Making Our Churches Safe for All:

An Introduction to Abuse Prevention for Local Churches

Printed Courtesy of:

UCC IB
United Church of Christ
INSURANCE BOARD

Serving the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

700 Prospect Avenue East, 5th floor
Cleveland, OH 44115-1100
(800) 437-8830
www.insuranceboard.org

Providing Insurance for:
Church Property, Liability, Auto, Crime, and Workers' Compensation

Thank you for helping make our churches safe for all!

2007 Revision produced by:

UCC Insurance Board

Local Church Ministries, a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ:
Worship and Education Ministry Team
Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team

Justice and Witness Ministries, a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ:
Human Rights, Justice for Women and Transformation Ministry Team
700 Prospect Avenue East
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1100
www.ucc.org

Contents

Introduction: God's promise and our journey 2

A Process for Developing Policies and Practices

1. Beginning 3
Organization and participation
An urgent consideration

2. Learning 4
Forming a community – Finding information and
Resources – Discussion and exploration

3. Sharing 5
Educating the congregation – Encouraging engagement

4. Forming 6
Writing your policies – Essential Issues

5. Establishing 6
Congregational approval – Constitution and Bylaws revision

6. Implementing 6
Organization – Training & Continuing Education – Record-keeping

7. Other Initiatives 7

Essential Issues for Policies 8-12
General
Screening
Reporting and Response
Education and Awareness

Basic Resources 13-15

Sample Policy and Disclosure Forms 16-26

Sample Format for a Boundary Workshop 27-29

God's promise and our journey

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
Even though I walk through the
darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me...

Making Our Churches Safe for All: An Introduction to Abuse Prevention for Local Churches

Perhaps the most famous promise in all Christendom is heard in the 23rd Psalm. Here the Psalmist expresses confidence in God's protection when he ends with: "and I shall dwell in the house of God forever." It is no coincidence that so many families request this Psalm at the funerals of loved ones. People want and need assurance that there is some place of safety here on earth and beyond. It is no accident that the worship space in a church is called a sanctuary...place of refuge, of hope, of safety. For hundreds of years the church, the sanctuary, was sacred space that could not even be invaded by kings, anyone who entered was safe in God's hands.

People still need to find sanctuary in God and should be able to find our churches a safe space. All people should be able to "dwell in the house of God forever." This material, *Making Our Churches Safe for All (Abuse Prevention Resources for Local Churches)* is the beginning of a process that will help a local congregation live into God's promise.

Deciding to take steps to prevent child abuse is often the first step in the journey to making a sanctuary of your church community. These materials will provide some guidance about developing policies and procedures for the protection of children, youth, and adults participating in church-sponsored activities. The original edition of this resource has been updated here in response to comments and experiences of churches, and your ongoing questions and feedback will in turn help other communities on this road. God's blessings on this journey of caring, trust and hope!

The United Church of Christ Insurance Board

Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries

Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries

Human Rights, Justice for Women and Transformation Ministry Team, Justice and Witness Ministries

A Process for Developing Policies and Practices

1. Beginning

Organization and participation:

While abuse prevention is an important part of the Christian education program, this process leads to the development of policies for all of the church's life. The chance of successful implementation is best if it is supported and understood by all congregational leaders. This generally means that the pastor and primary governing body (council, consistory, or other) should formally initiate the process, be represented on the planning team, and in other ways participate throughout.

A team will be needed to investigate and recommend policies. This team will usually be a short-term commitment. It may be called a planning team, task force, or whatever language is comfortable and descriptive for your congregation. Other committees, individuals and groups will have responsibility for monitoring the use and effectiveness of the policies once they are in place (for example, a Christian education committee or staff person, perhaps reporting to the primary governing body).

Representatives of the following might be considered for this team:

- **Those who will (probably) share in long-term responsibility for monitoring the policies**
- **Parents of school age children and youth**
- **Those whose vocation brings them into contact with issues related to protecting children (teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, etc.)**

Before it is done, this team may face needs beyond education and policy writing, such as sensitive response to troubled congregational members, and awareness of legal concerns. So, a diversity of gifts and skills can be helpful.

Throughout the process, keep the congregation aware of your work through a variety of means, such as newsletter updates, bulletin board notices, and inclusion on your Website. These need not be detailed, but simply communicate that you are open and welcoming of input or concerns.

An urgent consideration:

If your congregation has experienced an incident of abuse in some way, even if it did not take place recently, or within your walls, you may likely have special needs for healing. You are urged to seek assistance from your Conference, to find additional resources to help you assure these needs are met as you go about the process of policy formation. Otherwise, these issues can remain hidden, or become too painful to be addressed appropriately. In such difficult circumstances, some churches have found that an unhealthy denial of their experience was reinforced. This contributes to a less safe environment despite efforts to create policies.

2. Learning

Forming a community

As your planning team begins its work, give attention to community building, and ground yourselves in scripture and prayer. This is a challenging topic. Statistics suggest that some among you may have had personal experience with abuse in some way. First, create a "safe space" for your planning team! This is only one of several reasons we suggest exploring the topic of **boundaries** among adults in the congregation during this process, and you may want to do that early on in the workgroup to help form community. (A basic resource listing is included on pages 13-15.)

Finding information and resources

On pages 16-18, you'll find a list of resources to assist you with information and understanding. (Particularly useful are the Safe Sanctuaries books by Joy Thornburg Melton, which are available through United Church Resources.) These, or other resources about abuse prevention, may be available to borrow from your Conference or Association. Also, the staff of your Conference or Association may have other materials to help with the process. They will be able to help you learn about specific legal concerns in your state. They may also suggest consultants, speakers, or other churches which can share experiences or knowledge, which may help you understand your own needs. Your liability insurance carrier may also have resources to share, and can tell you of any specific actions which your coverage requires. Often, congregations are connected to schools or other community nonprofit organizations which have done similar work. This can be extremely helpful, as long as you are clear on the ways your needs or culture may differ.

Most members of planning teams will want to do some reading, and reviewing different resources and sharing with one another will help you explore the range of actions other groups have taken, and the most commonly recommended ones. Guidebooks written specifically for congregations will be most helpful, especially when it comes to successful implementation (since congregations usually function somewhat differently from most other organizations).

Discussion and exploration

Remember to include prayers and community building throughout your process, to enrich and assist you in your work.

The reactions you have as you discuss and explore your policy needs will probably reflect the process which members of the congregation will also have to go through, in abbreviated form, to understand and support your eventual recommendations. Taking note of your own process of exploration can help you in deciding how to introduce the material to others.

At times, you may find that there is a conflict between your sense of community and some of the recommendations. They seem to go against the grain for many of us, and can seem overwhelming as well. "Aren't we called to break down boundaries in the church?" "How can we treat our long time members with such mistrust?" "But kids need hugs!!" <u>These are reasonable reactions.</u> If congregations have not had time to absorb and consider the topic, some may accept this work with a heavy heart, or reject it altogether. Concerns about trust and community are serious ones. Talk them through, while not losing sight of the terrible reality of abuse in our world. Deep reflection on the scriptures may help.

Developing a clear sense of your congregation's needs for both safety, and for community, can help you design policies which enhance, rather than restrict, a sense of caring connections. Again, you may find materials on boundaries to be helpful.

3. Sharing

Educating the congregation

Once you have a clear sense of the needs of your congregation, and perhaps a first draft of some policy statements, arrange for open meetings to introduce the congregation to your work thus far, and your initial recommendations for policies. These can be in any format and time frame comfortable to your community. Parents and teachers especially should be urged to attend one such forum. You can anticipate that the reflections and reactions that the planning team encountered are likely to be present in the congregation. Planning events that allow for some exploration of the issues (before presenting a formal policy draft) can allow for helpful input, and help ensure that the congregation can live with and support the final product.

Encouraging engagement

It can be helpful to encourage the congregation to actively engage with the material you expect to include in your policy, through structured activities. Change takes time in congregations, and living into new behaviors takes practice for all of us.

A workshop on boundary issues can be a useful practical (rather than abstract) introduction to many of the concepts underlying protective policies.

- **It illustrates, for example, that an increased sensitivity to one another's boundaries can make church more of a "sanctuary" for all of us, not just children. Considering that many among us are survivors of abuse, this is important. It helps to build trust to go along with new safeguards.**
- **It makes of our congregation a place where, for example, a teacher who consistently crosses boundaries is noticed (thereby providing protection from abuse, be it inadvertent or planned).**
- **It allows members to explore the power dynamics which can help abuse stay hidden.**
- **It can address fears about false reporting.**

Another important reason to engage the church fully is to ensure widespread comfort with recommended reporting procedures. There is a natural concern about the possibility of false allegations, but in fact it is much more common that fear of embarrassment or error may keep even responsible adults from reporting legitimate suspicions. Coming to public agreement about a common, covenanted **expectation** of reporting will go a long way toward relieving these fears. There are some excellent videos that demonstrate many of these issues in a compelling way.

4. Forming

Writing your policies

By this time you should be fairly clear about the content of your policies, and be fairly comfortable that they will be supported by your congregation. One or more of the planning team can write them up for review by your team, any legal or other consultants, your church's primary governing body and pastor, and others who will play an important role in implementation and oversight.

Essential Issues

The experience of a great many other congregations and organizations suggests some essential issues which your policies and practices should address. The outlines on pages 10-13 are a checklist for your use in determining your congregation's policies. For help understanding common

5. Establishing

Congregational Approval

To ensure broad knowledge and agreement, have your policies formally approved by an appropriate vote of the members of the church, with advance notice of the congregation's meeting, as specified in your Constitution and Bylaws.

Constitution and Bylaws Revision

Remember to add the provisions of this policy wherever appropriate in your constitution and bylaws. This may include, for example, a summary statement of the overall policy and inclusion of committee and other responsibilities under the policy in the appropriate sections. You may want to schedule this vote simultaneously with the policy approval, referring to the provisions for revision of your Constitution and Bylaws.

6. Implementing

Organization

Your policy will define responsibility for oversight, training, supervision, receiving and investigating reports, and recordkeeping. It's appropriate for the responsible groups and individuals to implement the policies with assistance from the team.

Training and Continuing Education

All teachers will need to be trained about your policies at regular intervals (have this defined in your policies: when first volunteering, and periodically thereafter). The entire congregation should also be introduced to the policies and any prerequisites which have been set for teachers. Requirements for reporting should be emphasized in the training and reinforced on a regular schedule.

Education for children (whether or not it is required by your policies,) can be designed by a team of parents and teachers. There are curricula included in the Resource list.

Ongoing publicity and education regarding your policies (such as mentions from the pulpit, newsletter items, bulletin board postings, and so forth) are essential for their effectiveness and send a clear signal to would-be predators. Safety tips can be added for ongoing education and to stress the importance of this effort. You may develop a slogan which emphasizes the spiritual and theological meaning of "Safety," and the making of your community a **Sanctuary** of God's peace and presence.

Record-keeping

This is an important issue. Any records your policies require (such as teacher disclosures and documentation of attendance at trainings) should be kept in a secure place. Confidentiality, wherever it is a reasonable expectation, should be assured.

A church which adopts policies but fails to follow them faithfully may have an added liability for safety. (In effect, it is proof that the church "knew better" and showed disregard for safety.) Documentation can help establish compliance with the adopted policy. In addition, even in the event of an actual incidence of abuse, having documentation that you have made a faithful effort to publicize and follow your policies will be evidence that your church has acted responsibly in its attempt to prevent such abuse.

7. Other initiatives

Your journey into the deeper meanings of sanctuary may inspire next steps for your congregation. Perhaps these will be public witness or community service to raise awareness and address child abuse and domestic violence. Consider how the publicity about your policies in local newspapers may be a public witness on behalf of those most vulnerable to abuse of many kinds. Perhaps you will want to share your experiences in research, design, education and implementation with other local churches to assist them with the process. Your Association or Conference can direct you to ways you can use your expertise to help others. In doing so, you will hopefully deepen the level of sanctuary in your own community. As safety and trust grow we are freed, more and more, to be the persons whom God created.

Blessings on your journey.

Essential Issues for Policies

General

A. Identify the groups or positions in your church which will be responsible for general oversight of policies, and for specific tasks, such as maintaining records, reporting, and any other required elements you include.

B. Define the procedures you will follow to ensure the safety of children and youth.

1. How will activities be supervised?

2. What requirements will you set for teachers and caregivers?

3. How will parents know of, or approve of, the activities in your programs?

4. What facility safety provisions will apply (for example, key policies, running, furnishings, etc.)?

5. What safety procedures will you implement (for example, toileting procedures, identifying those who pick up children after events, etc.)

C. Define sexual misconduct broadly enough to cover all situations you mean your policies to govern. Throughout the UCC it has frequently been defined as any sexualized behavior within a ministerial relationship.

1. A ministerial relationship exists between a person providing ministry and the recipients of the ministry.

a. Providers of ministry will include clergy, counselors, youth group leaders, teachers of all types, organists and choir directors, and so forth, whether volunteer or paid. Consider who else provides ministry in your local church. Who else is employed, or in a position of authority or trust in some way?

b. Those receiving ministry may be parishioners, counselees, students, employees, volunteers, or visitors. Who are those for whom ministry is provided in your church?

2. Sexualized behavior encompasses a broad spectrum, or a continuum, of behavior which may include, for example, speech, gestures, and humor as well as physical contact. It is not limited to intimate contact of the type we normally think of as "sexual" such as intercourse or genital contact. Many behaviors which might be acceptable in other social contexts are inappropriate to any ministerial relationship.

Likewise, behaviors which may be innocent in themselves (such as hugging) may be sexualized by intensity, duration, and so forth.

a. Does your policy clearly identify and define behaviors which are inappropriate to a ministerial relationship (whether welcome or not) and are considered misconduct?

D. Clarify the **relationship between your policy and any civil or criminal statutes** which might apply.

1. An Attorney can help you learn about such statutes. There might be statutes having to do with:

a. Abuse (minors or incompetent adults), exploitation (of clients by counselors/ clergy) and harassment (offensive environment, or favors exchanged)

b. Seeking, hiring, supervising, retaining/dismissing, employees and volunteers.

c. Screening and background checks for employees and volunteers

d. Mandated reporting of abuse

e. Confidentiality and privileged communication

2. Does your policy acknowledge appropriate statutes? Does it move beyond them? Does it include required education of those providing ministry?

E. In appropriate language for your setting, the **policies should clearly communicate these points:**

1. It is unethical, wrong, inappropriate, or unacceptable behavior for any person engaged in the ministry of (your church) (whether lay or ordained, employed or volunteer) to engage in any type of sexualized behavior with any person with whom a ministerial relationship exists.

2. Every reasonable effort will be made to bring any misconduct to an end.

3. Every report of misconduct will be taken seriously.

4. All persons involved in an allegation will receive compassion, sensitivity, and concern.

5. In so far as possible, the identities of all persons involved in a report will be maintained in confidence (that is, a strict need-to-know basis.) Information relayed by the report will be shared as required by the policies and procedures, in order to investigate and decide on an appropriate response to reported misconduct.

6. The right of all persons to obtain justice in a fair hearing will be respected.

Screening

A. Volunteer and Employee Screening Procedures should contain the following elements:

1. A position description that helps to identify areas of concern and review/inquiry.

2. A form that includes the applicant's (including volunteers) self disclosure about the concerns to be addressed in the screening process (for example, prior accusations or dismissals related to areas of concern such as child abuse).

3. A process and procedures for conducting reference, and if necessary, record checks to confirm information shared by the applicant.

4. An interview process and discussion with the applicant regarding areas of concern and inquiry.

5. Safeguards and protections regarding the confidential treatment of information learned and shared in the screening process.

Reporting and Response

A. Reporting and Response Procedures should address the following elements (a sample is included on pages 21-22):

1. Discovery and Reporting

a. Who receives the allegations of misconduct?

b. What immediate steps will be taken?

i. Will employment or volunteer service continue or be suspended or restricted during the investigation?

ii. What information will be shared? Who will be notified that an investigation is under way? How will notification take place?

c. How will support be offered to those making an allegation?

d. How will support be offered to those who are accused?

e. How will support be offered to family members of all concerned?

f. How will support be offered for the entire congregation?

2. Investigation

a. Who will gather the information necessary to make a determination of the facts?

3. Intervention

a. Who will provide pastoral and other support for the principal parties involved (accusers, possible victims, accused, family members)?

b. How will ministries be maintained in the church while the allegation is being addressed?

4. Adjudication (review and decision)

a. Who will make a determination about the facts of the case? Who decides appropriate action in view of the facts?

b. What board or group within the church has the authority to discipline, if that is necessary? (If the accused is authorized or holds other credentials outside of the church, other bodies may have responsibility and authority to discipline or require remediation.)

c. Are there provisions for remedial action, in any cases where that is advisable?

5. Pastoral Care and Support

a. Recognizing that often no single person can provide adequate counsel and support to all parties involved, and that some situations will call for specific skills, how will you provide for this support?

b. Do you have funding (through liability insurance or other means) for any of the following:

i. Clinical evaluation and/or treatment;

ii. Advocacy for victims; or

iii. Legal counsel for employees, members, the church?

6. Legal Issues

a. Does the allegation involve criminal behavior? Does it suggest that laws may have been broken?

b. What are your legal responsibilities and liabilities?

c. Does your legal counsel understand the complexity of these issues, including the unique status of religious institutions before the law?

d. Are you required to report to secular authorities?

e. How does a secular investigation affect your concern or ability to respond?

7. Insurance Issues

a. Does your church liability policy cover misconduct?

b. At what point are you expected to notify your insurance carrier of a potential claim?

c. If there is an insurance investigation, how does that affect your ability to follow your policies and procedures?

B. Some who are engaged in ministry are **authorized by the Association** (or in some areas, the Conference). **Will there be a single procedure** for those who are authorized and those who have no credentials or endorsement outside of the local church? Or will these be handled separately? Consider these questions:

1. In the case of ministers who are authorized (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) by the Association or Conference of the United Church of Christ:

a. To what extent will the local setting rely on the policies of the wider Church (or other body that grants credentials of some kind)?

b. At what point will the wider Church become involved if the discovery is made locally?

c. Will the local leadership cooperate with the procedures of the wider Church?

2. In the case of lay leaders, volunteers, and employees, who are not authorized by the United Church of Christ:

a. Who shall implement the procedures?

b. How shall the interests of the accused, the accuser, their families, and the church be addressed?

c. Who has authority to act?

d. What are the relevant personnel and volunteer policies of your congregation? Do they allow for appropriate supervisory responses?

e. Do your Constitution and Bylaws contain provisions for censure and discipline of members? Of volunteers?

Education and Awareness

A. Identify those who need training and opportunities for growth and awareness

1. Identify the types and frequency of continuing education and training needed for employees and volunteers, including such activities as:

a. Seminars and workshops

b. Books and readings

c. Signed covenants

2. Identify **what types and frequency of training** and discussion are needed for those who may be called on to implement and oversee the policies and practices, such as:

a. regular training retreats

b. seminars sponsored by others

c. orientation sessions when new leaders assume responsibility

B. How will you provide ongoing educational opportunities for the membership-at-large? (for example, church school, adult forum, Sunday discussion series)

1. Identify **sources, curricula and programs for education** and training at all levels. Consider content needs, such as signs of abuse in others; welcome and unwelcome touch; healthy boundaries; and so forth.

2. Consider also education programs about **specific related subjects,** such as

a. Sexual violence and exploitation in our society as a whole

b. What is sexual harassment?

c. Human sexuality

d. Clergy sexual misconduct

C. Identify ways to inform members, neighbors, friends, visitors, and groups using your facilities about your policies and practices. How often will this information be shared?

Basic Resources for Making Our Churches Safe for All

CHECK YOUR CONFERENCE RESOURCE CENTER FOR POSSIBLE LOANS

Primary Resources for Education and Planning

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church
Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries

by Joy Thornburg Melton, a lawyer and United Methodist pastor. Published by Discipleship Resources. Highly recommended. Readable, comprehensive guides for understanding the risks and working with the church community for prevention. Available through United Church Resources at 1-800-325-7061.

Reducing the Risks of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church

Hammar, Klipowicz and Cobble, available from Church Law and Tax Report, PO Box 1098, Matthews, NC 28106. 1-800-222-1840. Includes book, an audiocassette (What Church Leaders Should Know about Child Sexual Abuse and the Church) and video (Reducing the Risk). The materials in this set can also be purchased separately. Contains a strong message about the human, legal and financial incentives for this important work. Reducing the Risk II includes a video or DVD, guidebook and access to a web-based training and resource center.
See reducingtherisk.com for more information or to order.

A Sacred Trust: Boundary Issues for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers

From FaithTrust Institute. This 4-part video series with exercises and leaders' guide gives a broad picture of appropriate ministerial ethics which is both inspiring and informative. Available for loan in most Conferences, it is recommended for planning teams, Pastor Relations committees, deacons, moderators and other church leaders. Available for purchase through UC Resources at 1-800-325-7061 or from FaithTrust Institute at 206-634-1903 or faithtrustinstitute.org.

Child Care Liability and the Church: Managing the Risk

A publication of the United Church of Christ Insurance Board. This pamphlet contains specific help for churches which operate, sponsor, or lease space to childcare facilities. Introduces many policies which will be helpful in all child protection programs. Available from the UCC Insurance Board at 1-800-437- 8830 and online at www.insuranceboard.org.

Creating a new culture of safety in your church

Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders

by Gilbert Rendle, Alban Institute. An in-depth resource to help understand the process of change within congregations. May be useful for leaders in congregations which tend to resist or avoid difficult issues, or in congregations which have been prone to disabling conflicts. This and other related congregational leadership resources are available at www.alban.org.

Caring for Our Churches: A Loss Control Manual

A publication of the United Church of Christ Insurance Board. This book contains information on a broad range of safety issues for churches. Useful for Trustees and others in developing policies and safety procedures. Available from the United Church of Christ Insurance Board at 1-800-437- 8830, and online at www.insuranceboard.org.

Breaking the Culture of Bullying and Disrepect, Grades K-8: Best Practices & Successful Strategies

by Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin, Maureen Taylor. Corwin Press, 2004. This book addresses something else that keeps kids from feeling safe–bullying. Written for schools, it is adaptable to Christian Education programs.

Curricula for children in your Church School and Youth Programs

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages Five through Eight and **Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages Nine through Twelve**

More resources from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, by Kathryn Goerning Reid, in collaboration with Marie Fortune. United Church Press. Call 1-800-325-7061, or order on www.ucc.org.

Our Whole Lives Sexuality and our Faith

See description under "Related Programs" below.

Brochures

What Every Congregation Needs to Know about Domestic Violence

An excellent introductory pamphlet ideal for distribution for both laity and clergy. Includes information for victims and for batterers. Available in English, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Traditional Chinese, and Laotian. Sold in packages of 25. $12.50 per package of 25, plus S&H. FaithTrust Institute, 1-206-634-1903 or www.faithtrustinstitute.org.

What You Need to Know if a Child is Being Abused or Neglected

An introductory pamphlet ideal for distribution to clergy, laity and volunteers in churches. Available in English, Spanish and Korean. Sold in packages of 25. $12.50 per package of 25, plus S&H. FaithTrust Institute, 1-206-634-1903 or www.faithtrustinstitute.org.

Related Programs

(check with your Conference for availability of local speakers.)

Domestic Violence: What Churches Can Do

This one-hour program for use in Christian education offers basic information on domestic violence, as well as concrete ideas about how congregations can become involved in prevention and can offer a safe space for battered women to come forward. Uses a 20-minute video, worship materials, background information, and discussion questions. Includes a 24-page study guide and a package of awareness brochures. $45.00 plus S&H. Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1-206-634-1903.

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality and our Faith

A comprehensive series of sexuality education resources, uplifting the values of self worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity, *Our Whole Lives* begins with kindergarten age children and continues through senior high youth, teaching awareness of personal space and relationships that may be detrimental and/or harmful. These resources may be used by teachers who have attended trainings. Please contact 216-736-3718, or go to www.ucc.org/justice/owl/ for further information.

Resources on the Web

www.insuranceboard.org and **www.ucc.org/ministries/safe**
Check here for the latest information and assistance with Making Our Churches Safe for All.

www.faithtrustinstitute.org

The Faith Trust Institute (formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence) provides resources for churches about sexual abuse in religious systems. Provides helpful links for victims of clergy or other professional sexual abuse.

www.parentsanonymous.org

Education and support groups for building strong, healthy family relationships and strengthening communities. Resources and support for adults, children and youth.

www.nonprofitrisk.org

The NonProfit Risk Management Institute provides resources and newsletter articles for nonprofit organizations to use in reducing a variety of risks.

Toll-free Hotlines you can call from anywhere, anytime:

Want to talk to someone about your relationship? **The National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 (TDD) provides telephone counselors who will listen, help you clarify your thoughts and feelings, and give information and referrals to services in your area. (www.ndvh.org/)

Child Help USA National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 has professional counselors available for crisis intervention and referral to local child protective services and community agencies. (www.childhelpusa.org)

Sample Church Policy and Disclosure Forms

Important Note:

This is a "model" or "sample" policy. It does not cover every issue that you may want to consider in the development of such a policy. Nor does it reflect the law of each and every state. Consistent with UCC polity and practice, Local Churches and other settings are encouraged to consider adopting policy as adapted, revised, or changed to meet their own unique circumstances, state laws, or other factors. It is very important that the policy you adopt and implement complies with applicable federal and state laws regarding employment, privacy, and inquiries regarding criminal history. All laws are subject to change from time to time by action of state legislature, Congress, and state and federal courts. Therefore, you should develop and periodically review your policy with the assistance of persons knowledgeable in these laws. Parish Life and Leadership is not engaged in giving legal or professional advice or services by providing this model policy. You are encouraged to consult with your own legal counsel and professional advisors before adopting any safe church policy.

Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse Prevention

Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, (name of Local Church) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with (name of Local Church) should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Ministerial Conduct

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers are Ministers to the congregation.

It is important that every Minister to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others.

It is the policy of (name of Local Church) to encourage its Ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of (name of Local Church) is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit a disclosure form similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit A.

- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.

- The church will conduct a registered sex offender review for each Minister by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. This registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all Ministers.

- Authorized Minsters of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by (name of Association or Conference), or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

(name of Local Church) is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love.

In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been members of (name of Local Church) for at least six months or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with (name of Local Church) for at least a year.

- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form substantially similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit B.

- Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third party vendor.

- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.

- It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children. Youth over the age of _____ (establish minimum age) may assist an unrelated adult in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two unrelated adults be present.

- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities.

Definitions

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.

Authorized minister: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). An Authorized Minister is one type of minister within the meaning of this policy.

Ministerial relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

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.

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:

- 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.
- 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
- 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.

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.

Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment

I. Generally

A. A subcommittee of the (name of committee) with no less than two members, one male and one female, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee, hereinafter referred to as "The Response Team," will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

B. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:

1. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.

2. The complainant can report the incident to a called minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.

3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:

- The Response Team shall advise the Senior Minister and Moderator of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Senior Minister or Moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.

- The (name of committee), or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:

a. 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:

(i) A formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;

(ii) Recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;

(iii) Probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;

(iv) Dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.

b. Finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

- The Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.

C. A written summary of the (name of committee) proceedings in such cases will be maintained.

D. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. At any time the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.

E. 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.

F. 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 or church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the (name of committee) , he or she has the right to appeal to the Moderator, or to the Vice Moderator if the Moderator is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the (name of governing board). The subject of any such appeal to the (name of governing board) shall be limited solely to whether the procedures of this policy were followed. The matter will not be reconsidered on the merits and the decision of the (name of governing board) will be the final resolution of the matter. If the (name of governing board) determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the (name of committee) to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

II. Child Abuse Apart from any legal requirements, the (name of Local Church) will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the (name of State Department of Children and Family Services), if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any Minister of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Senior Minister and Moderator so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The (name of State) Child Abuse Hotline currently is: _____.

III. Clergy Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the (name of Association or Conference) of the United Church of Christ. The (name of Association or Conference) may be contacted at: (telephone number of Association or Conference) and/or (email of Association or Conference).

The (name of Association or Conference) may be contacted at: (telephone number of Association or Conference) and/or (email of Association or Conference).

EXHIBIT A

Sample Disclosure Form

(NAME OF LOCAL CHURCH)

Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

NAME: LAST FIRST MIDDLE

ADDRESS: STREET CITY STATE ZIP CODE

DAYTIME PHONE EVENING PHONE EMAIL

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

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

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 _____

SAMPLE

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 (name of Local Church) 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.

(name of Local Church) 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 (name of Local Church) 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 (name of Local Church) will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the (name of Local Church) Safe Church Policy.

_____

(PRINT NAME & SIGN) DATE

_____

(PRINT NAME & SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN FOR APPLICANTS UNDER 18) DATE

- Sex Offender Registry (www.nsopr.gov) review performed on _____
- Personal interview conducted by staff on _____
- Reference inquiries completed on _____

SAMPLE

EXHIBIT B

Sample Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

(NAME OF LOCAL CHURCH)

Employment/Authorized Children and Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

NAME: LAST FIRST MIDDLE

ADDRESS: STREET CITY STATE ZIP CODE

DAYTIME PHONE EVENING PHONE EMAIL

References: One reference should be related to you and the other references should not be related to you.

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIP CODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

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** _____

SAMPLE

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.

No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.

❍ True ❍ Not True

If not true, give a short explanation of the lawsuit. (Please indicate the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit; where the lawsuit was filed; and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.).

I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position or had my employment, professional credentials, or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct.

❍ True ❍ Not True

If not true, give a short explanation. (Please indicate the date of termination; name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor; and nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.)

Do you have a valid drivers' license?

❍ Yes ❍ No

With respect to my driving record, I have not had my license suspended or revoked within the last five years due to reckless driving or driving while intoxicated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance.

❍ True ❍ Not True

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.

SAMPLE

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 (name of Local Church) 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.

(name of Local Church) 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 (name of Local Church) 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 (name of Local Church) will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the (name of Local Church) Safe Church Policy.

_____

(PRINT NAME & SIGN) DATE

_____

(PRINT NAME & SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN FOR APPLICANTS UNDER 18) DATE

- Sex Offender Registry (www.nsopr.gov) review performed on _____
- Personal interview conducted by staff on _____
- Reference inquiries completed on _____
- Church membership for 6 mos. or association for 1 year confirmed on _____
- Safe church awareness training and policy orientation performed on _____

Additionally, if considered for employment:

- Criminal History Verification (Oxford Document Management) together with Fair Credit Reporting Act notices, completed on _____

SAMPLE

A suggested format for discussing Boundaries

Boundaries are Basic

One of the most important parts of any protective policy is consistency. If adults feel hampered and constrained in their relationships with kids, they will tend to either shy away from the education program, or from the Making Our Churches Safe for All policies. It can be very helpful to discuss the many ways that kids and adults have of indicating what is a "welcome touch," or an "unwelcome touch." This can help raise awareness, and protect kids who may not be able to name their discomfort in words. It may help us all feel a little more comfortable with one another, to know that our personal boundaries are respected by others in our community. This contributes to a sense of SANCTUARY in our churches.

We would like to offer this introduction to boundary training for your committee and congregation.

Sample Training

The facilitator will be a member of the Safe Church team, and will have become well-versed in the ways that exploring boundaries can be helpful to the work. (The team may ask the pastor or other person with appropriate training in human relations to lead their own initial training.)

Introduction

The leader or facilitator introduces him/herself and goes around the room making sure everyone has met each other.

Why are we doing this? Open with a brief introduction about why boundaries are important to the work of safety in the church. Note that "there will be some of us who have had painful experiences with boundary violations," and ask that "we show one another respect and care."

Explain that boundaries are the "invisible walls" which divide our selves from one another. We cross them all the time, and that can be a very positive thing or very negative. In between the extremes we are always negotiating healthy and helpful boundaries for ourselves. And in the church, respecting each other's integrity is part of the goal of making a sanctuary.

Meditation and Reflection

As you hand out these readings, note that they come from distinct communities and cultures which may or may not have a lot in common with our own. But we look for the universal messages they have for us.

Readings:

Romans 12: 12-27

Mending Wall by Robert Frost

What does this passage say about us as a community?

What does this poem say to us as a community?

How do the readings fit together?

Take about 15 minutes for discussion.

Questions & Discussion

- ✓ What is a boundary?
- ✓ Webster defines it as: "a border, a limit."
- ✓ What else can it be?
- ✓ People can name their own experiences (i.e.: a fence, an aura, etc.) Consider the example of a cell boundary. What does it tell us?
- ✓ Who defines personal boundaries?
- ✓ Each person gets to name his/her own boundary. I cannot define your boundaries, you cannot define mine, even if I mean no harm. Discuss.
- ✓ An example of this might be a person who says "I'm just a hugger." Talk about the potential impact (good and bad) of hugs in the church.
- ✓ Talk about "Good, Bad, and Confusing" Touch.

Power and Boundaries:

- ✓ Introduce by explaining that power results from having resources of various kinds; and vulnerability comes from a lack of resources.
- ✓ Discuss: What kinds of resources give us power or make us vulnerable? (Examples: money, position, education, gender, sexual orientation, social status, emotional stability, crises or stable life situations, health)
- ✓ How does power imbalance in relationships impact boundaries? How does power impact our responsibility for maintaining boundaries? (Discuss, ask for examples).
- ✓ Are there power relationships in this church? What kinds? How do they impact the way we relate to one another?
- ✓ What are healthy relationships in a church? How do we respect each others' integrity as individuals? Discuss.
- ✓ Who abuses in a church?

- People with personality disorders and abnormal sexual compulsions such as pedophilia are only one kind. Some in our churches may have these disorders.
- Some abuse results from temporary crisis which results in uncharacteristic behavior. (Example: hitting or yelling at children.)
- Some abuse – especially boundary violations – is the result of fuzzy boundaries and lack of experience. (An example might be tickling to extremes or encouraging dangerous play.)

✓ How do we keep tabs on our OWN boundary maintenance? Discuss.

Suggestions: **talk** about boundaries in sermons, children's messages, in meetings, in teacher training sessions, post messages on walls, etc. **Pray** for good boundaries in this congregation and in each person's life. **Teach** people how to ask themselves about good boundaries. Example: Each day each of us should ask ourselves if what we are doing pleases God? Am I aware of the power I have in my relationships? Do I respect the needs of others? Do I know whose needs I am meeting in my actions? Encourage all members of the congregation to really know themselves and where to get support and help if they need it.

The goal of maintaining healthy boundaries is to create a true sanctuary for one another, in which we are free to be the people God made us: People who support and respect one another in holy love.

Note: Be creative about using this material. You might want to use it in committees first and then use it in different groups or in one or more general sessions (depending on size of congregation), with parents, or with teachers.

This is important, serious work, but the discussions can be made fun as well. Keep the focus on the fact that they bring good health to a congregation, rather than on the fear of abuse. When someone expresses hurt from past experiences, take time to honor and respect that person. When someone expresses frustration or anger, honor that, too, but do not let them deter you from the goal of a healthy discussion.

This discussion should take about two hours.