

Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse

***St. John's United Church of Christ
Nazareth, PA***

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I. Code of Conduct for Protection of Children and Youth

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and as such are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through policies and codes of conduct is not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Relationships in ministry should, ideally, always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or allow harm to occur. This Code of Conduct has been adopted by St. John's United Church of Christ, Nazareth, PA to help the church create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them. All Church Personnel (see definition below) are asked to carefully consider each statement in the Code and within the *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse* before agreeing to adhere to the statements and continue in service to the church.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- A. Church Personnel agree to do their best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
- B. Church Personnel agree to not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect any child or youth.
- C. Church Personnel agree to comply with the policies for general conduct with children and youth as defined in these *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse*.
- D. All Church Personnel agree to comply with the *Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth* (Appendix A).
- E. In the event that Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth, church personnel agree to immediately report their observations in accordance with Section IV.1 of this policy.
- F. All Church Personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth in accordance with Section IV.1 of this policy.
- G. Church Personnel understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.

II. General Definitions

1. CHURCH PERSONNEL

For the purposes of this policy, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the church:

- A. All clergy whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service to this congregation.
- B. All paid personnel whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services at St. John's UCC including those employed by St. John's UCC Nursery School.
- C. Volunteers, including any person who enters into, offers him or herself or actually assists with ministries, programs or activities of the church, whether or not they have been selected or assigned to do so.

2. CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- A. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.
- B. A **youth** is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.

3. CHURCH PERSONNEL WHO WORK WITH OR AROUND CHILDREN OR YOUTH

For the purpose of this policy, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth**:

- A. All clergy whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
- B. All paid or volunteer Church Personnel whose work regularly takes them throughout the facility or grounds or who has keys giving them access to the buildings on the grounds.
- C. All persons who have direct contact with children or youth and provide direct care, supervision, guidance or control of children and youth or routine interaction with children or youth in ministries, programs or activities.
- D. All persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle.
- E. Any paid personnel whose living quarters are on the grounds of the church, school or other related agency.
- F. Members of the Church and Ministry Committee.

Examples of Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth**: include, but are not limited to:

- Church school teachers
- Children's or youth choir directors
- Organists who work with children or youth
- Volunteer youth leaders and confirmation mentors
- All Church Personnel who provide child care service.
- All staff, whether volunteer or paid, at church camps.
- Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth.

4. TYPES OF ABUSE

- A. **Physical abuse** is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.
- B. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and an adult. This includes any activity, which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth.
- C. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.
- D. **Emotional abuse** is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
- E. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.
- F. **Economic exploitation** is the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth's belongings or money.

5. LIMITED ACCESS POLICY

St. John's United Church of Christ located in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, is a congregation that boldly proclaims "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!" and as such affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshiping with us, especially in times of distress and serious personal troubles. All convicted sex offenders must abide by the Limited Access Agreement listed as Appendix B.

III. Safeguards for Children and Youth

1. SCREENING AND SELECTION

Any and all Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth** shall be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:

- A. **A standard application** completed by the applicant that includes a copy of this policy.
- B. **Pennsylvania Child Abuse Clearance, Pennsylvania Criminal Background Check, Mandated Reporter Training for Church Personnel** (Volunteers not having lived in the state of Pennsylvania for the past 10 consecutive years must also obtain additional FBI Fingerprinting) and additional **FBI Fingerprinting for clergy and paid employees** as required by **Pennsylvania House Bill 435** who **Work With or Around Children or Youth**.
- C. **Sexual offender registry check** as determined by the church.
- D. **Individual interview** with the applicant.
- E. **Reference checks**
- F. **Copy of a valid Driving license and copy of current insurance card** if the person may be transporting children or youth.

Additional steps to be taken include:

- A. All information gathered about an applicant will be carefully reviewed by the Senior Pastor or his/her designate to make a determination, in consultation with others as necessary, of whether or not the person is appropriate to work with children or youth.
- B. Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth** must have a personnel file that is kept where other church records are kept.
- C. Each applicant's file will be kept secure. No information will be disclosed except to the person/persons who are collecting the information or the person/persons recruiting or supervising the position, or the Senior Pastor.
- D. St. John's volunteers will be notified by letter (in writing) 60 days prior to the expiration of their clearances that their clearances will need to be renewed if they wish to continue to volunteer. Included with the letter will be a form that volunteers must sign confirming their commitment and intention to renew their clearances within a period of 60 days following the expiration of their current clearances. The signed form is to be returned to the church office prior to the expiration of their current clearances in order for the individual to continue volunteering.
- E. All clearances must be renewed according to Pennsylvania State Statutes for Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth**. These clearance certificates (or copies) must be submitted and be placed on file in the Church Office.
- F. Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth** and who already possess any of the above listed background clearances and/or certificates that have been completed during the current calendar year may be submitted in lieu of resubmitting the requirements.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

- A. Child abuse prevention education and training is required for all **Church Personnel Who Work With or Around Children or Youth** as determined by the church.
- B. Church Personnel who are responsible for screening and selection of **Church Personnel Who Work With or Around Children or Youth** are required to complete additional specialized education and training in screening, selection and monitoring.
- C. The approved training programs will be stipulated by the Consistory.

3. MONITORING AND SUPERVISION OF PROGRAMS

- A. All programs involving youth must have a ratio of one adult for every eight youth. All programs involving children must have a ratio of one adult for every eight children.
- B. Church Personnel are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth or multiple children or youth where other adults cannot easily observe them, except in transport situations as explained next.
- C. Church Personnel may be the sole adult in a vehicle when transporting more than one child or youth. Church Personnel may be the sole adult in a vehicle with a single child or youth if that sole passenger is their own child. The sole adult may drop a child or youth at their home provided that there is always more than one child or youth remaining in the vehicle after the drop-off, unless the sole remaining passenger is their own child.
- D. Church Personnel over the age of 21 must directly supervise Church Personnel under the age of 18 and be physically present during all activities
- E. An up to date list of approved ministries, activities and programs of the church for children and youth will be maintained in the church office or other place where church records are kept.
- F. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering, diapering or toileting infants or children, Church Personnel will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.
- G. When both boys and girls are participating in an event lasting eight hours or more, male and female adults must be present.
- H. All Church Personnel who **Work With or Around Children or Youth** must agree to comply with the St. John's United Church of Christ, Nazareth, PA Guidelines for *Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth* (Appendix A).
- I. Programs for infants and children under six (6) years old will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.
- J. Church Personnel are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.
- K. Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before Church Personnel transport children and youth for a ministry, activity, or program of the church or for any purpose.
- L. Church Personnel will respond to children and youth with respect, consideration and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture or socio-economic status.

- M. One-to-one counseling with children or youth will be done in an open or public or other place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others.
- N. Church Personnel are prohibited from dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth.
- O. Church Personnel are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child or youth.
- P. Church Personnel are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.
- Q. Church Personnel are prohibited from using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.
- R. Church Personnel are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the Internet, with children or youth.
- S. Church Personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds, sleeping bags, tents, hotel rooms or other rooms with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of all children or youth in the bed, sleeping bag, tent, hotel room or other room. It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleep with all the children or youth participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge.
- T. Church Personnel are prohibited from dressing, undressing, bathing, or showering in the presence of children or youth.
- U. Church Personnel are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth or others.
- V. Church Personnel are prohibited from using harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.
- W. Church Personnel are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities relating to children's or youth ministry or camp activities.

IV. Responding to Problems

1. REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE OF CHILDREN OR YOUTH

- A. When Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors, behaviors that are inconsistent with the **Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth**, or which may violate any provision of these *Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse*, they must immediately report their observations to the Childline Abuse Hotline at 1-800-932-0313.

Appendices

APPENDIX A - GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE AFFECTION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

St. John's United Church of Christ, Nazareth PA is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for our children's and youth ministries that protect our children and youth from abuse and our Church Personnel from misunderstandings. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church Personnel working around or with children or youth.

- A. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. Some **positive** and **appropriate** forms of affection are listed below:
- Brief hugs.
 - Pats on the shoulder or back.
 - Handshakes.
 - "High-fives" and hand slapping.
 - Verbal praise.
 - Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth.
 - Arms around shoulders.
 - Holding hands while walking with small children.
 - Sitting beside small children.
 - Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children.
 - Holding hands during prayer.
 - Pats on the head when culturally appropriate.
- B. The following forms of affection are considered **inappropriate** with children and youth in ministry setting because many of them are the behaviors that child molesters use to groom children or youth and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves, sexual abuse.
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
 - Kisses on the mouth.
 - Holding children over three years old on the lap repeatedly or for extended periods of time.
 - Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers.
 - Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms.
 - Occupying a bed with a child or youth
 - Touching knees or legs of children or youth.
 - Wrestling with children or youth.
 - Tickling children or youth.
 - Piggyback rides.
 - Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult.
 - Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth.
 - Any form of unwanted affection.

- Comments or compliments, spoken, written, or electronic, that relate to physique or body development or that are sexual in nature. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touching of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing.
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth.
- Private meals with individual children or youth.
- Repeated and sustained private communication, spoken, written or electronic, not related a church program or one’s church employment.

APPENDIX B – LIMITED ACCESS AGREEMENT

Between St. John's UCC and _____, a Convicted Sex Offender

St. John's United Church of Christ located in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, is a congregation that boldly proclaims "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!" and as such affirms the dignity and worth of all persons. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshiping with us, especially in times of distress and serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our congregation.

We welcome you, but your participation in our congregational life will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth. Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events specifically for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, children's stories or talks for worship, youth group specific-events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.

Within these guidelines, the congregation welcomes your participation in worship services, hospitality time following worship, meetings, adult education, and all adult social events. You are to avoid all contact with children and youth under the age of 18 on church property or congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- You will remain in the presence of a Parish Associate who knows your situation at all times while on church-owned property, church-rented property, or at congregation-sponsored events. You must meet that person before coming onto church property (or before arriving at any congregation-sponsored event), remain with him/her at all times, and depart with him/her.
- Do not talk with children unless both you and the child/youth have immediate supervision beside you.
- If an activity is an intergenerational event, you will stay with your designated Parish Associate and will not initiate conversation with a child or youth.
- If a child or youth in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation. If this is impossible to do, ensure that a Parish Associate is beside you and the child or youth has an adult with them.
- Do not ask for, seek access to, nor remove from the church any materials, files, directories, etc. listing members and friends of the church.
- We ask that you are aware of your surroundings during hospitality time and retain the above stated, proper boundaries with any children or youth present.
- While working outside on church property you must remain in the presence of your Parish Associate. If an unsupervised child or youth comes towards your direction, and a Parish Associate is not immediately besides you, you must remove yourself from the situation until the child or youth has passed by.

As a part of this agreement it is understood that you will have four (4) members (all unrelated to you) of this congregation (approved by the pastor and our Church and Ministry Committee) who thoroughly know your history and are willing to serve as your Parish Associates. You will be welcome on church property and at church-sponsored events but must be accompanied at all times by or in clear view of one of the Parish Associates named below:

To engage your integration into the congregation and to assist you in maximizing your experience with the church it is agreed that you will meet on a quarterly basis with the Parish Associates and the pastor together or separately to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. These meetings will also serve as an ongoing review of the implementation of this agreement.

As part of this agreement, you acknowledge and agree that the congregation will be notified of your history. This will include, but not be limited to an announcement during our worship services informing the congregation of your presence among us and that you have agreed to follow this policy while you are associated with our congregation. New members of the congregation will be notified individually by the pastor.

Implementation of this agreement is based upon a review by the clergy of the most current supporting documents as follows:

A statement from the court as to the nature of the conviction.

A risk assessment from a qualified therapist.

A report from a certified treatment provider indicating that you are not at too high a risk for recidivism.

Any change in the above must be reported immediately to a member of the clergy.

REASONS FOR EXCLUDING A PERSON FROM ALL CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

Refusal to allow the clergy to contact the treatment provider and parole officer.

Refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.

Report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high a risk for recidivism.

Refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement.

Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement.

This agreement will remain in effect until or unless:

- _____ fails to honor the terms of the agreement, thus nullifying it.
- It is superseded by any policies and procedures put in place by the church's Church and Ministry Committee. The Church and Ministry Committee in consultation with the pastor is the body responsible for providing _____ with guidelines, support, and counsel for _____ participation in the life of the congregation.
- _____, the pastor, and the Church and Ministry Committee mutually agree to change the terms of this agreement.

I have reviewed the terms of the above limited access agreement and agree to abide by its provisions. Failure to honor its terms will result in my being denied access to church property and all church events.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Signature of Witness

Date

