to-youth abuse are 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. Union Chapel recognizes that the following interactions are high risk and should be prohibited:

<i><b>Prohibited Youth-to-Youth Interactions</b></i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazing</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Derogatory name-calling</li> <li>• Games of Truth or Dare</li> <li>• Singling out one youth for different treatment</li> <li>• Ridicule or humiliation</li> </ul>

**Employee and Volunteer Response:**

Youth-to-youth sexual behaviors can include inappropriate touching, exposing body parts, using sexualized language, making threats of sexual activity, engaging in sexual activity, using social media to share sexualized photos or messages, sexting, and similar types of interactions.

If employees or volunteers witness youth-to-youth sexual behaviors, they are instructed to follow these guidelines:

***Guidelines for clergy, employees, and volunteers Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity***

- If you observe sexual activity between youths, you should immediately separate them.
- Calmly explain that such interactions are not permitted and separate the youths.
- Document in writing what you observed and how you responded.
- Notify the Pastor or Adult Leader and follow instructions regarding notifying the authorities and informing the parents of the youth involved.
- In some cases, if the problem is recurring, discipline may be required including not allowing one or both youths to return to the program.

**Supervisors and Administrators Response:**

In the event that the Pastor, a Trustee or the Ministry Leader receives a report of a youth's sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the supervisor should do the following:

***Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity***

- Meet with the person who reported the sexual activity to gather information.
- Confirm that the youths involved have been separated or placed under increased supervision.
- Review the steps taken by the adult leaders on duty.
- Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.
- Meet as a team (or with at least 2 members of the ministry) with parents or legal guardians of the youths involved.
- Determine what actions should be taken to make sure there is no recurrence, including assessing the suitability of the program for the youth involved.
- **Notify the proper authorities.**
- Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident

**Organizational Response:**

After the internal review of the sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the organization will determine what can be done to prevent a recurrence, such as:

***Guidelines for Organizational Response***

- Review the need for additional supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.
- Alert others in the organization.

## Responding to Victims

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of Union Chapel will be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, we will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

An incident of alleged abuse that requires medical or psychological care for a victim or family shall be reported to the Insurance Board by the Treasurer. The latter shall discuss with the Insurance Board Claims Department whether the circumstances warrant initiation of Crisis Management services which may include psychological counseling. Upon approval, counseling services may be offered to a perceived victim(s), which may include family members.

## Notification of Parents

A youth may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a youth is an initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a youth-on-youth incident. Violations of policy do not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

While communicating with a parent, 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 youth should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians);
- Whether “mandatory reporting” is a factor;
- Who shall and in what manner communicate with the parents/guardian;
- Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident.

Notification of parents or legal guardians shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required.

## F. Responding to Media

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals, the congregation, and Union Chapel. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with the media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Trustees to represent the church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the church. Prior to speaking to the media, the designee shall contact and consult with United Church of Christ (UCC) Legal Counsel, to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation. The designee shall give immediate consideration to securing

Insurance Board media relations and crisis management resources. Considering the speed of news cycles, a prompt determination is required, erring on the side of seeking help

### **Congregational Awareness**

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the youth, parents, vulnerable adults and guardians we serve. This entire policy shall be posted on the Union Chapel website, [www.fiunionchapel.org](http://www.fiunionchapel.org)

At the time youth or vulnerable adults are enrolled in Union Chapel programs, parents or legal guardians shall be provided:

- A summary of the content of the orientation to be provided to youth and vulnerable adults including a link to the full SafeChurch policies on the website.
- Information regarding the means to report violations of policy or suspicions of abuse.
- An invitation to visit programs in progress at any time at their convenience.

Youth and vulnerable adults shall be provided an orientation covering the following subjects:

- Age-appropriate information about boundaries (with reference to the Code of Conduct);
- How to protect themselves from abuse; and
- How to report boundary violations or incidents of abuse.

The orientation shall be provided annually for participants and/or individually at the time a youth or vulnerable adult begins participation in a ministry of the church.

Parents and guardians shall be invited to receive the same SafeChurch training as provided to staff and volunteers to be taken at their option.

Parents/guardians shall be encouraged to report violations of policy, boundaries or suspected abuse to the Pastor or adult leader of the respective ministry at which an incident has occurred. Alternatively, they may report incidents to a Trustee. Anonymous reporting is permitted. If for any reason, the parent/guardian believes that the primary contacts have failed to respond or have not given credibility to the parent's/guardian's concerns, the latter may contact any Trustee to report those concerns.

### **Boundary Violations/Sexual Harassment involving Clergy, Staff or Congregants**

It is always the responsibility of the person in a leadership role, whether staff or volunteer, to maintain appropriate boundaries. If you are a clergyperson, staff or other church leader who has encountered boundary violations or harassment by a layperson, here is a suggested process for re-asserting and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

1. Pastor/staff/church leader perceives an advance has been made.
2. Pastor/staff/church leader needs to establish professional pastoral boundaries:
  - a. Identify your role as the pastor/staff/church leader: "I am [your pastor]..." "As [your pastor] I..." "The United Church of Christ takes this kind of conduct very seriously and considers this behavior as sexual harassment..."



- b. Identify that they are part of a community, not just “you and me” framing. “We are in relationship to a congregation, denomination, calling(s), roles, responsibilities...” Expand the awareness of your context by bringing in others you are both responsible for and in relationship with.
  - c. “I cannot be [your pastor] if...”
- 3. Document the boundary violation verbally and in writing to the Trustee Chair or member of the Response Team.
- 4. State the facts. What? Where? When (include date, time)? Who? “Advance” behavior or verbiage? Witnesses? What happened after clarifying boundaries?
- 5. Inform the Southern New England Conference.

**If inappropriate behavior continues:**

- 1. Re-establish boundaries
  - a. I will not meet with you privately. Explain that someone will be in the church if/when you meet and that confidence will be maintained.
  - b. Reiterate your identity/role to congregant
- 2. Continue to document as above.

**If flirtation has happened (mutual attraction/enticement):**

- 1. **Name** and confess your participation in the confusion of boundaries and your role as pastor/staff/church leader. Name the mixed messages/signals to bring them to light.
- 2. **Repent** – Identify your role as pastor/staff/church leader and being responsible for maintaining clear, healthy, professional relationships with all in the congregation and apologize by naming the confusion and harm your behavior has brought to your relationship with the congregant.
- 3. **Reconcile** – Identify what boundaries must be made and kept as well as what damaging or misleading behaviors must be stopped. Pastors – talk with a grounded confidant and make a behavior covenant with clear accountability structures built in.

**If violation of boundaries persists:**

- 1. Call a meeting for the purpose of clarifying communally the role and responsibility of the pastor/staff/church leader and appropriate behavior of congregants.
- 2. Invite:
  - a. church leader of the victim’s choosing, informing them of your purpose; who will be attending; follow-up communication plan; meeting location; etc.
  - b. Violator – Ask them to bring a friend or family member– someone they trust – for a conversation with others about issues related to serving as pastor. They are to bring someone who can be reflective with them
- 3. Seek resolution with clear boundaries about how to behave appropriately and why the boundaries have to be maintained. Consider preparing a “Behavioral Covenant” identifying what you need as pastor/staff/church leader and be prepared to name what behaviors need to stop by the

violator. Write out the agreed “ways of being” and have everyone sign as witnesses and prayer partners.

4. If you sense it will help, plan a follow-up meeting for a “check-in” and if further clarification/information is needed.

5. Follow up with a letter to everyone involved as to the purpose of the meeting; those attending; if resolution was reached, note the specifics; thank everyone and seek continued prayer for everyone. Letters must be entered in a file to be kept confidential by the Trustees.

**If they refuse to sign a Behavior Covenant:**

1. Be clear that the violator is making a choice about their relationship to the church and is choosing not to be in contact, communication, on church property or attend any church programming until they agree and sign the behavior covenant.
2. Have everyone in attendance note and sign that they witnessed a refusal to sign by the violator. Follow up by sending a certified letter to the violator, specifying a procedure they can initiate for future participation in any church sponsored activities. (Whom to contact, etc.)
3. Send copies of all documentation via certified mail to the UCC Southern New England Conference.
4. Do not send any documentation electronically.
5. The Trustees should be fully aware of all that has transpired.
6. Make clear that professional, appropriate boundaries are taken very seriously in the UCC as well as the need for our congregants to be responsible for maintaining safe, healthy, respectful and honoring behavior to one another and those in professional leadership.
7. Have a reporting/communication plan in place to be followed if the violator appears on church property, during church programs/services, or makes contact with church leaders.

**Acknowledgment of Union Chapel, UCC, Fishers Island NY Safe Church Policy and Procedures**

I have read and agree to comply with Union Chapel’s Safe Church policies and procedures.

Printed Name	
Signature	
Date	