

# First Congregational United Church of Christ

## Christian Education Commission

### Child Welfare Policy

Adopted by Council July 2012

#### Purpose

First Congregational United Church of Christ (the “Church”) is committed to providing programs, facilities, and a community within which children can safely learn, play, and worship, free from physical threats and all forms of harassment, intimidation, or abuse. This Child Welfare Policy sets out guidelines for meeting our commitments to all children who come within our care. The policy addresses the responsibilities of professional ministers, employees, and volunteers who work with children. All members of the congregation shall support child safety consistent with this policy in all interactions with children.

The Christian Education Commission (“CE Commission”) shall take a leadership role in implementing the guidelines and shall periodically review the guidelines and their implementation to determine whether changes are warranted. This Policy is in addition to any policies adopted to prevent sexual harassment, intimidation, or abuse in the wider Church.

#### General Guidelines

- **Facility**
  - **Facility Safety.** The Church shall maintain safe spaces for the care and nurturing of infants and children. This includes minimizing and/or eliminating conditions that can present physical hazards and segregating equipment or materials not suited for infants or younger children. The CE Commission shall periodically inspect the Christian Education Suite and other Church spaces frequented by children to identify and address any safety concerns. CE Leaders shall be attentive to respond to any hazardous conditions that may develop in the course of providing care or teaching.
  - **First Aid.** The Church shall maintain first aid kits in the CE suite. All child care employees and CE volunteers shall be advised of the location and content of the kits.
  - **Evacuation Plan.** The CE Commission, in consultation with the Facilities Commission, shall develop and maintain a plan for the evacuation of the CE Suite in the event of fire or other emergency. Evacuation routes and rendezvous locations shall be prominently posted in the CE Suite. All CE Leaders shall be familiar with and able to implement the evacuation plan.
  - **Access to CE Suite.** Access to the CE suite shall be limited to professional staff, child-care employees, volunteers working with the children, parents and guardians of the children, and invited guests.

- **Sanctuary Overlook.** The sanctuary overlook (enclosed room on balcony) is provided, during services, for priority use by nursing mothers and parents with infants.
- **Communication with Parents/Guardians.** Ministers, child-care workers, and other CE leaders shall endeavor, before beginning to work with any child, to ascertain from his or her guardians and from fellow CE leaders any special conditions or needs of the child, including any special medical concerns.
- **Team Work.** As far as practicable, child-care workers, teachers, and program leaders (whether employees, professional ministers, or volunteers) shall work in teams of two or more unrelated adults. At least two adult supervisors shall be present in the CE Suite during Sunday services or other programs.
- **Off-Site and Overnight Activities.** Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property and any overnight activities.
- **Reporting Misconduct, Abuse, or Neglect**
  - For purposes of this guideline, “misconduct” means conduct by a Church employee or volunteer that threatens the safety or welfare of a child through lack of due care. “Child abuse” means conduct of any caretaker that threatens the safety or welfare of a child through the intentional infliction of physical or emotional injury or any act of sexual abuse. “Child neglect” means harm to a child’s health or welfare which occurs through the failure of a parent or guardian to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical care.
  - Allegations of misconduct by any child-care employee, Sunday School teacher, or other CE volunteer should be directed to the Minister responsible for youth programs (“CE Minister”) or the chair of the Christian Education Commission. The Christian Education Commission and CE Minister shall investigate any complaint and take appropriate action. Any complainant dissatisfied with the response of the CE Commission and CE Minister may bring the issue to the Moderator for consideration by the Church Council. Any allegation involving the CE Minister or a member of the CE Commission should be directed to the Moderator and/or Senior Minister (as warranted) for consideration by Church Council.
  - Any minister, child-care employee, or CE volunteer who becomes aware of child abuse or neglect or facts and circumstances presenting a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Senior Minister and Moderator so that the Church may take appropriate and timely action, including reporting to appropriate authorities. Apart from any requirements imposed by law, the Church will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (“CFSA”) (or equivalent agency in Maryland or Virginia as warranted), if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. The DC Child Abuse Hotline is: (202) 671-SAFE [7233].
  - All allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any authorized Minister or Ministerial candidate will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Potomac Association or Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ.

- **Orientations, Disclosures and Background Checks.** Before beginning to work with children, prospective ministers, employees, and CE volunteers shall submit undergo training, orientation and/or screening, varying by position, as described below.

## Guidelines for Professional Ministers

- *This guideline applies to any person employed by the Church as a minister, including senior and associate pastors, full or part time.*
- **Training.** All ministers shall undergo training in procedures/policies to detect and prevent sexual harassment and abuse and child neglect and abuse. Such training may consist of a review of on-line or other instructional materials provided by the United Church of Christ and the District of Columbia CFSA or comparable sources.
- **Orientation/Acknowledgment.** All ministers shall receive an orientation in this Child Welfare Policy and procedures and shall execute the Acknowledgment (attached).
- **Disclosure.** Before beginning work, all prospective ministers shall complete the Disclosure (attached) or provide equivalent information as part of a verified employment application form.
- **Background Check.** Background check. Before beginning work, prospective ministers shall undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to: (1) inquiries of references, (2) a criminal history and credit history verification by a third party vendor (*e.g.*, Praesidium, Inc.), and (3) a registered sex offender review (checking names on the Department of Justice website at [www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)), which shall be repeated on an annual basis.

## Guidelines for Child-Care Employees and Others Paid to Work With Youth

- *These guidelines apply to all persons paid by the Church to provide child-care service or to lead youth programs (as all or part of their employment services).*
- **Orientation/Acknowledgment.** All child-care employees shall receive an orientation in this Child Welfare Policy and procedures and shall execute the Acknowledgment (attached).
- **Disclosure.** Before beginning work, all prospective child-care employees shall complete the Disclosure (attached) or provide equivalent information as part of a verified employment application form.
- **Background check.** Before beginning work, prospective employees shall undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to: (1) inquiries of references, (2) a criminal history and credit history verification by a third party vendor, and (3) a registered sex offender review, which shall be repeated on an annual basis.

## Guidelines for Volunteer CE Leaders

- *This guideline applies to Sunday School teachers and all others who volunteer to lead youth programs or activities (hereinafter “Church CE Leaders”). It does not apply to guests invited to address groups of children in the presence of Church CE leaders.*
- **Orientation/Acknowledgment.** All Church CE Leaders shall receive an orientation in this Child Welfare Policy and related procedures and sign the attached acknowledgement form.
- **Background Check.** All Church CE leaders shall have been members of the church for at least six months or associated with the church for at least one year. All CE leaders also shall undergo a background check including but not necessarily limited to a registered sex offender review, which shall be repeated on an annual basis.