

March 10, 2015

Safe Church Policy

West Parish Congregational Church

Adopted March 10, 2015

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Forward

As a community of Christian faith, West Parish Congregational Church, Bethel, Maine (WPCC UCC, or the 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 WPCC UCC 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 Ethics

Forward

1. It is the policy of the United Church of Christ (UCC) to recognize the local church as the primary community of faith and the locus of accountability. Local churches, including WPCC UCC, are in covenant relationships with each other through the Oxford-Union Association and the Maine Conference, UCC, for the purpose of mutual cooperation and support in accomplishing the mission of the entire Church of Jesus Christ.
2. Ministers in the UCC are in covenantal relationship(s) with the local churches through which they serve. They are also in covenantal relationship with the entire Church of Jesus Christ by means of the covenant of Ministerial Standing.
3. Questions or concerns about the conduct of a Minister are ordinarily raised in and through the local Church in which that Minister serves. When questions are of a serious nature, it is appropriate for the local church to work in cooperation with the Oxford-Union Association and the Maine Conference, UCC.
4. In order that WPCC fulfill its responsibility to protect the well-being of its members and the integrity of its ministry, and remain consistent with the provisions of the Bylaws of the Church, the following policies and procedures shall govern the handling of any allegations regarding a breach of ministerial ethics.

The Policies

1. Any coercive or exploitative sexual contact by the Minister(s) with members and friends of this Church in a professional relationship is totally inappropriate.
2. Allegation(s) of any such violation of Ministerial ethics that may have any validity, or that may be multiple in nature, will be immediately addressed. The Moderator will contact the Chair of the Committee on Ministry of the Oxford-Union Association and also the Maine Conference to seek its support and assistance in investigating and adjudicating this matter. The Conference will immediately initiate an investigation as stipulated by its Policy on Sexual Harassment as adopted in September 1987 and as from time to time officially revised.
3. The Board of Deacons, in consultation with the Pastor Parish Committee, the Chair of the Committee on Ministry of the Oxford-Union Association, and with the Maine Conference, UCC, may make recommendations to the Church Council which then may act to enforce an immediate leave of absence of the Minister or Associate Minister without prejudice and with continued pay pending resolution of such allegation(s). This action may be in conjunction with, or independent of, related Conference action.
4. One of the primary concerns of the WPCC is the support, welfare, and protection of the complainants and the immediate prevention of further possible abuses to others. Equally important is the need for the accused Minister and/ or Associate Minister(s) to be assured provisions for a fair, impartial hearing. The accused, if determined to have acted in a manner that is in violation of the Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment

policy, will be encouraged to acknowledge the violation, repent, and seek rehabilitative treatment.

5. These policies and the following procedures will be communicated from time to time to the entire Congregation

Procedures for Initiating a Complaint

1. **Origin of Complaint:** The initial report to the Moderator of alleged inappropriate Ministerial conduct or abuse may come from the victim(s), a member of the victim's family, a friend of the victim(s), from a witness to such an event, or from other credible sources.
2. **Conference Contact:** Upon receipt of such a report, the Moderator shall make immediate (within 36 hours) contact with the Chair of the Committee on Ministry of the Oxford-Union Association and the Maine Conference, UCC. Conference representatives shall take immediate steps to investigate the allegations and notify the accused.
3. **Log:** This Church and the Maine Conference, UCC, shall each begin at this point to keep a log of all events, meetings, contacts, etc. which are related in any way to the charges.
4. **Local Church Coordination Committee:** The Board of Deacons shall serve as the Church's coordinating body. It shall take the following actions:
 - a. Cooperate with the Committee on Ministry of the Oxford-Union Association and the Maine Conference, UCC, in its conduct of its investigation, given the fact that the Minister of this Church holds ministerial standing in the Oxford-Union Association.
 - b. If the allegations appear to have sufficient basis for investigation, the Board of Deacons will cooperate with the Association and the Conference in making every effort to identify other possible victims.
 - c. Aware that it is often very difficult for a victim of sexual abuse to come forward and make a complaint, anonymity and confidentiality will be assured to anyone who offers information at this point of the investigation. However, confidential statements must be submitted in writing to the Association's Committee on Ministry by the complainant for the Association's investigation.
 - d. The Board of Deacons will cooperate with the Oxford-Union Association, the Maine Conference, and local authorities, including police and judicial, in providing immediate (within 12 hours) support, counsel, and assurance of physical protection to all parties.
 - e. Since a primary concern is for the welfare of the complainants, they shall be offered support and counseling as needed to deal with the experiences which precipitated their complaint(s).
 - f. Complainants will be informed of all options available to them for dealing with complaints, including making formal charges through established denominational procedures, initiating civil litigation to recover damages, filing criminal charges, etc.

- g. A referral list of trained, competent counselors sensitive to the issues of sexual abuses will be made available to all parties.
- h. In cases when there are multiple complainants of one accused, an opportunity for voluntary sharing among them will be made available. Such persons, it is intended, would thereby gain healing insight and experience mutual support in a group facilitated by an experienced, caring counselor.
- i. Also, these individuals will be given fullest assurance that steps are being taken to prevent other possible abuses.
- j. Since this Church is equally concerned for the welfare of the accused, he/she will be offered support and counseling.
- k. All parties will be kept informed as to process, progress, and conclusions of the investigations and the procedures being taken to resolve the issue(s).

5. The WPCC: The Governing Body

Upon allegations being brought to the Oxford-Union Association's Committee on Ministry and the Maine Conference, UCC by this Church, the Conference Minister, or the complainant(s), there shall be notification of every member of this Church. This notification shall be in writing and delivered by the U. S. Postal Service. Notification shall include that allegations have been made (the complainant(s) shall not be identified), and that the Minister is being given leave of absence without prejudice, pending resolution of the charges. There will be provided the telephone number of a designated official of this Church to allow members to voice their concerns.

The Board of Deacons may recommend to the Church Council other actions, including, but not exclusively, the following:

- a. Allocating resources to assist in the conduct of the investigation;
- b. Allocating necessary resources to give support to the complainants;
- c. Allocating resources necessary to cover replacement of the Minister(s) during the leave of absence;
- d. Reassigning staff duties as necessary during the leave of absence, especially counseling responsibilities; and
- e. Monitoring the ongoing cooperation between the Board of Deacons and the Maine Conference, assuring that:
 - i. Proper, thorough records are kept,
 - ii. Complainant(s) is (are) given support and protection,
 - iii. The Congregation is being kept informed as to the status of the investigation, and
 - iv. The accused is given support and proper care.

Guidelines for Adults Working with Children

Discipline

Discipline is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as “training that is expected to produce a specified character or pattern of behavior...” It comes from the word “disciple,” which means a “learner.” Adults responsible for supervising children during church-sponsored formal activities accept the responsibility of providing training and guidance to young learners. This training and guidance should promote the development of characteristics and behaviors valued by our Christian community – those gifts of the Spirit that St. Paul identifies in his letter to the Galatians 5:22-23. “But the spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.”

When we allow these gifts of the Spirit to guide us in our interactions with children, positive discipline methods emerge and those qualities of character we hope to promote are modeled in our words and actions. Methods of positive discipline help teach children self-control, responsibility, cooperation and problem-solving skills.

Strategies to Prevent Misbehavior

1. Understand stage of development. Individuals working with children in church activities will be supplied with materials that describe development and behavioral expectations at each age level.
2. Provide a nurturing environment and age-appropriate activities.
3. Create a positive verbal environment. Use warm and loving tones and language that together convey a positive regard for children and respect for their individual feelings and ideas.
4. Set clear limits (establish rules, create a covenant). Children in each class may have a voice in establishing classroom rules and in identifying consequences for breaking the rules. All consequences will follow the three R's. They must be respectful, reasonable, and related to the misbehavior.
5. Praise positive behavior. For example, it may be appropriate to ignore unwanted behavior as long as it is not harmful or destructive.

Use Positive Techniques to Deal with Misbehavior

1. Children misbehave for different reasons. Understanding the cause of the behavior is often important in knowing what to do. Make certain the child is aware that his/her behavior is inappropriate and involves him/her in finding a way to solve the problem.
2. Offer limited choices. For example, for every “No,” offer two choices. This encourages a child's independence and decision-making skills, but sets boundaries.
3. Redirect to an alternative activity.
4. Allow for natural and logical consequences. A natural consequence is a thing that happens naturally, without adult intervention. Logical consequence is when an adult

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offers a choice to stop the behavior or experience the consequence related to the behavior. This choice should be presented in a private conversation, if possible.

Seek Outside Assistance when Problems Persist

1. From a co-worker, or
2. From the Christian Education Committee or its designee, or
3. From parents or guardians. In a situation such as criticizing, blaming, shaming, and using sarcastic or cruel humor. Often saying "Stop that!" or "Don't do it that way!" or "You never..." is harmful to a child's self-esteem.

Inappropriate and Unacceptable Discipline Practices

The following discipline practices are deemed to be unacceptable and should never be utilized by any Church Member or adult supervisor including:

1. Physical punishment, such as slapping and spanking.
2. Use of restrictive language, such as criticizing, blaming, shaming; using sarcastic or cruel humor. Often saying "Stop that!" or "Don't do it that way!" or "You never ..." is harmful to a child's self-esteem.
3. Isolation (leaving a child alone, using time-outs exclusively or for extended periods.)

Child Security Policy

Then Jesus took a child and made him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them: "The person who in my name welcomes one of these children welcomes me; and who welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me." (Mark 9:36-37)

The primary purpose of this policy is to put into place every reasonable precaution to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual health of our children, of their parents, and of the adults/young adults who interact with our children. The secondary purpose of this policy is to protect adults and young adults from potential allegations of abuse and limit the extent of our Church's legal risk.

Definitions:

Child:	any person under the age of 16 years
Young adult:	ages 16-21
Adult:	any person 21 or older
Formal activities:	an activity in which the child's adult supervision is other than the parent or guardian

Non-related adults individuals not related either con-sanguinely, or by marriage, or by step relationships or by co-habitation relationships as defined by Maine law

The policies described in the following paragraphs apply to all adults/young adults interacting with children in formal activities sponsored by the WPCC.

1. For their safety and security, children are to supervised at all time
 - a. Supervision periods include formal activities, transitions such as Sunday School arrival and dismissal periods, bathroom visits during formal activities, committee meetings, rehearsals for choir, special services, special trips, volunteer work such as working on an event, treatment of injuries such as cuts or bruises, and transportation periods.
 - b. All children and each child's parents or guardians will be clearly identified. Children will only be released to a properly identified and pre-authorized adult or older sibling.
 - c. When a child is not involved in formal church activities such as coffee hour, church suppers, etc., parents or an identified responsible adult are expected to supervise their child.
2. Supervision of activities involving children is the responsibility of a team, that is, at least two adults. Two non-related adults always shall be present during any formal church activity involving children.
 - a. All adults and young adults supervising formal activities are screened and approved by the Christian Education Committee and required to participate in training in WPCC child security, safety, and discipline policies, procedures, and guidelines. Both adults and young adults shall be members and/or actively involved in the life of the Church for 6 months before being eligible to work with the youth. People new to the Church will be paired with experienced volunteers.
 - b. Non-recurring activities such as field trips, day trips, and special meetings shall require a list of participating adults/young adults and shall be cleared in advance of the activity by the Christian Education Committee. Recurring activities such as committee meetings, choir, play practice, and Sunday School shall require a list of ALL adults/young adults expected to participate as supervisors and shall be cleared before the first meeting of the activity by the Christian Education Committee.
 - c. For activities designed for younger children (sixth grade and below), only one of two supervising adults may be a young adult at the discretion of the Christian Education Committee.
 - d. Adults in the same room may supervise different activities or small groups such as two different Sunday School classes. Activities in adjoining rooms can be conducted by a single adult, if a second adult is able to observe activities from the other room.
 - e. A person designated by the Christian Education Committee may assume the role of the second supervising adult by making random visits to all classrooms and

frequently visiting or inspecting areas in the Church's building that are isolated from view.

- f. Parents are welcome in the classrooms at any time to observe.
 - g. In a situation in which an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child, such as transporting a child from the Church to home, the responsible adult shall obtain parental consent **in writing** before being alone with the child.
 - h. When private consultation is needed between an adult and a child, the responsible adult shall use an area that is removed from, but in view of, other people.
3. Written parental permission shall be obtained for all Church-sponsored formal activities involving children.

Written parental permission shall be obtained before a child participates in any formal activity. Permission in the form of registration is needed for ongoing activities such as Sunday School, visits to nursing homes, and choir. Special permission is needed for activities such as helping at a Church function or going on a trip. Parents need to know what the activity involves, when and where it is to occur, and who will supervise.

4. The following rules will apply to the transportation of non-family members:
- a. Drivers must be 21 or older and hold a valid driver's license
 - b. Vehicles must have current inspection, registration and insurance
 - c. Permission slips (specifying drivers) must be (1) signed by a parent or guardian and returned before the event and (2) kept on file at the church office
 - d. Car seats or booster seats appropriate for the age of the child will be used
 - e. All passengers in the vehicle will be wearing their seat belts
 - f. The group of committee organizing the event is responsible for determining compliance with these rules and obtaining the necessary permission slips.
5. The WPCC has procedures for handling discipline based on developmentally appropriate expectations.
- a. Adults/young adults working with children are encouraged to use positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement, rather than competition, comparison, and criticism.
 - b. Adults/young adults working with children will be aware of these procedures through required training and reading.
6. Adults/young adults acting on behalf of the WPCC shall not abuse/neglect children in any way, including, but not exclusively, the following:
- a. Physical abuse – strike, spank, shake, slap; verbal abuse – humiliate, degrade, threaten; sexual abuse – inappropriate touching or verbal exchange; mental abuse – shaming, cruelty, withholding love; neglect – withholding food, water, basic care.
 - b. Adults will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and their right to say "no." Other than diapering, children

should not be touched on any area of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit.

7. Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult/young adult and a child will be confronted immediately and investigated.

A supervising team, consisting of members of the Christian Education Committee, is responsible for overall supervision of youth activities with respect to the implementation of the child security policies. When an incident or problem behavior is observed or reported, this committee is responsible for investigating and taking appropriate action including close monitoring, issuing warnings, and termination of the adult/young adult for continued violation of such warnings, or for a single violation of sufficient gravity.

8. By law, suspected cases of abuse must be reported to the appropriate legal authorities. The WPCC will comply with the law.

Training in aspects of recognizing and reporting abuse is to be included in the training required for all individuals involved with children in Church activities.

The law provides that a report must be made to:

- DHHS, when the person suspected is “a person responsible for the child.”
- District Attorney, when the person suspected is not a person responsible for the child

If the minister of the church has reason to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected, the minister will make a report to the Department of Human/Health Service (DHHS) and the District Attorney. If a volunteer suspects any child or vulnerable adult abuse, he/she will report this to the minister or moderator or directly to the DHHS.

The minister shall retain a record of all verbal and written reports made to DHHS, the District Attorney, or outside agencies.

9. Outside groups using the Church will be required to sign a copy of this policy, acknowledging compliance with WPCC Policy & procedures. Compliance with state licensing requirements is an adequate substitute.
10. Exhibit A shall be completed by each supervisory adult/young adult.

Physical Safety and Security Policy for Activities Involving Children

Health history/health examination

A health history is required for all children participating in formal activities of our Church. If a child is in school, this requirement will have been met. Allergies, medications, and infectious disease information shall be included on the registration form for children.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

At least one attending adult leader shall know how to administer emergency care in the event of minor accidents. Adequate first aid kits will be readily accessible to all individuals working with children and are to be located in clearly defined places in the Church.

Children shall be told the four basic steps to take if clothing catches fire: Stop, Drop, Cover (face) and Roll. Leaders shall be encouraged to take advantage of first aid training offered by local chapters of the American Red Cross. Leaders shall be aware of contracting an infectious disease, such as AIDS and Hepatitis B, in a first aid situation involving blood and other bodily fluids such as vomit, feces, or urine. Latex gloves shall be use. Encourage self-help. After giving first aid, immediately wash hands and other skin surfaces thoroughly with disinfectant and water.

Procedures for Handling Accidents

The adult in charge, if capable, shall first provide first aid. Then he/she shall contact the parents and/or legal guardians, and local emergency services. Advance emergency release forms from the legal guardians or parents granting permission for a child's emergency medical care shall be obtained prior to field trips. An incident report for each accident shall be submitted to the trustees with a copy to the Moderator.

Service Projects

Service projects involving litter pickups or other activities that involve contact with trash or hazardous materials shall be discouraged due to the degree of risk.

Fire Evacuation Procedures

The WPCC shall have a fire evacuation. The plan shall be located in the Chapel and Fellowship Hall. It will be reviewed will all participating children and fire drills will be conducted periodically.

Child Safety Screening Committee

There shall be a Child Safety Screening Committee which shall serve to screen individuals desiring to work with the children of the Church. In carrying out these duties, the Committee shall do the following tasks:

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1. Provide and collect screening applications to be completed by any individual desiring to work with the children of the WPCC in its activities;
2. Conduct confidential telephone interviews with references as listed by the applicants and agreed to by them for references to be contacted.
3. Determine with the aid of the Minister, based on the application, telephone reference checks and on personal knowledge, whether the applicant(s) is (are) suitable for working with children.
4. Maintain in strictest confidence all matters and interviews;
5. Seek training to enhance the Committee's ability to screen volunteers.

Three individuals, to be appointed annually by the Church Council, shall comprise the membership of the Committee.

Procedure for Harassment Issue

The following steps should be promptly taken when a person believes he or she is being harassed or observes another being harassed, by anyone on the church premises or by an employee of the church:

Consider using an informal method of resolution if the behavior was minor. Only use this method if

- You feel it will permanently stop the offensive behavior without reprisal.
- You feel comfortable talking to the offending person about his/her behavior, and
- You feel the offender should be given a chance to change.

Whenever possible, you should politely, but firmly,

- Confront whomever is doing the harassing
- State how you feel about his/her actions
- Request that he/she cease harassing you immediately

Consider formal channels, if the incident or behavior is serious, unacceptable or repeated. If you do not feel comfortable confronting the harassing individual, you should contact your supervisor, the minister or the Moderator.

Your complaint will be handled with diligence and sensitivity and will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible. Employees are assured that they will be free from reprisals or retaliation from filing a complaint. You will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

If you are not satisfied with the progress of the investigation or the outcome, you may appeal to the Church Council for resolution. Appeal beyond the Council can be made to the Oxford-Union Association.

If you observe harassment against someone, take action.

Should the person doing the harassing be the minister, contact the Moderator or a member of the Church and Ministry Committee of the Oxford-Union Association.