

# Safe Church Policy

First Congregational United Church of Christ  
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## **Statement of Vision and Purpose**

First Congregational United Church of Christ (“First Congregational”) values the members of our church and seeks to be a place where adults, youth, and children come together to experience God’s love freely and safely.

In instituting this policy, we commit to protecting and supporting the value and dignity of each person and to being a community that strives to create and maintain an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, abuse, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. All persons associated with First Congregational should be aware that the church opposes these types of misconduct and will take action to correct behavior contrary to this policy. Our Safe Church policy will always be available on our website, and any updates will be shared with the congregation.

# Definitions

## Legal Definitions

First Congregational does not condone illegal acts of harassment and abuse.

1. The courts have determined that **sexual harassment** is an illegal form of discrimination under Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended in 1991.
  - a. According to the Illinois Human Rights Act, sexual harassment is defined as: Any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or any conduct of a sexual nature when:
    - i. Submission to such conduct is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment;
    - ii. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
    - iii. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.
  - b. Examples: One example of sexual harassment is a case where a qualified individual is denied employment opportunities and benefits after rejecting the supervisor's sexual advances or request(s) for sexual favors or the individual is terminated. Another example is when an individual is subjected to unwelcome sexual conduct by co-workers because of their gender, which makes it difficult for the employee to perform their job.
2. **Child Abuse:** Refer to the Section entitled "What is Abuse?" on pages 6-8 of DCFS's "*Mandated Reporter Training Manual*" which can be found online at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/public/pdf/en/Mandated-Reporter-Manual.pdf>
3. **Vulnerable Adult Abuse:** Refer to "What is Adult Abuse?" on page 2 of the State of Illinois Department on Aging's "*What Professionals Need to Know: Understanding your responsibilities as a mandated reporter under the Adult Protective Services Act.*" found at: <https://ilaging.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/aging/resources/newsandpublications/publications/documents/what-pros-need-to-know.pdf>

## Misconduct

As a church, we are committed to a high standard of behavior among members and leaders. As a result, we do not condone the following types of misconduct listed here, which may go beyond legal definitions to include other forms of ungodly conduct, misuse of power, misuse of spiritual authority, sexually inappropriate behavior, neglect, and abuse of office.

1. **Physical Misconduct** is intentionally inflicting physical injury or causing or allowing physical injury to be inflicted.
2. **Sexual Misconduct** includes:
  - a. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It constitutes sexual harassment when:
    - i. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in church life or church ministry.
    - ii. 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
    - iii. 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.
  - b. Other conduct, which may constitute sexual harassment, includes, but is not limited to:
    - i. Verbal: Sexual innuendos, suggestive comments, insults, humor, and jokes about sex, anatomy or gender-specific traits, sexual propositions, threats, repeated requests for dates, or statements about other employees, even outside of their presence, of a sexual nature.
    - ii. Non-Verbal: Suggestive or insulting sounds (whistling), leering, obscene gestures, sexually suggestive bodily gestures, "catcalls," "smacking," or "kissing" noises.
    - iii. Visual: Posters, signs, pin-ups or slogans of a sexual nature, viewing pornographic material or websites.
    - iv. Physical: Touching, unwelcome hugging or kissing, pinching, brushing the body, any coerced sexual act, or actual assault.
    - v. Textual/Electronic: "Sexting" (electronically sending messages with sexual content, including pictures and video), the use of sexually explicit language, harassment, cyberstalking and threats via all forms of electronic communication (e-mail, text/picture/video messages, intranet/online postings, blogs, instant messages and social network websites like Facebook and Twitter).
  - c. Sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate working or volunteering in a church ministry or program.
  - d. Repeated sexual advances toward another person after being informed that the interest is unwelcome.
3. **Emotional Misconduct** is a pattern of behavior in which a person insults, humiliates,

and manipulates an individual or group to establish or maintain control over them. Emotional misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- i. Threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones;
- ii. Isolating a person from family, friends, and acquaintances;
- iii. Demeaning, bullying, belittling, shaming, or humiliating a person;
- iv. Delivering constant criticism; or
- v. Emotionally blackmailing or harassing a person.

**4. Spiritual Misconduct is** a form of emotional and psychological abuse, characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. Spiritual misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- i. manipulation and exploitation by appealing to religious convictions and beliefs,
- ii. censorship of decision-making,
- iii. requirements for secrecy and silence,
- iv. coercion to conform [inability to ask questions]
- v. requirement of obedience to the abuser
- vi. the suggestion that the abuser holds a 'divine' position
- vii. isolation as a means of punishment.

### Concepts of Abuse of Power

All who serve in the life of the church are called to use their position and authority, not in ways that assert dominance over or seek to control others but in ways that support their thriving. We expect ministry leaders to steward their position and power well and cultivate cultures that resist abuse.

**Power:** Power is the ability to influence or affect an outcome. We all have power as human beings; some of us are given more power as a result of our role or our status within a community. When power is stewarded well, it allows others to reach their full potential.

**Abuse of power:** Abuse of power is misusing power to harm another person or using power and influence for personal gain at the expense of another person. Power can be used to harm another person intentionally or inadvertently, subtly or overtly, to advance one's own desires without regard for the needs or desires of others in ways that disturb the flourishing of others. At the core of all types of abuse are behaviors related to acquiring, maintaining, and misusing power and control. The same power dynamics show up in all types of abuse, whether it be sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or spiritual abuse.

### Positions

**Child:** Any person under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated, according to Illinois law.

**Youth:** A child who is in junior high school or high school.

**Vulnerable Adult:** A person over the age of 18 who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation because of a mental or physical impairment or advanced age.

**Ministry Leader:** Any person, paid or volunteer, ordained or unordained, in a leadership position over an area or aspect of ministry in our church. (This could include pastors, directors, council members, youth leaders, etc.)

**Adult Volunteer:** Any volunteer over the age of 18 who leads or assists in ministry programming.

**Helper:** A youth who assists a volunteer in a program.

**Safe Church Response Team:** This group generally consists of the pastor, moderator, and Christian Education (CE) Director. If allegations are made and one or more of these persons are the claimant or the accused, or if there is another conflict of interest, the Church Council will appoint replacement member(s) to serve on the team.



# Screening and Exclusion Policies

## Screening Employees

It is the policy of First Congregational to screen full-time and part-time potential candidates as outlined in conjunction with our personnel policies prior to employment (note that some screenings are to be repeated at a frequency indicated below). If the candidate is not hired, the results of the screenings will be destroyed. If the candidate is hired, the results of the screening will be maintained on Realm, a cloud-based church management software system.

1. Upon completing an application for employment, the applicant must sign an authorization statement which permits First Congregational to conduct all required background-screening checks. The authorization statement is located in [Appendix A](#) of this policy.

**Responsibility:** Applicant

**Frequency:** One time only, upon initial application

2. All applicants for full- and part-time employment must provide two or more references who can speak to their qualifications and character. A placement interview must be conducted with each applicant to assess suitability and assist with hiring decisions. Although the initial interview can be conducted by phone, a subsequent face-to-face interview will be conducted.

**Responsibility:** The Applicant will provide at least two references. The Search Committee will conduct the Reference Check before calling a potential minister. For all other applicants, the applicant's manager will conduct the reference check.

**Frequency:** One time only, upon initial application

3. All applicants will be background checked using Praesidium Inc. Results will be kept on Realm under personal information.

**Responsibility:** The Church Secretary will work in partnership with the CE director or other ministry leaders as appropriate. If the applicant is for one of these roles, the moderator will submit a background request.

**Frequency:** Upon initial application and every 5 years thereafter

4. Valid Driver's License and Proof of Auto Liability Insurance must be verified for any employee who may be transporting youth as part of their employment. This will be documented by making a copy of the driver's license and proof of insurance and such information will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

**Responsibility:** The Church Secretary

**Frequency:** Driver's license information will be collected upon initial application and every four years or when a new license is obtained. Insurance information will be updated yearly when an employee is driving youth.

### Screening Volunteers Serving Youth, Children and/or Vulnerable Adults

It is the policy of First Congregational to screen potential volunteers who will serve youth, children and/or vulnerable adults as follows:

1. All volunteers must regularly attend First Congregational for at least six months before supervising children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
2. The potential volunteer will be required to complete a Volunteer Application Form (located in [Appendix B](#) of this policy), which includes self-disclosing the following information to First Congregational:
  - A. information on the volunteer position and church membership information,
  - B. proof of a valid driver's license as well as insurance (if transporting minors),
  - C. prior experience working with children and/or youth, and
  - D. criminal history.

**Responsibility:** Potential Volunteer

3. Valid Driver's License and Proof of Auto Liability Insurance must be verified for any volunteer who may be transporting youth as part of their service. This will be documented by making a copy of the driver's license and proof of insurance, and such information will be kept by the CE director.

**Responsibility:** The CE Director (or other Ministry Leader if appropriate)

**Frequency:** Driver's license information will be collected upon initial application and every four years or when a new license is obtained. Insurance information will be updated yearly when an employee is driving youth.

4. All applicants over the age of 18 will be background checked using Praesidium Inc. Results will be kept on Realm under personal information.

**Responsibility:** The church secretary in partnership with the CE director or other ministry leaders as appropriate. The volunteer will provide information and notify the church office of any license changes

**Frequency:** Upon initial application and every 5 years thereafter

### Screening Safe Church Policy Response Team

The Safe Church Policy Response Team is defined in the [Definitions](#) section.

It is the policy of First Congregational to screen volunteers who will serve on the Safe Church Policy Response Team according to the same procedures as used for volunteers working with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults (see [previous section](#)).

### Assessing Candidates with a Criminal Record

In the event that a background check reveals a criminal record for a potential employee or volunteer, consideration shall be given to:

- The requirements of the position applied for;
- Seriousness of the crime;
- Statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors;
- Length of time since the last offense;
- Pattern of criminal activity; and
- Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.

Conviction for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to employment or volunteer work with children:

- Violent crimes;
- Sexual assault;
- Sexual abuse or neglect of a child; and
- Drug offenses or driving offenses (depending upon position requirements)

Arrest data are not grounds for disqualification, only convictions. The status or relevance of other crimes will be considered individually.

Felony convictions or indictable offenses are wide-ranging, each with varying degrees of harm caused. The uniqueness and level of risk of each conviction should be carefully assessed should this person be given the privilege of doing ministry with those who are vulnerable. A person with a felony conviction may serve in ministry with youth or vulnerable adults only with another approved adult present at all times.

Before an offer of employment is made, the hiring committee involved in the screening process should review all information obtained. The employment process should last a sufficient length of time to allow the hiring committee to carefully collect and evaluate information about applicants and to allow the applicant time to self-select out of the process if they have concerns about the position.

Following the review, each hiring committee member shall sign and date one of two documents that becomes part of the applicant's or employee's permanent personnel file:

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

OR

“We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is not acceptable for the position.” We do not retain background check information for candidates we do not hire.

### Registered Sex Offender Policy

Convicted sex offenders, registered sex offenders, or those who have been convicted of a sex-related offense who wish to participate in the life of the church must identify themselves to a member of the Safe Church Response Team. A limited access agreement may be required. The Safe Church Response Team is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.

### Exclusion Policy

First Congregational reserves the right to require a limited access agreement or, in extreme cases, to exclude any individual who has exhibited behavior that is deemed harmful to the life of the church, at the sole discretion of the Safe Church Response Team. The Safe Church Response Team is responsible for enforcing this policy.

## Training and Policy Communication

### Pastor/Clergy

1. These persons will familiarize themselves with this Safe Church Policy and sign the form found in [Appendix C](#), indicating they have received and understood the information and agree to follow the policy. The forms will be returned to the CE Director.
2. As a mandated reporter for child abuse, clergy will familiarize themselves with DCFS's Mandated Reporter Training Manual found at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/public/pdf/en/Mandated-Reporter-Manual.pdf> and will register for and complete the DCFS administered online training entitled "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters". Online registration form found at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/Registration/Registration.action>.

After the training, Clergy members will sign the "Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status (Clergy)" form found on page 45 of the training manual acknowledging their status as a mandated reporter and will return to the church secretary.

3. As a mandated reporter for vulnerable adult abuse (a person age 60 or older or adults with disabilities age 18-59), clergy will familiarize themselves with the State of Illinois Department on Aging's "What Professionals Need to Know: Understanding your responsibilities as a mandated reporter under the Adult Protective Services Act." found at <https://ilaging.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/aging/resources/newsandpublications/publications/documents/what-pros-need-to-know.pdf>

### CE Director

1. This person will familiarize themselves with this Safe Church Policy and will sign the form found in [Appendix C](#) indicating they have received and understood the information and agree to follow the church's Safe Church Policy including the [Code of Conduct for Church Lay Leaders](#). Forms will be returned to the church secretary.
2. This person will familiarize themselves with DCFS's Mandated Reporter Training Manual found at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/public/pdf/en/Mandated-Reporter-Manual.pdf> and will register for and complete the DCFS administered online training entitled "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters". Online registration form found at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/Registration/Registration.action>.

### Safe Church Response Team (other than pastor and CE Director)

1. These persons will familiarize themselves with this Safe Church Policy and will sign the form found in [Appendix C](#) indicating they have received and understood the information and agree to follow the church's Safe Church Policy including the [Code of Conduct for Church Lay Leaders](#). Forms will be returned to the CE director.

2. These persons will familiarize themselves with DCFS's Mandated Reporter Training Manual at: <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/public/pdf/en/Mandated-Reporter-Manual.pdf>.
3. These persons will familiarize themselves with the State of Illinois Department on Aging's "What Professionals Need to Know: Understanding your responsibilities as a mandated reporter under the Adult Protective Services Act." found at <https://ilaging.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/aging/resources/newsandpublications/publications/documents/what-pros-need-to-know.pdf>

### Volunteers Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

1. Before beginning work as a volunteer, the appropriate staff supervisor or ministry leader will review this policy with participants and answer any related questions.
2. After the training, participants will complete the appropriate screening forms (see previous section) and sign the form found in [Appendix C](#) indicating they have received and understood the information and agree to follow the church's Safe Church Policy, including the [Code of Conduct for Church Lay Leaders](#). Forms will be returned to the CE director and kept in the church office until they are no longer serving in their role.

### Other Council Members and Ministry Leaders

1. Before beginning work as a volunteer, the appropriate staff supervisor or ministry leader will review this policy with participants and answer any related questions.
2. After the training, participants will sign the form found in [Appendix C](#) indicating they have received and understood the information and agree to follow the church's Safe Church Policy, including the [Code of Conduct for Church Lay Leaders](#).

### All Other Members

1. A copy of [Appendix G](#) will be included in all New Member Packets so congregants may read and familiarize themselves with it.

## **Code of Conduct For Church Lay Leaders**

At First Congregational United Church of Christ, our leaders are expected to the best of their ability, to act according to the following Code of Conduct:

### **Relationships**

1. I will speak and act, in all my personal and professional relations, in ways that follow the pattern of Christ, who used his power to serve.
2. I will respect, love, and treat with integrity and truthfulness people of every position, status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, or ability.
3. I will maintain appropriate emotional, physical, and sexual boundaries in all relationships.
4. I will participate in restorative justice meetings and support restorative practices to resolve conflicts and restore trust within our community when appropriate.

### **Safety**

1. I will actively promote a welcoming and respectful environment where all persons are treated with dignity and value, and where any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place.
2. I will report known or suspected cases of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of minors or vulnerable adults to the proper authorities.

### **Pastoral Leadership**

1. I will promote truthfulness, transparency, and honesty in all of my work.
2. I will use my power, authority, and position to build up the community of believers and seek first the realm of God.
3. I will work within my trained competence, especially in counseling situations, and I will refer individuals to other professionals as appropriate.
4. I will preach, teach, admonish, or discipline in ways that are biblical and Christlike, promoting shalom and the flourishing of those to whom I am ministering.
5. I will refrain in my pastoral care and counseling from using references to Scripture or God to manipulate, coerce, or threaten another person.
6. I will disclose conflicts of interest.

### **Confidentiality**

1. I will maintain and uphold confidentiality appropriately, which means I will hold in confidence whatever information is not mine to share.
2. I will not use information shared with me in confidence in order to elevate my position or to depreciate that of others.

### **Finances**

1. I will ensure that funds for which I am responsible or which are under my control are used for their intended ministry purposes.
2. In all financial matters, including the acceptance of gifts, I will act with scrupulous honesty, transparency, and appropriate accountability.

3. I will appropriately use and encourage accepted accounting practices and regular reviews and/or audits of ministry funds.

In the event that I misuse my power, either intentionally or unintentionally, in my dealings with others, in word or deed—if I fail “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly” (Mic. 6:8) as outlined in the Scriptures and our confessions—I will acknowledge the harm that has been caused and the trust that has been broken, and I will actively seek restoration with justice, compassion, truth, and grace. I will humbly submit to the insight and accountability of the body that implements this Code of Conduct to ensure that I use any power entrusted to me fully in service to Christ.

In the beautiful hope of Christ’s transforming work, in all I do, I will seek to use my position, power, and authority prudently and humbly to support and encourage all the members of his body in my care.



## **Guidelines For Safe Supervision of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

First Congregational has set the following guidelines to foster safe interactions while working with youth, children or vulnerable adults:

Under no circumstances should adults give gifts to individual youth or children.

### **Safe Numbers**

1. Sunday School/Joyful Sound: Each class shall be led by one adult or by one adult and one youth helper (for Preschool-2nd grade classes only). If there is only one child in attendance, class will be combined with another class group. A floater will be onsite to periodically visit the classrooms.
2. Middle School Youth Group: Two adults must be present for each meeting or event. The two adults will be unrelated and unmarried/unpartnered. If two unrelated and unmarried/unpartnered adults are not available to supervise, the meeting/event will be canceled.
3. High School Youth Group: All volunteers and full-time employees will observe the "two adult or two children/youth/adults" rule for meetings. The two adults will preferably be unrelated and unmarried/unpartnered.
4. Staff and adult volunteers should avoid one-on-one meetings with youth, children and/or vulnerable adults in private.

### **Safe Environment**

1. At church
  - A. With the exception of Joyful Sound Classes, doors will remain open when meeting with a child or youth, regardless of either party's gender.
  - B. If the door needs to be closed for privacy reasons, the meetings must be held in rooms with a window so that parties in the room are visible from the outside.
2. Meetings outside church
  - A. Meetings held outside church - for example, of a mentor and confirmand -will be in a public place rather than one-on-one in the mentor's home unless prior parental/guardian approval is given, preferably in writing.
  - B. Parents will always be aware of meetings and will have given prior approval, preferably in writing or email. As long as parental permission is given, confirmands may drive with their mentors.
3. Overnights
  - A. Will have at least two adult chaperones (at least one male and one female).

- B. Will have separate sleeping accommodations for male and female youth. In cases where there is only 1 large room available, males will be supervised in an area by male chaperones and females in another section by female chaperones.
- C. Will have private changing/bathroom facilities for youth
- D. Parents will give prior approval in writing.
- E. At no time will sleeping accommodations include only one adult and only one youth sleeping in the same room.

### **Safe Ages**

1. The minimum age to be a youth volunteer helping with younger children is 13.
2. The use of 13 and older youth volunteers will occur only when there is adult supervision.
3. We follow the “five years older” rule. Any helper, leader or volunteer working with children/youth should be at least five years older than the oldest child/youth in the group.

### **Safe Transportation**

1. Children and youth should not be transported home by leaders, helpers or other parents, unless approval is received from a parent.
2. Where children and youth have to be transported, arrangements should be made to have more than one passenger in the vehicle unless a parent has given approval, including telephonic approval.
3. In an emergency, discretion must apply after exhausting all of the above possibilities.
4. At no time should youth be transported by someone not in possession of a valid driver’s license and insurance.
5. Where children or youth need to be transported during a church function, no person under the age of 21 may transport others during the church function.

### **Safe Electronic Communication and Social Media**

1. Communication should not take place with young people between the hours of 9:00 pm and 7:00 am or on staff members’ days off, unless in an emergency.
2. Once parental permission is given via email to the CE Director or the permission form found in [Appendix H](#), staff and volunteers can hold email addresses and cell phone numbers for young people over the age of 14 in their care.
3. Emails, messages and texts should be sent to the whole group whenever possible and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
4. Ongoing conversations or lengthy personal communications should not be done through email or text or social media messaging.
5. No youth leaders or teachers or pastors may “friend” or “follow” youth or children on any social media sites or use those platforms to communicate privately with them.
6. If a digital communication raises any child protection concerns, the staff or volunteer will inform the Safe Church Response Team.

7. Ministry staff/volunteers may not use any image of a child or youth, including in marketing materials or on social media, without the written consent of the parents and only in ways that protect the value and dignity of those pictured. This does not include our services, which are live-streamed and may occasionally include brief glimpses of people in the sanctuary.
8. When a volunteer leaves a ministry involving youth due to misconduct of any kind, staff should request that this volunteer not contact any youth - and that all youth contact information must be removed from that adult volunteer's devices.

# Reporting Procedures

## Generally

First Congregational does not condone or tolerate acts of physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual misconduct (as detailed in the [Definitions](#) section of this document). Employees and volunteers are under a duty to report any acts of misconduct they may observe whether in the workplace, life of the church, or in any of the church's ministries. Any employee, volunteer, or church member or visitor who believes they are a victim of misconduct in the church should immediately report the behavior as indicated below.

- 1) The Safe Church Response Team will be tasked with dealing with a complaint made under this policy.
- 2) Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged misconduct:
  - a) The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the individual accused.
  - b) The complainant can report the incident to the Safe Church Response Team, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
  - c) If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Safe Church Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:
    - i) The Church Council will assess any conflicts of interest between the accuser, the accused and the pastor, Moderator and CE Director. If it is determined that conflict(s) of interest exist, they will appoint other members to the Safe Church Response Team as appropriate.
    - ii) The pastor (or if the pastor is the accused, the Moderator) shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged misconduct and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to the rest of the Safe Church Response Team.
    - iii) The Safe Church Response Team, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
      - (1) finding that misconduct has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action accordingly; such action may include one or more of the following:
        - (a) a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;

- (b) recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;
- (c) probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
- (d) dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.

(2) finding that misconduct did not occur.

- iv) The Safe Church Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or the appropriate authorities, including police. A written summary of the proceedings in such cases will be maintained.
- 3) 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.
  - 4) In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes misconduct, 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.
  - 5) Any person bringing a complaint of misconduct 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 in retaliation.
  - 6) False and frivolous charges refer to cases where the accuser is using a sexual harassment complaint to accomplish some end other than stopping harassment or misconduct. They do not refer to charges made in good faith that cannot be proven. Given the seriousness of the consequences for the accused, a false and frivolous charge is a severe offense that can itself result in disciplinary action.
  - 7) If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter, that person has the right to appeal to the Church Council. The subject of any such appeal to the Church Council 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 Church Council will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Church Council determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Safe Church Response Team to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

### Resolution of Illegal Sexual Harassment Outside the Church

The purpose of this policy is to establish prompt, thorough and effective procedures for responding to every complaint and incident so that problems can be identified and remedied internally. However, an employee has the right to contact the Illinois Department of Human

Rights (IDHR) or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) about filing a formal complaint for sexual harassment as defined by the State of Illinois (see [Legal Definitions](#)).

An IDHR complaint must be filed within 180 days of the alleged incident(s) unless it is a continuing offense. A complaint with the EEOC must be filed within 300 days. In addition, an appeal process is available through the Illinois Human Rights Commission (IHRC) after IDHR has completed its investigation of the complaint. Where the employing entity has an effective sexual harassment policy in place and the complaining employee fails to take advantage of that policy and allow the employer an opportunity to address the problem, such an employee may, in certain cases, lose the right to further pursue the claim against the employer.

## ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

### **Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR)**

Chicago: 312-814-6200 or 800-662-3942

Chicago TTY: 866-740-3953

Springfield: 217-785-5100

Springfield TTY: 866-740-3953

Marion: 618-993-7463

Marion TTY: 866-740-3953

### **Illinois Human Rights Commission (IHRC)**

Chicago: 312-814-6269

Chicago TTY: 312-814-4760

Springfield: 217-785-4350

Springfield TTY: 217-557-1500

### **United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**

Chicago: 800-669-4000

Chicago TTY: 800-869-8001

An employee who is suddenly transferred to a lower paying job or passed over for promotion after filing a complaint with IDHR or EEOC may file a retaliation charge, also due within 180 days (IDHR) or 300 days (EEOC) of the alleged retaliation.

An employee who has been physically harassed or threatened while on the job may also have grounds for criminal charges, such as assault or battery.

## Child Abuse

In Illinois, the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA) designates certain people as “mandated reporters.” According to DCFS, the role of a mandated reporter is to inform the department when you determine there is reason to believe that a child has been harmed or is in danger of being harmed — physically, sexually, or through neglect — and that a caretaker either committed the harm or should have taken steps to protect the child from the harm. These individuals must report any suspected case of child abuse. Illinois clergy are included in this list, and are therefore no longer responsible for making subjective judgments concerning the validity of a possible child abuse claim. Any suspected child abuse must be reported to DCFS.

In addition to our legal responsibility, First Congregational recognizes that each child deserves to be free of abuse, and encourages all its employees, volunteers and members to be aware of the possibility of child abuse and to report any suspected cases of abuse.

Ministers, church volunteers, and other members of a child's "church family" are in a unique position, and their relationship with children cannot be underestimated. A child may feel safe in approaching a church worker or member for help if child abuse is occurring at home, or he or she may approach someone at church to ask for help in stopping abuse that is occurring at church. If this happens, the employee or volunteer will use the guidelines for speaking to the child outlined in [Appendix D](#).

Any employee or volunteer at 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 follow these steps:

- A. The employee or volunteer will complete a Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form located in [Appendix E](#) of this policy. The completed form is to be returned to the Safe Church Response Team and the pastor, unless the pastor is the accused. DCFS recommends that the person with the most knowledge of the incident fill out the report.
- B. The pastor (or Safe Church Response Team if the pastor is the accused) will notify the parents. Although state law does not require such a report, it is in the church's opinion that parents shall be told unless it is deemed that this would put the child in danger.
- C. If the accused is a church employee or volunteer, the accused will be notified and:
  - a. A volunteer who has been accused of abuse will be removed from their position during the investigation.
  - b. Full-time staff will be given paid leave while the allegations are being investigated.
- D. The pastor (or Safe Church Response Team if the pastor is the accused) will report abuse to DCFS by calling the **Illinois Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE**.
- E. The Safe Church Response Team will appoint a news liaison as needed. No other employee or volunteer shall speak publicly or privately concerning alleged abuse except during specific meetings to determine the church's course of action.
- F. Provide support:
  - a. At all times the church will work to safeguard the privacy of the victim and to treat them with dignity and honor.

- b. If the accused is a church member or employee, the accused will be offered continuing pastoral care and support while the DCFS or criminal investigation proceeds.
  - c. In the case of the minister being accused, pastoral services will be provided temporarily through a supply pastor as they are during a minister's sickness, absence, or sabbatical. No full-time replacement shall be hired during the course of the investigation.
  - d. If appropriate, counseling may be offered to the victim.
- G. First Congregational will use the resources of the Illinois Conference for advice on handling allegations and with regard to hiring full time legal counsel to represent the church in any such allegations.
- H. Our insurance company will be notified of any potential lawsuit involving a staff member or volunteer of our church.

### Vulnerable Adult Abuse

Effective July 1, 2013, [legislation](#) was passed by the General Assembly to expand the Department's current Elder Abuse and Neglect Program (now [Adult Protective Services](#) (APS) Program) to prevent abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of persons over age 60 or persons with disabilities between the ages of 18-59. Under this Act, Clergy are mandated reporters and therefore must report suspected abuse (note that mandatory reporting requirements apply only when the reporter believes that the adult is not capable of reporting the abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation themselves).

In addition to our legal responsibility, First Congregational recognizes that elders and vulnerable adults deserve to be free of abuse, and encourages all its employees, volunteers and members to be aware of the possibility of abuse and to report any suspected cases of abuse.

Any employee or volunteer at the Church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that adult abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall follow the steps below:

- A. The employee or volunteer will complete a Report of Suspected Incident of Vulnerable Adult Abuse Form located in [Appendix F](#) of this policy. The completed form is to be returned to the Safe Church Response Team and the pastor, unless the pastor is the accused.
- B. The pastor (or Safe Church Response Team if the pastor is the accused) will notify the family unless it is deemed that this would put the victim in danger.
- C. If the accused is a church employee or volunteer, the accused will be notified and:
  - a. A volunteer who has been accused of abuse will be removed from their position during the investigation.



- b. Full-time staff will be given paid leave while the allegations are being investigated.
- D. The pastor (or Safe Church Response Team if the pastor is the accused) will report abuse to the appropriate hotline below:
  - a. **Call the statewide, 24-hour Adult Protective Services Hotline: 1-866-800-1409.**
  - b. For residents who live in nursing facilities, **call the Illinois Department of Public Health's Nursing Home Complaint Hotline: 1-800-252-4343.**
  - c. For residents who live in Supportive Living Facilities (SLFs), **call the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services' SLF Complaint Hotline: 1-800-226-0768.**
- E. The Safe Church Response Team will appoint a news liaison as needed. No other employee or volunteer shall speak publicly or privately concerning alleged abuse except during specific meetings to determine the church's course of action.
- F. Provide support:
  - a. At all times the church will work to safeguard the privacy of the victim and to treat them with dignity and honor.
  - b. If the accused is a church member or employee, the accused will be offered continuing pastoral care and support while the APS or criminal investigation proceeds.
  - c. In the case of the pastor being accused, pastoral services will be provided temporarily through a supply pastor as they are during a pastor's sickness, absence, or sabbatical. No full-time replacement shall be hired during the course of the investigation.
  - d. If appropriate, counseling may be offered to the victim.
- G. First Congregational will use the resources of the Illinois Conference for advice on handling allegations and with regard to hiring full time legal counsel to represent the church in any such allegations.
- H. Our insurance company will be notified of any potential lawsuit involving a staff member or volunteer of our church.

### 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 pastor will promptly be forwarded to the Committee on Ministry of the Fox Valley Association of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

## Confidentiality

The following measures are implemented in order to protect the privacy, dignity and well-being of any persons involved in a misconduct allegation and to ensure that information about any alleged act is limited to essential persons.

1. Essential Persons: Those positions in the need-to-know category include the following: the claimant, the alleged offender, moderator, pastor and the Safe Church Response Team.
2. The names and information in any abuse allegations shall be limited to the positions listed on this page as "Essential Persons". Any request to release names of any involved party must be first cleared by the congregation's legal counsel.
3. Discussion by Council or Ministry Committees shall be conducted without the actual names of involved persons being used. Instead, descriptions such as "reporter", "alleged offender", and "claimant" shall be used.
4. After law enforcement has officially charged someone of a crime or after a legal decision has been made, there will be a communication outlining ways that the church and community may be able to move forward with respect and responsible ways to process the harm within the congregation and community.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Employee Disclosure Form and Authorization for Background Check

Because employees of this church serve the public, including a large number of children, all prospective employees over the age of 18 are required to pass a criminal background check before their final hire. The criminal background check will consist of a State Law Enforcement Division background check and a sex offender check. Other criminal background checks may be conducted in accordance with this policy or at the discretion of the Safe Church Policy Response Team.

These background checks will be conducted at no cost to you. The results will be limited to those deemed to have a need for access (see [Confidentiality](#) Section of the Safe Church Policy). Otherwise, the results will remain confidential. Applicants are welcome to request a copy of their results.

Have you been convicted of a crime (Y or N): \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please list and explain:

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Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
*First Middle Last*

Maiden Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
*First Middle Last*

Please list any other names under which you have been known (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Address City State Zip*

Please list your prior three addresses:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Address City State Zip*

(2) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Address City State Zip*

(3) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Address City State Zip*

Employee Disclosure Form and Authorization for Background Check (Continued)

If your position will involve driving children, do you have a valid driver's license?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

State where driver's license issued : \_\_\_\_\_

Driver's license number : \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Race:

- Hispanic or Latino
- Caucasian
- African/American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American/Alaskan Native
- Two or more races
- Unknown

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- None of the Above

**I certify that the answers to the questions asked above are true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that if false statements are on this form, this shall be grounds for refusing hire/immediate dismissal. I hereby authorize any law enforcement agency or highway department to release requested information from my record to this agency.**

---

*Signature*

*Date*



Appendix B: Volunteer Application Form (continued)

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, misconduct, physical abuse, child abuse, or financial misconduct. *(check one)*

- 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 the nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.)*

If your position will involve driving children, do you have a valid driver's license?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

State where driver's license issued : \_\_\_\_\_

Driver's license number : \_\_\_\_\_

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?

- True
- Not True

*If yes, please provide a brief explanation.*

**I understand that in signing this form, I affirm that the information I have given is true and correct.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Parent's or guardian's signature for applicants under 18*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

Appendix C: Acceptance of Safe Church Policy Form

I have received a copy of the Safe Church Policy of First Congregational United Church of Christ. I agree to abide by the rules and recommendations therein, including those recommendations concerning the reporting of known or suspected abuse.

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*Name*

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*Signature*

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*Position*

This employee/volunteer is a mandated reporter according to Illinois law (applies to clergy only):

- Yes
- No



## Appendix D: Tips for How to React if a Child Reports Abuse and Warning Signs of Abuse

### **If a child approaches you concerning abuse, keep the following points in mind:**

1. General points
  - A. Accept what the child says
  - B. Keep calm; do not appear to be shocked.
  - C. Look at the child directly.
  - D. Be honest.
  - E. Let them know that you will need to tell someone else - don't promise confidentiality.
  - F. Even when a child has broken a rule, they are not to blame for the abuse.
  - G. Be aware the child may have been threatened.
  - H. Make notes as soon as possible, writing down exactly what the child said, including the child's name, age, address, relevant family information, and details of the situation and the activity that preceded disclosure.
  - I. Never push for information or question the child on the specifics of the alleged abuse.
  - J. Never make false promises.
2. Helpful things to say
  - A. I believe you
  - B. I am glad you have told me
  - C. It's not your fault
  - D. I will try to help you
3. Avoid saying
  - A. Why didn't you tell anyone before?
  - B. I can't believe it.
  - C. Are you sure this is true?
  - D. Why? How? When? Who? Where?
  - E. "I'm shocked, don't tell anyone else."
4. Concluding:
  - A. Again reassure the child they were right to tell you and that you believe them.
  - B. Let the child know what you are going to do next, and that you will let them know what happens.

### **Warning signs of abuse**

Warning signs are not to be considered proof of abuse, but rather areas of concern to be taken into account with other factors which may include the following:

- Changes or regression in mood or behavior, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging.
- Nervousness/watchfulness.
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration.
- Running away/stealing/lying.
- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them, or where differing explanations have been received.
- Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Injuries and illnesses which have not received medical attention.
- Any signs of neglect, undernourishment, or inadequate care.
- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
- Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters, and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behavior, or who regularly engages in age-inappropriate sexual play.
- Sexual activity through words, play, or drawing.
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults.

**Appendix E: Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse**

*In addition to completing this form, please refer to [DCFS Mandated Reporter Manual](#) For: "Guidelines for Calling Child Abuse Hotline" (Page 2)*

**Reporter/Observer:**

Name of person observing or receiving disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_

Position of observer within congregation (member, pastor, teacher, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of this Report: \_\_\_\_\_

**Alleged Victim(s):**

Birthday or Approximate Age(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address (or approximate address:) \_\_\_\_\_

**Alleged Perpetrator(s):**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday(s) or Age(s) or some approximation so role of DCFS can be determined:

\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to alleged victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Harm to Victim(s):**

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Risk of Harm
- Neglect
- Death

**Statement of abuse as related by accuser:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E: Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (continued)

**Description of Incident(s):**

When calling the DCFS Hotline (1-800 25-ABUSE), be prepared to give a brief description of the incident(s) of abuse/neglect. This description should include:

1. as much detail as you have about the actual incident
2. indication of intention (especially in physical abuse)
3. description of the time and place of the incident
4. information, if any, about possible witnesses to the abuse/neglect
5. evidence of abuse (physical evidence, behavioral indicators, disclosure by the victim, etc.)
6. evidence of neglect (disclosure by the victim, observations, etc.)

**Follow-up by Pastor or Moderator**

This incident was reported to the DCFS hotline?     Yes     No;    Date and Time \_\_\_\_\_

Intake ID number (provided by the hotline worker) \_\_\_\_\_

What action, if any, will be taken by DCFS? \_\_\_\_\_

Reported to parents of child?     Yes     No;    Date \_\_\_\_\_

Reported to Safe Church Policy Response Team or pastor?     Yes     No;    Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Follow-Up Needed/Additional notes:

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*Signature of Pastor or Safe Church Response Team Representative*

*Date*

**Appendix F: Report of Suspected Incident of Vulnerable Adult Abuse**

*In addition to completing this form, please refer to the State of Illinois Department on Aging's "What Professionals Need to Know: Understanding your responsibilities as a mandated reporter under the Adult Protective Services Act." found at <https://ilaging.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/aging/resources/newsandpublications/publications/documents/what-pros-need-to-know.pdf>*

**Reporter/Observer:**

Name of person observing or receiving disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_

Position of observer within congregation (member, pastor, teacher, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of this Report: \_\_\_\_\_

**Alleged Victim(s):**

Birthday(s) \_\_\_\_\_ or Approximate Age(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address (or approximate address): \_\_\_\_\_

**Alleged Perpetrator(s):**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to alleged victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Harm to Victim(s):**

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Financial Exploitation
- Self-Neglect

**Statement of abuse as related by accuser:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Report of Suspected Incident of Vulnerable Adult Abuse (continued)

**Description of Incident(s):**

When calling the appropriate Adult Protective Services Hotline, be prepared to give a brief description of the incident(s) of abuse/neglect. This description will include as much of the following information as possible:

- the circumstances that led the reporter to believe that the adult is being abused, neglected or financially exploited, with as much specificity as possible;
- whether the alleged victim is in immediate danger; the best time to contact the person; if the person knows of the report; and if there is any danger to the worker going out to investigate;
- whether the reporter believes the adult could self-report;
- the name, telephone number and profession of the reporter;
- the names of others with information about the situation;
- whether the reporter is willing to be contacted again; and,
- any other relevant information

Notes:

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**Follow-up by Pastor or Moderator**

This incident was reported to the APS hotline? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No; Date and Time \_\_\_\_\_

Intake ID number (provided by the hotline worker) \_\_\_\_\_

What action, if any, will be taken by APS? \_\_\_\_\_

Reported to family members of the abused? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No; Date \_\_\_\_\_

Reported to Safe Church Policy Response Team or pastor? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No; Date \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Follow-Up Needed/Additional Notes:

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*Signature of Pastor or Safe Church Response Team Representative*

*Date*

## Appendix G: Safe Church Commitment (for New Member Packets)

First Congregational United Church of Christ (“First Congregational”) values the members of our church and seeks to be a place where adults, youth, and children come together to experience God’s love freely and safely.

As documented by our Safe Church policy, we are committed to protecting and supporting the value and dignity of each person and to being a community that strives to create and maintain an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, abuse, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. All persons associated with First Congregational should be aware that the church opposes the following types of misconduct and that the church will take action to correct behavior contrary to this policy. Refer to our Safe Church Policy for more details.

- **Abuse of Children or Vulnerable adults**
- **Physical Misconduct**
- **Sexual Misconduct** (including sexual harassment which is an illegal form of discrimination under Title VII of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended in 1991.)
- **Emotional Misconduct**
- **Spiritual Misconduct**

**If you have concerns regarding misconduct within our church, please contact our Safe Church Response Team at [safechurchresponseteam@loveandjustice.org](mailto:safechurchresponseteam@loveandjustice.org).**

Appendix H: Authorization to Share Youth Contact Information and Photo Release

My child is high school age (14 or older) and has my permission to share their phone number with the following church staff and/or volunteer(s):

- Pastor
- CE Director
- Youth Group Leader(s)

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*Parent/Guardian Signature*

*Date*

First Congregational Church of Christ may share my child's photo on social media and/or the church's public website.

- Yes
- No

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*Parent/Guardian Signature*

*Date*