

# **West Park United Church of Christ**

## **Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse Prevention**

### **I Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment**

As a community of Christian faith, West Park United Church of Christ (WPUCC) is committed to creating and maintaining a community, and to providing programs and facilities, in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with WPUCC should be aware that the church is opposed to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of WPUCC to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

### **II Ministerial Conduct**

- A. Definition of ‘minister’: all clergy, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and volunteers who are engaged in ministry to the congregation.
- B. Requirements for ministerial conduct:
  - 1. Be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which one serves.
  - 2. Understand the ways in which use or misuse of authority may affect others.
  - 3. Nurture safety within ministerial relationships by:
    - a. Being attentive to self-care and education,
    - b. Maintaining appropriate boundaries
    - c. Referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.
- C. WPUCC will not tolerate sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and/or verbal and physical abuse of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in paid or volunteer ministry on behalf of the church.
- D. WPUCC will not tolerate sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and/or verbal and physical abuse between individuals in non-ministerial relationships on church property or at church-sponsored events.
- E. WPUCC’s procedure for addressing complaints and allegations of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse are described in Sections 5 and 6 below.

### **III Requirements for Clergy**

- A. All clergy will submit a disclosure form.
- B. All clergy under consideration for call or employment will be interviewed in person to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.

C. All clergy will undergo a background check, including:

1. Inquiries of references,
2. Criminal history verification by a third party, and
3. Initial and periodic review of relevant Federal and State registries of convicted sex offenders.

D. Clergy will attend all boundary workshops required by the Eastern Ohio/Western Reserve Associations (EO/WRA) of the United Church of Christ Ohio Conference, or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years.

E. Behavior that concerns the fitness for ministry of any Clergy will be forwarded to the Committee on Ministry of the EO/WRA Associations of the United Church of Christ at (330) 940-2220

#### **IV Policy and Requirements for Volunteers Working with the Children's and Youth Ministry**

A. Policy Affirmation: WPUCC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love.

B. WPUCC Affiliation and Self-Disclosure Documents

1. Volunteers who work with minors will be members of WPUCC or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with WPUCC for at least six months.
2. Volunteers and paid staff who regularly work with children and youth will submit a self-disclosure document every 3 years to a Safe Church Committee, which will consist of the Senior Pastor, Licensed Minister, Moderator and Vice-Moderator.
3. Positions that will require a self-disclosure document every 3 years will include:
  - a. Clergy
  - b. Christian education administrators
  - c. Paid and volunteer childcare providers
  - d. Church school teachers and guides
  - e. Volunteer youth group advisors
  - f. Youth travel chaperones and drivers for youth and children's events
  - g. Choir directors for children and youth
  - h. Other leaders for children and youth programs
  - k. Contract Employees
4. WPUCC Safe Church Committee will have final approval on all persons working with children and youth.

### C. Orientation and Training about WPUCC Safe Church Policies and Procedures

1. All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive boundary training and orientation regarding the WPUCC Safe Church policy and procedures. All those under the guidelines of this policy will be required to complete the training every three years.
2. Children and youth at WPUCC will receive instruction about WPUCC Safe Church policies and procedures as part of the yearly church school curriculum.
  - a. Such instruction will be age-appropriate and appropriate to the participation of children and youth in the life of congregation.
  - b. Curriculum will be developed by the WPUCC Board of Christian Education in consultation with the Clergy and other appropriate WPUCC and United Church of Christ entities.
  - c. Training will be administered by the WPUCC Board of Christian Education, Pastors and/or other appropriate entities.

### D. Criminal Background Checks

1. All prospective paid employees will undergo a background check, which may include:
  - a. Inquiries of references
  - b. Criminal history verification
  - c. Review of relevant federal and state registries of convicted sex offenders.
2. All paid employees, including contract workers, will undergo a background check every 3 years which will include:
  - a. Criminal history verification
  - b. Review of relevant federal and state registries of convicted sex offenders
3. Volunteer positions that require a criminal background check and review of relevant federal and state registries of convicted sex offenders include:
  - a. Church school teachers and guides
  - b. Youth group advisors and travel advisors
  - e. Overnight chaperones for youth and children's events
4. If a background check reports a past offense, then the following steps may be taken:
  - a. When a background check indicates an individual is a sex offender or otherwise abusive, this should be brought to the attention of the Senior Pastor as soon as possible.
  - b. The Senior Pastor may then, as deemed necessary, notify the Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Conference Minister, and the UCC Insurance Advisory Board.
  - c. The Safe Church Committee should meet immediately to determine a strategy and set it in motion. Appropriate pastoral care will be offered to the individual and the individual's

family and close friends.

d. A meeting with the person in question should be held as soon as possible in order to discuss his/her future participation in the life of WPUCC. Assuming s/he had not disclosed this information to a Pastor previously, several possible courses of action may be taken, including requiring the individual to avoid all contact at church with children and youth (or the appropriate group fitting the past offense). If the person in question refuses to meet or we cannot reach a mutual understanding at the meeting, a final course of action might include banning the person in question from church property and church functions.

e. In order to maintain confidentiality, criminal background checks/self-disclosure documents of lay persons will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. Background Check/self-disclosure documents for the Senior Pastor and other clergy will be reviewed by the Moderator and Vice-Moderator.

f. In some instances, reporting may be required, including an informational letter to the congregation.

5. A criminal history does not automatically exclude a volunteer or staff member from service to WPUCC.

#### E. Supervision of Children and Youth Activities

1. Policy Affirmation: WPUCC will provide supervision and adequate safeguards for children and youth activities.

2. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, there will be at least two adults present with children.

3. Youth over the age of 13 may assist an adult in supervising children's activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two adults be present.

a. Youth assistants will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures appropriate to the nature of the activity.

4. Written consent of a parent or guardian will be required for each event off church property, and any overnight activities.

5. All overnight youth activities must be supervised by both male and female adult travel advisors and/or chaperones, with the total number of adults to be determined by the size of the group.

a. Travel Advisors and chaperones may be required to adhere to additional guidelines and agreements as determined by the WPUCC Board of Christian Education or other appropriate WPUCC entity.

6. Church-sponsored youth events at private homes will require the host adults to adhere to the policies and requirements determined by the Board of Christian Education or other appropriate WPUCC entity.

#### V. Policy Regarding Members or Friends who are Registered Sex Offenders or Have a History of

## **Abuse**

- A. When a church member or friend discloses a history of abuse or sexual offense to a Pastor or church leader, the Pastor should seek a comprehensive understanding of what happened, how many were involved and in what situations, legal disposition of the case(s) if any, and what therapeutic help has been sought and obtained. This information is not confidential and will be shared by the Pastor with anyone s/he deems necessary, including but not limited to the Moderator and the Safe Church Committee.
- B. The individual will be asked to avoid all contact at church with children and youth (or the appropriate group fitting the past offense).
- C. The Pastor should meet with the Safe Church Committee and the Moderator thereby creating a review team. If additional information about the incident is needed, that should be sought. A response plan should be determined and put into action.
- D. The review team will hold a meeting with the member or friend in question in order to discuss if it is possible for this individual to safely be a part of the church's fellowship and under what conditions.
- E. In executive session, the review team shall make these determinations (and consequences if violated), put them in writing, and submit them to the individual for his/her acceptance via signature.
- F. This document (and all these proceedings) will be kept in a confidential place. As appropriate, the document may be shared with the church. Every new Pastor should be briefed about this situation.

## **VI. Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment**

### **A. Procedures to address incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:**

1. Attempt to resolve the matter directly with the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.
2. Report the incident to the Clergy, to resolve the matter informally.
3. Refer the matter to the Safe Church Committee to investigate the complaint, advise appropriate next steps.

### **B. WPUCC Safe Church Committee**

1. The WPUCC Safe Church Committee will be comprised of four persons, including at least one male and one female -- Senior Pastor, Licensed Pastor, Moderator and Vice Moderator. In the circumstance when all the roles are filled by persons of the same gender, the Committee should be expanded to five persons to ensure gender representation. The Safe Church Committee will administer the WPUCC Safe Church Policy and will investigate complaints under this policy.
2. The Safe Church Committee will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.
3. The Safe Church Committee will regularly review the Safe Church Policy and recommend updates to Church Council as necessary.
4. The Safe Church Committee will be responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of documents.

## **VII. Procedures for Reporting Abuse**

A. WPUCC will report all known or suspected child abuse and neglect, as well as adult or elder adult abuse:

1. Cuyahoga County Child and Family Services -- (216) 696-5437
2. Cuyahoga County Adult/Elder Abuse Hotline -- (216) 420-6700

## **VIII. Definitions**

A. Clergy: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ or other recognized judicatory body.

B. Ministerial Relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

C. Sexual Exploitation: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a person engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior.

D. Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes and with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

1. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- a. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity.
- b. 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
- c. 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 church environment.

2. Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

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

3. Sexual harassment also includes:

- a. Continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome.
- b. Using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another.
- c. Suggestions or threats that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church.
- d. Withholding support for an appointment and suggesting that poor reports, will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition;
- e. Hinting that benefits will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Adopted by WPUCC Church Council on July 27, 2017