

Safe Sanctuary: Guidelines for Ministry

Introduction

First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, United Church of Christ is an open, diverse, intergenerational congregation of Christian people engaged in a continuing spiritual journey. We believe that there are many ways to experience and understand God. We invite everyone to join us in this search.

At baptism, this question is posed to the congregation: "Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support and care to the one(s) about to be baptized, as he/she/they live and grow in Christ?" And with all honesty and intention, "we promise our love, support and care."

As adults, we promise to nurture our children in Christ. Providing this nurturance in a safe environment is part of our responsibility as disciples. Towards that end, the members of the First Congregational Church have adopted this policy on Safe Sanctuary prohibiting sexual misconduct and other forms of abusive behavior and establishing guidelines for volunteers who minister to children and youth. The intent of this policy is to prevent abusive and/or inappropriate behavior within our church and to correct such conduct should it occur.

Statement of Policy

A. Protection of Children and Youth

The First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, UCC takes seriously its responsibility to provide Christian education for its members in a safe environment. In order to maintain a safe environment, it is our policy to provide adequate supervision of all children and youth activities. Volunteers who work with children and/or youth must:

1. Complete a "Volunteer Disclosure Form" which:
 - a. authorizes staff to conduct background checks on volunteers and leaders
 - b. affirms that the volunteer/leader has reviewed the Safe Sanctuary Policy
 - c. will be maintained in confidence and used solely for the purpose of determining whether participation in youth programs or ministries is appropriate.
2. Participate in Abuse Awareness and Prevention training.

All church leaders, staff, and volunteers who work in any ministry within the church must follow guidelines in place to make our church a safe sanctuary for all children, youth, and adults engaged in our programs.

It should be noted that all clergy and staff have completed the same screening requirements as volunteers/leaders who work with children/youth. Clergy and staff have also undergone more rigorous background checks.

B. Volunteer Conduct

All persons engaged in the ministry of First Congregational Church are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Because volunteers and staff often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry model healthy behavior to children and youth. It is the policy of First Congregational Church to encourage its volunteers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources. Such resources and referrals are available through our Senior and Associate Pastors and program staff members.

C. Prohibition of Sexual Misconduct, Abuse and Other Discrimination

First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, UCC is committed to creating and maintaining a worship and work community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, abuse, exploitation or intimidation. This church affirms its responsibility for creating an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, adult or child, which is free of sexual misconduct, free of physical and emotional abuse, and that encourages respect, equality, equity, and kinship to Christ. We support equity among all persons regardless of ethnicity, situation, age or gender.

Specifically, all persons associated with First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, UCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation and harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take the action needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline any person who violates this policy. Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of members or other individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of First Congregational Church is unethical and unprofessional behavior, and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

D. Review and Education

This policy was reviewed and approved by the Education Committee in January 2006. The Church Council also reviewed and approved adoption of this policy. The Education Committee will conduct periodic reviews of this policy at a minimum of every two years and make any changes it deems appropriate as a result of its review. Church Council approval will be obtained before implementing any changes the Education Committee makes to this policy in the future.

This church commits itself to educating all church leaders, employees, and volunteers who work with minors in our children and youth programs and other ministries within our church on the provisions of our Safe Sanctuary Policy, so that they are aware of their responsibilities within the framework of this policy, the rationale behind the development of this policy and the applicable guidelines to be followed in ministry. A copy of this policy will be available for review in the Church office and library.

Definitions

Volunteer/Leader: A person working and serving as part of the ministry of the church.

Program Staff: Paid staff whose roles and responsibilities involve leading or supervising church programs (such as Music groups, Fellowship Groups, Educational classes, etc.)

Emotional Abuse: Involves verbal or non-verbal violence toward a child or other person that includes using harsh, abusive language meant to revile, malign or hurt someone.

Physical Abuse: Involves physical violence toward a child or other person, including any type of physical aggression directed at a child in anger, including corporal punishment.

Sexual Misconduct: Includes “sexual exploitation” and “sexual harassment” as defined in this policy.

Sexual Exploitation: This occurs when a person engaged in a ministerial relationship in the life or work of the church takes advantage of the emotional, psychological, or other vulnerability of another person within the ministerial relationship in order to engage in sexual behavior with the vulnerable person. Any form of sexual behavior between an adult and a child as well as any sexual conduct, including sexually suggestive advances, comments or actions, directed by an adult toward a child is sexual exploitation.

Sexual Harassment: This involves coercive or unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors or other conduct of a sexual nature directed toward another person, and includes behavior directed at and about a person’s sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or harassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and conduct of a sexual nature include:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, or sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault or coercing sexual intercourse, and
- Visual contact, such as glaring or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters or magazines.

Coercive sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occur when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment or participation in any church activity;
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or church environment.

Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature are "unwelcome" when such conduct continues after being informed directly that such conduct is not desired by the person to whom it is directed.

It is impermissible to suggest, threaten or imply that a failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership or comfortable participation in the life of the church or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Basic Guidelines for Ministry to Children and Youth

The following guidelines are important to the maintenance of a safe sanctuary for children and youth. First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn expects volunteers to follow these guidelines as closely and reasonably possible. They are listed in no particular order.

1. **Two-Adult Policy:** Whenever possible, two unrelated adults should be present during an activity involving youth or children. When this is not possible, it is understood that a system of floating supervision of classrooms is always in effect.

2. **Accessibility Policy - Windows and Doors:** There will be windows into rooms where youth and children's programs take place or doors will remain open or unlocked to allow access to classrooms.
3. **Bathroom Policy:** Volunteers should give children as much privacy as possible. Children requiring assistance should be helped outside of the bathroom stall and parents informed when they pick up their child. Diapers may be changed in the nursery with another volunteer present.
4. **Five Years Older Policy:** Volunteers and employees working with children are expected to be at least five years older than the children they are teaching or supervising. If there is a youth volunteer fewer than five years older than the children in the group, he or she will be paired with an adult volunteer.
5. **Six Months Policy:** No volunteer may be accepted to work with children until that volunteer has been an active participant in our congregation for at least six months. If under six months, then that volunteer will be paired with an adult who has been an active participant in our congregation and who has worked/volunteered with our children and youth ministries for at least six months.
6. **First Aid/CPR Policy:** The First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn recommends that volunteers working with children and youth obtain first aid and CPR training.
7. **Internet Policy:** The use of public computers is to be for lawful purposes only. The user shall not engage in any manner that violates or infringes the rights of others or that is unlawful.
8. **Alcohol/Drugs Policy:** Alcohol and recreational drug use are prohibited on any church-sponsored program that is designed for children or youth.
9. **Auto Safety Policy:** Adult volunteers will see that children and youth wear seatbelts or are secured in appropriate child safety seats when being transported for church-sponsored activities. No more passengers than can be safely restrained will be carried in a vehicle for these activities.
10. **Driver's License and Insurance:** Drivers must have a valid driver's license in order to drive any youth or child on a church-sponsored event. In addition, volunteers should have liability insurance coverage on the vehicle in use. Whenever possible, drivers should be adults over the age of 21. However, it is understood drivers under the age of 21, but no younger than 18, may be used from time to time, especially if the event is a day trip within a reasonably short distance of the church. Drivers should have a clean driving record and a vehicle in good repair.

11. **General Activity Waiver and Medical Information & Release Form:** Children and youth participating in church-sponsored events or activities outside the church premises must provide a signed "General Activity Waiver." This waiver contains a general grant of permission for the child or youth to participate in the event or activity. "The Medical Information and Release Form" will authorize supervising adults to seek emergency medical care if necessary and provide emergency contact information. Blank copies of these forms are available on our website (www.firstconge.org).
12. **Orientation and Acknowledgment (Volunteer Disclosure Form):** Each year the church will offer an orientation for all who work with children and youth. The orientation will include a review of the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and the guidelines First Congregational Church follows in children and youth ministries. (Volunteers/Leaders/Clergy/Program Staff who have attended the training previously will be asked to reaffirm the information on the "Volunteer Disclosure Form" but will not need to re-attend the Abuse Awareness and Prevention training unless it changes drastically). Procedures for reporting and investigating incidents or complaints regarding inappropriate behavior, misconduct or alleged violations of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will also be reviewed. All involved in youth and children's ministries shall sign the "Volunteer Disclosure Form" to indicate that they have reviewed the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy, are familiar with its provisions and goals, and agree to give their best effort to adhere to the guidelines established by the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Reporting and Complaint Response Procedures

Reporting

- A. First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn is committed to handling all issues regarding their Safe Sanctuary Policy with confidentiality and respect.
- B. Behavior in Violation of Safe Sanctuary Policy
- i. Complaints alleging violation of the terms of the Safe Sanctuary Policy are referred directly to a clergy or a member of the program staff for investigation
 - ii. Complaints alleging violation of the terms of the Safe Sanctuary Policy which involve clergy or staff are referred directly to the Moderator Team for investigation
- C. Investigation of Allegations
- i. The clergy/staff will meet with those involved in reporting violations as well as those accused of violating this policy.
 - ii. The clergy/staff will document the investigation

- D. Resolution of conflicts regarding this policy
 - i. Report of criminal behavior to proper authorities
 - ii. Clergy/staff will determine consequence for lesser violations on a case-by-case basis.
 - iii. Any resolution will be documented.
- E. Disclosure of Abuse to Volunteer/Leader
 - i. Volunteers/Leaders who work with children and youth may find that they are the trusted person to whom a child or youth in crisis turns. If a child makes a disclosure of abuse or shows signs of being abused, it may become necessary for a report to the proper authorities to be made.
- F. Support of Reporting Adult by clergy/staff of the Church
 - i. Volunteers who are struggling to make a decision about whether to report on suspected child abuse are encouraged to seek support from our clergy, Director of Christian Education, or Director of Youth Ministry.
- G. Mandated Reporting
 - i. Illinois clergy have now been added to the list of mandated reporters who are required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) under a new law signed by Gov. George Ryan on Friday, August 16, 2002.
 - ii. Illinois clergy are now required to report suspicions that a person (including parishioner, a parent, a church employee, teacher, or another member of the clergy) has neglected or abused a minor under their care, including sexual abuse.
 - iii. Reports are to be filed with DCFS through report to the Hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE. The hotline operates 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

Last revision 2/2/2009