



FOUNDED IN 1875
NORTH CONGREGATIONAL
United Church Of Christ
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North Church Safe Church Policy Adopted by North Church Council Monday, May 8, 2017

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Introduction <i>"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me"</i> (Matthew 18:5)

I. Statement of Purpose and Covenant

North Congregational United Church of Christ ("North Church") seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and adults who participate in our educational programs and related social activities. By implementing the practices below, our goal is to protect participants from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our volunteers from false accusations. Volunteers of North Church must be aware that the North Church does not tolerate violent or abusive behavior of any type, or any other unlawful conduct on its property or by its volunteers, particularly as it relates to those most vulnerable.

Every member of North Church, whether clergy, leader, lay staff, volunteer or parent, has a role in nurturing appropriate conduct and in taking action to prevent and correct unlawful or inappropriate behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this policy up to and including termination of member status and/or volunteer status.

To fulfill our commitment to providing a safe environment, North Church has adopted the following procedures to be used, without exception, when selecting educational ministry volunteers who are also required to adhere to the North Church's Anti-Harassment Policy.

This Policy will be updated accordingly at the direction of the Chair(s) of the Board of Christian Education and the Superintendent of Sunday School

II. Obligations of Volunteers to Understand This Policy and Report Suspected Violations

Each volunteer is expected to acquire knowledge of the details of this policy and related procedures in order to, among other things:

- 1) Prevent abuse or mistreatment of adults or children, including the abuse of one child by another.
- 2) Manage risk of one-on-one contact between adults and children.
- 3) Understand and accept reporting obligations and know how to report any suspected violation of this Policy or as required by applicable law, and cooperate with any investigations as may follow.
- 4) Understand how, by their action or inaction, they could individually pose a risk to North Church or themselves in the form of legal liability and loss of reputation.

III. Volunteer Screening Procedures

Volunteers must meet the standards of any church policy pertaining to them.

Prior to beginning their duties in education and related programs, each prospective volunteer who will work with children, youth, and adults shall:

- 1) Complete and return volunteer information forms. No answers may be omitted. Falsification of any aspect of the information forms shall be grounds for immediate revocation of volunteer status.
- 2) Provide a minimum of three references, which should include a mixture of both work-related, if possible, and personal references. The Chair(s) of the Board of Christian Education and the Superintendent of Sunday School, or his or her designee, intends to contact at least two of the references
- 3) Grant advanced written permission to conduct a background check. The required background check may include fingerprinting by an authorized agency. Volunteer status will be contingent on the results of this background check.
- 4) Upon selection, sign an acknowledgement of these policies and procedures and fulfill all training obligations prior to assuming duties.
- 5) Certifications for volunteers of background checks will be regularly obtained every two (2) years.

Volunteers shall be active members of the church, or otherwise affiliated with the church, for no less than six months before being permitted to work in child oriented programs. There shall be **no exceptions** to this policy, even when volunteer candidates come from another church with similar programs.

Grandfathering Not Permitted

Each board member or volunteer now serving and regardless of length of service shall submit to a background check as is required for candidate volunteers.

IV. Supervision and Interaction Between Individuals

- 1) Whenever possible, two adults should be present at every function or program involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This includes each classroom, vehicles, or other enclosed areas. For large groups, the number of adult supervisors should be increased where appropriate.
- 2) Two or more adults should be assigned to monitor children's, youth's, and vulnerable adult activities in areas outside the location of a ministry service or event that is in progress. The adults assigned must have been previously approved through our volunteer screening process.
- 3) Volunteers should arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled activity. They must remain at their assigned post until all people in their care have been picked up by an authorized person. No children or youth should be released to find their parents or wait unattended for transportation.
- 4) For children age 6 or older, at least one adult female should take girls to the restroom, and one adult male should take boys to the restroom. The adult should check that the restroom is safe and then wait outside the restroom for the children. Children age 5 or younger should be assisted, as requested, in the restroom by an adult volunteer with the door open and the adult should inform the other volunteer before assisting.
- 5) Volunteers must follow the guidelines for showing appropriate affection. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining appropriate boundaries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Acceptable forms of affection include verbal praise, side hugs, handshakes, "high fives," holding hands while walking or praying with small children. However, physical affection should only be initiated by the child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- 6) Volunteers will avoid the appearance of impropriety and not engage in inappropriate behaviors towards children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Inappropriate behaviors involving such individuals include, but are not limited to:
 - ❖ Taking such individuals or not removing them from isolated areas such as closets, staff only areas, or other areas cut off from easy view
 - ❖ Hugging from the front or back; lengthy embraces
 - ❖ Kissing on the mouth
 - ❖ Holding children over 3 years old on the lap
 - ❖ Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
 - ❖ Touching thighs
 - ❖ Wrestling, tickling, or giving piggyback rides
 - ❖ Engaging in massages

- ❖ Comments or compliments that relate to anyone's physique or body development (for example, "You sure are developing," or "Those jeans look really good on you").
- ❖ Giving gifts or money to individual children, youth or vulnerable adults
- ❖ Private meals with individual children, youth or vulnerable adults
- ❖ Any form of unwanted affection
- ❖ Any conduct that 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 church environment
- ❖ Contact that has sexual overtones
- ❖ Sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, emails, invitations, or electronic versions or postings
- ❖ Sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, sexual propositions
- ❖ Pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse, or
- ❖ Leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, magazines, or showing or sharing images through electronic media

7) Volunteers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Physical restraint is a last resort and should only be used in a situation where it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming himself or another individual. Disciplinary problems should immediately be reported to the activity coordinator or Superintendent and to a parent or guardian.

V. Medications Policy

It is the policy of North Church not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children and youth under the care of the Christian Education Program. Medications should be administered by a parent at home.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted by parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Superintendent of Sunday School to develop a plan of action. Exceptions to the medications policy shall be documented in advance and writing.

VI. Violation of This Policy and Internal Investigation

- 1) Volunteers or employees who become aware of any violation of this Policy occurring within any North Church activity must immediately inform the Senior Pastor or the Chair(s) of the Board of Christian Education and the Superintendent of the Sunday School.
- 2) After taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the child, youth or vulnerable adult is safe, the Senior Pastor, Chair Person, or Superintendent who becomes aware of a possible violation will ensure that parents or guardians are informed of the alleged incident as soon as possible.

Internal Investigation

Any allegation of violation of the Policy will be promptly investigated and, if appropriate, law enforcement will be notified. Each incident will be investigated by the appropriate Church leader, and if appropriate, with the assistance of legal counsel. All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers of this ministry are required to cooperate during the investigation.

- 1) Any volunteer who is the subject of any investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
- 2) Depending upon the violation, any volunteer(s) who violate(s) this Policy may have their volunteer status revoked. Volunteers making good faith complaints of violation(s) of this Policy will not be retaliated against.

VII. Training About Abuse Prevention

North Church is committed to providing abuse prevention. The mission of North Church is first to prevent abuse of children, youths or vulnerable adults through nurturing Safe Church practices and to guide them through adequate training.

Each new volunteer shall complete a specific program of training before assuming duties. Fulfillment of training requirements shall be documented and records shall be maintained by the Chair(s) of the Board of Christian Education and/or the Superintendent of Sunday School. Training shall occur regularly.

Generally, abuse prevention curriculum should include:

1) Organization level

- ❖ Review of expected conduct and boundaries
- ❖ Explanation of procedures for reporting violations of the Policy or suspected child abuse. This should include making a report to parents and guardians and law enforcement, if appropriate.
- ❖ Explanation of things that an adult should not do when a child reports abuse; this is important to avoid suggesting an answer to questions
- ❖ Review of how to write down what a reporting child says
- ❖ Explanation of how to reassure a child who reports abuse

2) Abuse prevention education will be provided regularly about:

- ❖ Effects of sexual abuse
- ❖ Identifying and managing high-risk situations such as bathroom use, transition times, and free times
- ❖ Specific monitoring and supervision activities to prevent child-on-child sexual activity
- ❖ How to respond to incidents of sexual activity between children

3) Other topics for abuse prevention training may include:

- ❖ Types of child molesters
- ❖ Characteristics of abuse
- ❖ How child molesters operate: access, privacy, and control
- ❖ Protecting oneself from false allegations
- ❖ Examples of child-on-child sexual abuse, even among young children
- ❖ Characteristics of children more likely to act out sexually
- ❖ Characteristics of children more likely to be abused

The Chair(s) of the Board of Christian Education and/or the Superintendent of Sunday School shall seek to assure that each volunteer has understood the requirements of these policies and procedures and shall provide additional supervision and guidance as needed to assure required conduct.

VIII. Forms To Be Used With This Safe Church Policy

- 1) Volunteer Information Form
- 2) Reference Response Information
- 3) Activity Participation Agreement
- 4) Transportation Permission Form
- 5) Vehicle Authorization Form
- 6) Notice of Injury

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