



**SAFE CHURCH
AND
CHILD/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULT
PROTECTION POLICY**

First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix
SAFE CHURCH AND CHILD/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION POLICY

POLICY APPLICATION STATEMENT

It is the policy of the First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix (the “Church”) that all clergy, Church attendees, Church officers, employees and/or contractors, and volunteers of the congregation, councils, committees and entities of the Church (each, a “Participant”) are to maintain the strongest sense of integrity, safety, nurturing, and care involving all interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This Safe Church and Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Policy (the “Policy”) applies to all Church sponsored activities that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

All persons associated with the Church should be aware that the Church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and harassment of any person, 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 the Policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate the Policy.

This Policy is adopted effective January 1, 2025. Longstanding volunteers will not be required to submit an application but otherwise are fully subject to the Policy and will be required to attend annual training.

DEFINITIONS

The following is a list of definitions of terms and their intended use in the Policy. For the purpose of the Policy:

Child: A child will be defined as a person between the ages of 0–11.

Youth: A youth will be defined as a person between the ages of 12–17.

Minor: A minor is any Child or Youth 0–17 years-old.

Child/Youth Worker: Any person, volunteer or paid staff or contractor, who participates at any level at Church sponsored events or activities involving Children and/or Youth.

Home Visitor: A Church participant designated by the Reaching-In Team to visit home bound participants and/or otherwise minister to Vulnerable Adults.

Vulnerable Adult: Any person eighteen-years-old or older without the developmental or cognitive capacity to consent.

Vulnerable Adult Abuse: Any act or failure to act that results in the physical, sexual, psychological, financial or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult.

Child/Youth Abuse: Any act or failure to act that results in the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a Child or Youth.

Sexual Abuse: Includes **sexual exploitation** in which a participant or clergy engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior; and **sexual harassment** which involves repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to that person's wishes. Sexual harassment includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

Misuse of Technology: The use of technology that results in the harassing or abusing of a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult. This includes using technology to send suggestive messages, audio and images.

Safe Response Team: The Safe Response Team is a team designated by the Church Council with no less than two members of two different genders which will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing and investigating complaints under the Policy.

SCREENING, TRAINING, AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

1. **For Child/Youth Workers: A Child/Youth Worker**, whether on a paid staff, contractor, or volunteer basis, shall be subject to:
 - a. The Church's receipt of a completed, signed, and approved application and background check authorization form, including a signed form verifying the Policy has been read, substantially in the form of Exhibit A. The application should include a minimum of two references. Complete background checks will only be required where (1) the application appears to be untruthful and/or raises concerns or (2) the applicant has lived in the Charlevoix community for less than three years.
 - b. All Child/Youth Workers must be at least eighteen years old and four years older than the oldest Youth whom they are serving.
2. **For Home Visitors for Vulnerable Adults:** Home Visitors are appointed by the Reaching - In Team of the Church. Prior to entering this ministry, the Church shall receive from prospective Home Visitors a completed, signed, and approved application and background check authorization form, including a signed form verifying the Policy has been read, substantially in the form of Exhibit A. The application should include a minimum of two references. Background checks will only be required where (1) the application appears to be untruthful and/or raises concerns or (2) the applicant has lived in the Charlevoix community for less than three years.
3. **All Child/Youth Workers and Home Visitors will complete training annually.** The training is to be provided on-line where possible and shall cover this Policy as well as methods of abuse prevention and a detailed plan of reporting.
 - a. What constitutes Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Abuse (including Sexual Abuse and Misuse of Technology).
 - b. How to recognize signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.
 - c. State laws concerning definitions of abuse and reporting.
 - d. Appropriate boundaries with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. **Supervision:** It is the policy of this Church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for Child and Youth activities. There will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with Minors unless (a) in an observable location on the main floor of the Church; (b) outside in an area that is open for observation at all times; or (c) for brief drop offs as set forth in (5) below. Youth may assist an unrelated adult in supervising Children's activities; however, such assistance does not alter the general requirement that at least two unrelated adults be present when not in an observable area. The adult to Child ratio for all Child-related events/activities is 2:10. The adult to Youth ratio for all Youth-related events/activities is 2:17. For Youth activities, an adult of each gender is preferred.
2. **Parental Consent:** Written consent of one parent or guardian of a Minor will be required for all activities off the Church property, and any overnight activities. Parents will be informed of sleeping arrangements for any overnight activities.
3. **Virtual/Online Meetings:** All virtual or online meetings involving Minors are subject to the same requirements as in person activities: no fewer than two unrelated adults will be online with Minors and consent of a parent will be required for participation. Additionally, parents will be provided with attendance credentials and invited to attend if they choose. Minors and adult attendees at a virtual event shall conduct themselves in a manner befitting a church event and be attentive to their backgrounds and what is visible to others. Persons behaving inappropriately will immediately be excluded from the meeting.
4. **Communications with Minors:** Adults should not have any technological contact with a Minor that is not either preapproved by the Minor's legal guardian with a signed waiver, or the contact is on an open public medium, such as a church website or other social media program. If a Minor initiates the communication, the adult must immediately add another adult to the communication and inform the Minor of the Policy. Parents should be copied on all electronic communications and should be members of any social media group maintained on behalf of Church of which Minors are members.
5. **Transportation:** All adult drivers at Child/Youth events must have proper licensure and insurance. All vehicles used must have seat belts for the driver and each passenger. No Minor under eighty-five pounds may sit in the front seat of any vehicle. All drivers transporting Minors and Vulnerable Adults must be over the age of twenty-five and must be informed that if their vehicle is used, their insurance would be primary if an accident occurs. An adult should not be alone in a car with a Minor except for brief drop offs from the meeting place to the Minor's home or vice versa. When dropping off Children and/or Youth the adult driver should minimize the time alone in a car and let the parent or guardian know the estimated time of arrival.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

The Church shall maintain all applications for Child/Youth Workers and Home Visitors, results of background checks (if any), and related information in confidential, secured files.

REPORTING AND SAFE RESPONSE TEAM

1. **Suspected Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Abuse.** Anyone suspecting or having knowledge of a Sexual Abuse, Misuse of Technology or another such violation of this Policy may report such violation to the Church moderator, Church pastor or head of the Church's personnel committee. Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult abuse should be made aware that state law may require the immediate reporting of such abuse to the civil authorities. Michigan Child Protection Law requires certain professionals to report their suspicions of child abuse or neglect to Centralized Intake (CI) at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Adult Protective Services (APS) statewide Centralized Intake Unit may be required to be called if there is suspected Vulnerable Adult Abuse. Any person receiving information under this paragraph shall share that information immediately with the Safe Response Team. The Safe Response Team shall have the following responsibilities in response to allegations of Child/Youth Abuse, Vulnerable Adult Abuse or Sexual Abuse incurred against any Child/Youth Worker, Home Visitor or Church Participant.
 - a. immediately provide for the safety of the alleged victim(s) involved If the report alleges abuse or harassment of a Minor;
 - b. immediately ensure the allegation is or has been reported to the civil authorities as required under state law;
 - c. immediately notify the parents or guardian of a Minor;
 - d. in the case of suspected abuse of a Vulnerable Adult, contact the caretaker or guardian as appropriate;
 - e. notify the insurance company of the allegation and that no investigation has yet occurred; and
 - f. make immediate decisions concerning the temporary removal of the individual accused from any contact with Children, Youth or Home Visitor pending an investigation.
2. **Suspected Sexual Abuse involving other Adults.** Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged Sexual Abuse that do not involve a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult:
 - a. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.

- b. The complainant can report the incident to the Church pastor or Church moderator 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 Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:
 - The Safe Response Team shall keep the Church pastor and moderator apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Church pastor or moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.
 - The Safe Response Team shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged Sexual Abuse and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to a special committee consisting of two members from each of the Church Council and the Personnel Committee (the “Special Committee”).
 - The Special Committee shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
 - A. finding that Sexual Abuse ***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; or
 - (iv) dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or participation in, the church.
 - B. finding that Sexual Abuse ***did not occur***.
 - The Safe Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.
 - A confidential written summary of the Special Committee proceedings in such cases will be maintained for seven years.
- 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 Abuse 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 Abuse 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 in retaliation.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING RULES AND PROCEDURES WITH RESPECT TO SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEX OFFENDERS

1. Special Rules for Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the Church moderator or Special Committee, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of clergy will promptly be forwarded to the Conference Director of the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Conference Director of the Michigan Conference may be contacted at: 517-258-0038 and/or lillian@michucc.org.

2. Policy on Sex Offenders in the Life of the Church

Convicted sex offenders, registered sex offenders, or those who have been convicted of a sex-related offense who wish to be a Participant, or a visitor must identify themselves to the Church pastor prior to participating. A limited access agreement will be required. The Safe Response Team is responsible for the enforcement of this Policy.

3. Policy on Excluding Behaviors Harmful to the Life of the Church

The Church reserves the right to require a limited access agreement of any individual who has exhibited behavior that is not welcome in the life of the church, in the sole discretion of the Church Council. The Church also reserves the right to exclude any person from the property or events of the Church, or participation in the Church, who has exhibited behavior that, in the sole discretion of the Church Council is harmful to the life of the Church. The Safe Response Team is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.

Exhibit A
First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix
Employment/Authorized Children and Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

NAME:

LAST _____ FIRST _____ MIDDLE _____

ADDRESS:

STREET _____ CITY/STATE _____ ZIPCODE _____

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 _____ ZIPCODE _____

TELEPHONE _____ EMAIL _____

NAME _____.

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIPCODE _____

TELEPHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Q: I have been a participant of this church since _____

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** (check one)

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** (check one)

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** (check one)

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** (check one)

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** (check one)

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** (check one) *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 **First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix** 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.

First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix authorized volunteer and employee 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 **First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix** 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 **First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix** 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 First Congregational UCC Church of Charlevoix Safe Church and Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.

(PRINT NAME & SIGN)

DATE: _____

For Church Use only: (Not a part of the published policy)

- 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 _____