

Safe Sanctuary Covenant

First Congregational United Church of Christ -- Oconomowoc, WI

Part 1: Purpose

Part 2: Screening Procedures

Part 3: Code of Behavior

Part 4: Response Plan

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Part 1: Purpose

1. Defining our Safe Sanctuaries Task Force

- a. Clergy – Rev. Stephen Welch; Rev. Lisa Schmatzhagen
- b. Clerical Assistance- Jo Szemborski
- c. Legal Assistance- Jeff Ek
- d. Education Representative- Chair of Education Ministry, Sunday School Superintendents
- e. Advocacy Panel- Our Personnel Committee

2. Mission Statement

First Congregational UCC is committed to nurturing our children through scriptural based Sunday school classes for children and youth age 3 to grade 12, and a Confirmation class for our ninth graders. Our Children & Youth Ministry also includes activities outside of the classroom, including three active youth groups – Junior Youth (grades 3-5), Middle School Youth (grades 6-8), and High School Youth (grades 9-12). We strive to provide a welcoming, safe, and open environment that addresses our youths' spiritual needs.

3. Statement of Purpose

The congregation of the First Congregational United Church of Christ aspires to be a God centered fellowship. Here, all can seek a closer relationship with God in a trusting, nurturing place. As part of this mission, one of our goals is to provide a safe environment for the children and youth who are entrusted to our care as they participate in our programs and use our facilities. **We want our congregation to be a haven, free of sexual misconduct or harassment.** To help reach these goals, we have adopted the following policies, procedures, and educational programs to reduce the possibility of child sexual or physical abuse, or any type of sexual misconduct or harassment from occurring in our congregation. The educational aspect will make us aware of potential problems, and the implementation of prudent policies should help safeguard our children, youth, and members. While not all policies can anticipate and prevent all misfortune, they can state a purpose and provide guidance to achieve the purpose. These policies express our keen interest in protecting our children and youth, while maintaining the trusting atmosphere of our congregation for the entire congregation, adults and children alike.

Part 2: Screening Procedures

Section One: Recruiting Congregational Workers

Our congregation welcomes staff and volunteers. We will strive to invite only those who have been part of **our church community for at least six months** to become involved with the Educational and Youth Programs at various levels of commitment. The pastor shall be responsible for screening applicants for such volunteer and staff positions.

Screening Procedure: Volunteers and/or paid staff or anyone with anticipated unmonitored contact with youth or children will complete a screening application, and undergo a Criminal Background Check. The Background Checks must be completed at least every two years.

The pastor will review the submitted forms. The pastor will arrange for a Criminal Records Background Check.

Any person known to have committed previous acts of sexual misconduct with children or youth shall be strictly prohibited from serving our children or youth.

All persons will have read and agreed to abide by all Policies and Procedures herein. Signature upon the appropriate application denotes a willingness to remain in compliance with these or their successors.

Section Two: Education and Training

The Associate Pastor for Youth and Families will be responsible for:

- the implementation of procedures designed to educate volunteers, staff and congregation members regarding these policies and procedures. Each new volunteer and each employee will review these policies, procedures and code of behavior.
- define and implement procedures designed to further the intent of these policies, and educate volunteers and staff on these procedures through regular training programs.
- Will coordinate regular training programs to teach staff and volunteers how and when to report a possible sexual misconduct incident and how to discuss questionable behavior.

The Administrative Ministry shall maintain procedures related to building use which uphold the intent of this policy.

This code of behavior, application process and response plan shall be subject to regular review.

Section Three: Maintenance of Records

Records of all actions required by this policy and any material pertinent to it, including reports, volunteer application and acknowledgment forms, shall be kept for a legally appropriate time in a secure and confidential place, the location and security measures to be determined by the pastor, and Advocacy Panel.

Section Four: Advocacy Panel

An Advocacy Panel shall be established for two purposes. In the event that a volunteer, congregation member or staff member is uncomfortable reporting an allegation of sexual misconduct to the pastor, that person may take the allegation or concern to the Advocacy Panel. The Panel will also serve to support staff members charged with confirming the suitability of volunteers and carrying out the Response Plan.

The Panel will be composed of the members of our Personnel Committee. The Panel will be a formally constituted congregation committee and its members may serve on other ministries

serving the congregation. Panel members will be noted on documents related to this policy and changes will be announced promptly in congregation publications. All members of this panel shall maintain a strict code of confidentiality.

Part 3: Code of Behavior - Best Practices and Regular Operating Procedures

Volunteers who have taken active part of the life of the congregation for at least **SIX MONTHS** may become involved with the Educational and Youth Programs. During this time, those planning to be directly involved in the life of the congregation shall receive training and accept the intentions provided by the following code of behavior. New employees, having satisfied the Screening Process, employed to work with children and youth, may assume their position immediately. They shall pay close, if not restrictive attention to the code of behavior.

- **The Two Adult Rule:** The children and youth in both the educational and youth fellowship program of our congregation shall be under the care and supervision of two adults, one of whom may be a high school aide. An exception would exist if programs are so constructed as to provide constant visual access and frequent observation by the department’s director, superintendent, or their designee. Furthermore, no teacher, advisor, aide or anyone else working with our children or youth should place themselves in a compromising situation by being alone with a child or with children out-of-sight of other teachers, advisors, aides, or parents.
- **Specific Guidelines for Adult Supervision:**

Adult leaders for a youth ministry activity function as representatives of the church and as such are held to different standards than when acting as a parent or adult in their own family. Adult leaders need to be 18 years of age and be at least 5 years older than the youth they are supervising. The rules and guidelines of the church must be followed by all leaders at all events, thereby providing appropriate supervision for the youth. Illegalities and irresponsibility cannot be allowed. Supervision must be consistent, reasonable and prudent.

Adults are encouraged to remember that they will be providing both supervision and modeling adult Christian behavior for the youth in their care, and should endeavor to see that the example they set is consistent with the value and expectations of the church community.

The following chart outlines minimal levels of adult supervision necessary for overnight and off-site youth ministry activities. These Guidelines are supplied by the Insurance Boards of the United Church of Christ and the American Camping Association.

AGE GROUP	COUNSELOR/YOUTH RATIO
Infants and toddlers	Presence of parent/legal guardian required.
6 - 8 years old	1 adult counselor per 6 youth
9 - 14 years old	1 adult counselor per 8 youth
15 - 18 years old	1 adult counselor per 10 youth
* A minimum of two adults will be scheduled for each overnight and off-site event.	

- **Regarding Bathroom Supervision of Educational Department Children:** Normally teachers, advisors, or aides who accompany a child to the bathroom, should remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside. If a child needs assistance with zipping, buttoning, buckling, clean up, wiping, etc., two adults need to be present, one of whom may be a high school aide. If, for any reason, a teacher or aide is left alone in a classroom, the teacher in the nearest or neighboring classroom should be so informed. Diapering of infants and toddlers may be done in the classroom if two people are present, one of whom is an adult. If anything unusual occurred during this

assistance, a note describing the help given and persons present should be written and handed to the department supervisor at the close of the educational program day.

- **Parental Consent:** The Church will request written consent from the parent or guardian before a child can attend activities or programs away from our facilities.
- **Discipline:** The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of religious responsibility, respect and cooperation. No child shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any form of physical punishment. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insult or shouting. Teachers, advisors and aides, and others helping in the classroom are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs or give alternate choices. If a child is disruptive, a teacher or aide from the class or a neighboring class may be sent to locate a staff member or the designated person in charge. If none of these people are readily available, a parent should be contacted and brought to the room.
- **Overnight Rule:** Any and all adult chaperones supervising overnight stays at our facilities or on congregational sponsored trips shall have been cleared to do so by the church staff or other designated official. Upon request, parents will be given a verbal listing of the chaperones.
- **Youth Group Activities:** Inappropriate contact such as wrestling, horseplay, sardines or other high contact games are not allowed. No adult leader, staff or volunteer should initiate or encourage inappropriate physical contact with or among children or youth. Setting boundaries is the responsibility of the adults. The Youth Group is a group ministry. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the times listed in congregation publications. No pairing or otherwise separating off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds is permitted without the approval of the supervising adults.
- **Youth Members of Boards and Committees:** No youth member of a Board, Committee, Subcommittee, or Task Force, shall be in attendance at a meeting with less than two adult members present, or the youth's parent, unless the parent has given verbal consent for their child to meet with the adult.
- **Leaving and Locking:** The last three people, including the staff person locking the door, will leave our facilities together. We avoid situations where one adult and one youth or child are left at the facility's door waiting to be picked up by parents at the end of an evening activity. Parents are encouraged to respect concluding times.
- **Key Assignment:** When a key to the building is assigned to staff or a volunteer, the office manager will maintain key assignments, as well as a list of who has access to the outside key box. It is understood that keys will not be loaned out to anyone else, no duplicate keys be made, the person shall take responsibility for the security of the key(s), and will return it when he/she no longer has the responsibility which required the use of the key.
- **Drugs, Tobacco, Alcohol:** The use of any drugs, tobacco or alcoholic products on or in congregation facilities or at congregation sponsored youth events is not permitted.
- **Transportation:** Staff and adult leaders or teachers cannot transport individual children or youth between congregation facility or events and home. Transportation for field trips, to activities, or for events is by groups and to/from the congregation facility except with the parent's permission.
- **Parental Guidelines:** We strongly encourage parents, when on the premises with their children, to know at all times where their children are, who they are with, and what they are doing. It is strongly encouraged that children 10 or under do not play in unsupervised areas.

- **Visitors On-site:** The staff or volunteers serving our congregation shall be aware of who is visiting our facilities. Visitors are welcomed and shall be accompanied on their visit to the areas frequented by our youth and children by a member of our staff.
- **Reporting Responsibilities:** Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult worker and a child or youth or between children shall be promptly reported to one of the *pastors* or member of the Advocacy Panel.
- **If You Suspect a Violation of the Code:** If a suspected case of abuse has either been reported to you or is suspected by you to have occurred at a congregational-related function or program, immediately contact the one of the *pastors* and this person only. In the case where this person cannot be contacted, call the judicatory head of your conference (Wisconsin Conference Minister is David Moyer 608-846-7880; SE Association Minister 414-771-8569). If the alleged abuser is the *pastor*, report the allegation to a member of the Advocacy Panel and the judicatory head of the Conference.

Abuse can include:

- Sexual remarks
- Inappropriate kissing
- Fondling
- Touching parts of the body which would be covered by a swimsuit.
- Watching any sexual activity
- Intercourse
- Showing pornography

If you are unsure whether or not your suspected case falls under this definition, it is strongly recommended that you err to the side of caution and report your suspicion immediately.

Part 4: Response Plan

Preliminary Response by Pre-assigned trained staff person.

- All allegations will be taken seriously.
- Response to allegations must be handled with due respect for **EVERYONE'S** privacy and confidentiality.
- Care and safety of alleged victims and or complainant (and family) are the first priority. Extend whatever pastoral resources needed. Notify parent of alleged complainant and or victim if appropriate.
- When questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible sexual misconduct or sexual harassment between adults is observed, it should be reported to the *pastor* and/or the Advocacy Panel. The incident will be documented by the *pastor* and/or the Advocacy Panel who will discuss it and make an initial response.
- When a case is reported, the pastor receiving the report is asked to interview the primary supervisor of the Education or Youth Ministry departments and to share all pertinent information with him/her. A low level, discrete investigation of the charges is to be taken as soon as possible. This will include speaking to both the alleged perpetrator and victim.
- Document all activity involved in handling the incident; note date, time, persons involved as well as the content of what was done. All documentation will be held confidential.

If Deemed Necessary:

- If, after an initial investigation by the pastor and/or Advocacy Panel, the charges are deemed valid, steps will be taken to immediately comply with all state laws. All incidents involving children shall be reported to the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention (608-261-4973), the congregation's insurance writer and attorney and the judicatory head of the conference or diocese shall also be notified.
- Should it become necessary, full cooperation will be given to civil authorities under guidance of the congregation's attorney. The attorney must be present while any investigative questions from the police or applicable agencies are being answered by anyone. If a report is made to Wisconsin Department of Health and Family services, the Advocacy Panel must carefully document all steps taken, contact legal counsel, congregation moderator, the Conference Minister, and the congregation's insurance agent.
- Treat the accused with dignity and respect and offer support. If the accused is a congregation worker, he/she should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is completed. If the accused is a paid employee, a decision will be made to maintain or suspend his/her income, as appropriate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- Be prepared to issue a public statement to inform the congregation and respond to press inquiries. This statement should communicate that the congregation regards these allegations seriously and offers responsible action, concern, and support for all involved. No details of the accusation will be released. Do not deny that the incident occurred; do not assign blame; do not minimize the situation (e.g. "It wasn't that serious."). No statement will be issued until it has been approved by the congregation's attorney.
- The Advocacy Panel and pastor will appoint one official congregation spokesperson to deal with any and all media inquiries.
- When it is deemed prudent, the investigative team should share appropriate information with the wider congregation, in all cases respecting the privacy of the individuals involved.

Checklist for First Respondent

- ✓ Document your efforts. An Incident Form can be found in the office "Safe Sanctuary File."
- ✓ Report the incident immediately (within 24 hours).
- ✓ Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child is secured.
- ✓ Do not prejudge the situation.
- ✓ Treat all involved with dignity and support.
- ✓ Use the prepared public statement to answer the press.

Checklist for Pastor and/or Advocacy Team responding to allegations of abuse

(No course of action is going to be 100% effective. If or when it may happen, a plan needs to be developed to respond to sexual abuse allegations.)

Remember to:

- ✓ Contact the proper civil authorities.
- ✓ Notify the parents when appropriate.
- ✓ Treat all allegations seriously.
- ✓ Handle the situation with respect to everyone's privacy and confidentiality.
- ✓ Immediately contact your insurance carrier.
- ✓ Give full cooperation to civil authorities with the guidance of your congregation's attorney.
- ✓ Adequate care must be shown for the well being of the victim.
- ✓ The victim should not be held responsible in any way.

Create a Response Plan

- ✓ Maintain Adequate Records.
- ✓ Select a spokesperson to speak with the media and your congregation.
- ✓ Know your state's reporting requirements.
- ✓ Use a reporting procedure.
- ✓ Prepare a position statement.
- ✓ Do not engage in denial, minimization or blame.
- ✓ Use an attorney.
- ✓ Don't accuse in public interviews.
- ✓ Work with your denomination and insurance company.

Part 5: Screening Application

Information Provided in the Screening Process

- ✓ Cover letter explaining the congregation's rationale and need for having a screening process.
 - Clearly state intentions for screening process
 - Request that applicant read all the information provided prior to submitting Application or Signing Covenant
 - Make clear that applicants and recruits must submit the signed Background Criminal Authorization before becoming involved in any ministry with children or youth
- ✓ Application /Covenant Statement/Background Criminal Authorization Form
- ✓ Copy of the church policies pertaining to persons working with children/youth
- ✓ Code of Behavior for children and youth workers adopted by the congregation
- ✓ Response Plan of the procedure that will follow if there is an allegation of abuse

For paid staff, each recruit or applicant will have read all the information and provided a completed Screening form before the position is offered.

SCREENING PROCEDURE

This confidential statement will be retained by the pastor or his/her designee

First Congregational United Church of Christ Application for Children and Youth Volunteers

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. It is being used to assist this congregation in providing a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities. Information provided will be kept strictly confidential and shared only among church pastors and the advocacy panel.

PERSONAL HISTORY

Date:	Home Phone ()
Name:	
Present Address:	
City/State/Zip:	
Please indicate the type of youth or children's work you prefer:	
Have you ever been charged with, convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
If yes, please explain:	
Do you have a current driver's license? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
If yes, please list your driver's license number and state issued:	
Do you have car insurance? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Do you have a clean driving record? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If no, list violations:	

BACKGROUND CRIMINAL AUTHORIZATION FORM

The First Congregational United Church of Christ reserves the right to run and have access to a criminal records check.

Signature Print Name

Date of Birth Social Security Number Place of Birth

Print all Aliases / Maiden Name if applicable

I agree to be bound by the Bylaws and Policies of the First Congregational United Church of Christ, refrain from unchristian conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the congregation, and to the following covenant which governs children and youth work at First Congregational United Church of Christ:

- *To honor each child's integrity and worth as a child of God.*
- *To provide a nurturing and safe environment for children and youth to grow socially, and spiritually.*
- *To continue to grow and nurture my own personal faith.*
- *To work in partnership with the professional staff, volunteers, and Christ as a part of the larger Christian community.*

I state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. This is a legally binding agreement I have read and understand.

(Signature)

(Today's Date)

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