



Safe Church Policy

Sexual Exploitation, Ministerial Conduct, and Youth Protection Policy
Adopted May 2025

The Congregational Church of Mansfield
A United Church of Christ
17 West Street, Mansfield MA 02048
508-339.4793
office@occmansfield.org

Table of Contents

1. Statement of Policy
2. Safe Church Contacts
3. General Definitions
4. Code of Conduct
5. Policies and Procedures
6. Screening
7. Training
8. Monitoring and Supervision
9. Responding
10. Congregational Awareness
11. Registered Sex Offender Policy
12. Acknowledgment of Safe Church Policies and Procedures
13. Appendices

1. Statement of Policy

As a community of Christian faith, The Congregational Church of Mansfield is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which members, friends, Clergy, employees, and volunteers can worship, learn, and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. The congregation of The Congregational Church of Mansfield supports principles of Safe Church, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith.

The Congregational Church of Mansfield strongly opposes and prohibits “sexual exploitation”, “sexual harassment” or any form of exploitation or abuse of others regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identification or mental capacity. Every member of the Congregation, whether “authorized clergy”, leader, lay staff, volunteer or parent, has a role to lead those who look to them individually for guidance, to monitor their behavior, and redirect them as they cross the boundaries of Safe Church.

It is the intention of our congregation to affirmatively nurture good behavior, and to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this policy. Our congregation shall nurture good conduct as demonstrated by personal behaviors that are consistent with our Christian values. As we might conduct an orchestra, we shall guide and lead in ministry.

2. Safe Church Contacts

Church Moderator - Peter Ham

Pastor - Rev. Marissa Rapoza

Parish Relations Team Co-Leader - John Partridge

Trustee Chair - Nicole Reynolds

Deacon Chair - Eric Greenberg

Coordinator of Children’s Christian Education - Meghan Rego

3. General Definitions

1. Physical abuse is an injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a youth.
2. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a youth and an adult or between two youths. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the other youth.
3. Emotional abuse is a mental or emotional injury to a youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
4. Neglect is the failure to provide for a youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a youth from harm.
5. A Minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as youth throughout policy).
6. A Vulnerable Adult is anyone aged 18 or over, who is or may need community care services because of mental or other disability, age, or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
7. Mandatory Reporters are those persons required by Massachusetts law to report suspected abuse to police or child welfare agencies.
8. Authorized Clergy includes any person who is admitted to ministry by The United Church of Christ, who serves the congregation in any capacity whether called as pastor or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, or volunteer capacity.

4. Code of Conduct

The following Code of Conduct is intended to assist Clergy, employees, and volunteers in making decisions about interactions with youth and vulnerable adults. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact your supervisor.

The Congregational Church of Mansfield provides our youth and vulnerable adults with the highest quality services available. We are committed to creating an environment for youth and vulnerable adults that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated, and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal from The Congregational Church of Mansfield. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth and vulnerable adults or allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. The Congregational Church of Mansfield will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation. The Conduct with

Youth and Vulnerable Adult outlines specific expectations of the Clergy, employees, and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

Federally protected categories

(<https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/3-who-protected-employment-discrimination>) include “discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity), national origin, age (40 or older), disability and genetic information (including family medical history).”

Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not abuse youth and vulnerable adults in anyway including (but not limited to) the following: Physical abuse: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints; Verbal abuse: degrading, threatening, cursing; Sexual abuse: inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations; Mental abuse: shaming, humiliation, cruelty; and Neglect: withholding food, water, shelter [

The Congregational Church of Mansfield will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult. In addition, The Congregational Church of Mansfield will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

- Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
 - a. *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
 - b. *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
 - c. *Nonverbal or relational bullying* – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
 - d. *Cyberbullying* – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
 - Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - Posting sensitive, private information about another person.

- Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
 - Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
 - Hazing – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
2. Sexualized bullying – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.

Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all youth and vulnerable adults, Clergy, employees, and volunteers.

- All Clergy, employees, and volunteers must follow state specific mandatory reporting requirements. They should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. They will:
 - a. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
 - b. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youth and vulnerable adults against abuse.
 - c. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
 - d. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken

5. Policies and Procedures for Working with Youth and Vulnerable Adults

Policies define the bandwidth of acceptable behavior in an organization. Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to youths, when staff know and understand policies, they can identify, interrupt, and report policy violations. Simply interrupting a policy violation can prevent a false allegation of abuse or put an offender on notice that no one works in private, the rules apply to everyone, and violations will be detected.

A. Physical Contact

The Congregational Church of Mansfield's physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting youths, Clergy, employees, and volunteers. The Congregational Church of Mansfield encourages appropriate physical contact with youths and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by Clergy, employees, and

volunteers towards youths in the organization's programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

The Congregational Church of Mansfield's policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side hugs • Shoulder-to-shoulder or "temple" hugs • Pats on the shoulder or back • Handshakes • High-fives and hand slapping • Verbal praise • Pats on the head when culturally appropriate • Touching hands, shoulders, and arms • Arms around shoulders • Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-frontal hugs • Kisses • Showing affection in isolated area • Lap sitting • Wrestling • Piggyback rides • Tickling • Allowing a youth to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg • Any type of massage given by or to a youth • Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer • Compliments relating to physique or body development • Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

B. Verbal Interactions

Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youths in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youths. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youths.

The Congregational Church of Mansfield's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive reinforcement• Appropriate jokes• Encouragement• Praise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name-calling• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving youths in the personal problems or issues of Clergy, employees, and volunteers• Secrets• Cursing• Off-color or sexual jokes• Shaming• Belittling• Derogatory remarks• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youths• Derogatory remarks about the youth or his/her family

C. One-on-One Interactions

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. The Congregational Church of Mansfield aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by the organization administration.

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved, Clergy, employees, and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions

- When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other Clergy, employees, and volunteers that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly drop in.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

Tutoring/ Private Coaching:

One-on-one situations, such as tutoring and private coaching sessions, introduce additional risks for false allegations. Clergy, employees, and volunteers should be aware of our policies regarding tutoring and private coaching:

- a. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must have supervisor approval for any tutoring or private coaching sessions.
- b. Tutoring and coaching sessions with the Congregational Church of Mansfield's youths may not occur outside of the organization.
- c. Supervisors must keep a schedule of private tutoring and coaching sessions, which should include times, youths involved, and location of sessions.

D. Off-site Contact

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put staff, volunteers, and the Congregational Church of Mansfield at increased risk.

1. *(Preferred)* Option One:

The Congregational Church of Mansfield prohibits interactions outside of regularly scheduled program activities unless approved by the organization's Administration.

2. Option Two:

The Congregational Church of Mansfield strongly recommends that staff do not have outside contact with youths from the organization. However, if off-site contacts are unavoidable (such as during mentoring programs), The Congregational Church of Mansfield has determined that the following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<i>Appropriate Outside Contact</i>	<i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking groups of youths on an outing• Attending sporting activities with groups of youths• Attending functions at a youth's home, with parents present	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents' written permission• Visiting one youth in the youth's home, without a parent present• Entertaining one youth in the home of staff or volunteers• A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers

In addition, when outside contact is unavoidable, ensure that the following steps are followed:

1. Supervisors should identify for Clergy, employees, and volunteers what types of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate.
2. Ensure that staff or volunteers have the parents' permission to engage in outside contact with the youth. Consider requiring the parents to sign a release-of-liability statement.

E. Electronic Communication

Any private electronic communication between staff and youths, including the use of social networking websites like - Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, texting, etc. - is prohibited. All communication between staff and youths must be transparent.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication:

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youths ONLY when copying in a supervisor or the youth's parent• Communicating through "organization group pages" on Facebook or other approved public forums• "Private" profiles for Clergy, employees, and volunteers which youths cannot access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments• Sexually oriented conversations• Private messages between Clergy, employees, and volunteers with youths• Posting pictures of organization participants on social media sites• Posting inappropriate comments on pictures• "Friending" participants on social networking sites

In addition, provide this information to your participant's parents so that they know what is appropriate and inappropriate from your staff.

Cell Phone Use:

While assigned to work with youths, staff are not permitted to use electronic communications device except during approved breaks and emergency situations. Internet use, text messaging and/or emailing pictures while assigned to work with youths is strictly prohibited regardless of the type of device used and whether for business or personal reasons. Employees need to ensure that friends and family members are aware of this policy.

Use of personal electronic communication devices to contact (via voice, text, or pictures/video) organization members and/or program participants for personal and/ or inappropriate reasons shall be grounds for discipline up to and including termination of employment.

There are occasions in which staff will need to use personal or organization issued electronic communication devices. In these cases, staff will have explicit direction from supervisors governing use. Situations which may require use of organization issued or personal electronic communication devices include:

- a. Field Trips;
- b. Off-site Programs; and
- c. Emergencies.

F. Gift Giving

Youth are routinely groomed by molesters and abusers (sexual, emotional, physical, mental) by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to the youth. They might instruct the youth to keep the gifts a secret, which then starts teaching the youth to keep secrets from parents. For this reason, Clergy, employees, and volunteers should only give gifts to groups of youths, and only under the following circumstances:

1. Administration must be made aware of and approve the gift.
2. Parents must be notified.

6. Screening

The process of screening and selecting employees and volunteers is an essential element of management due diligence. There are several elements required which serve a number of purposes. Criminal background checking by itself is inadequate simply because very few predators, or people who would become predators, have been through the penal system. A would-be predator requires three things: Access, Privacy & Control.

Standing of “Authorized Clergy”: Each denomination served by the Insurance Board has a process of granting professional standing to clergy. Employment of clergy who do not fulfill denominational requirements may have an impact on insurance programs. Consult your insurance agent if there are concerns.

The following screening and selection procedures are strongly recommended for all Clergy, employees, and volunteers.

Note: Each board member, employee or volunteer now serving and regardless of length of service must be willing to set an example for all others who follow in their ministry. Therefore, at the time this policy is first adopted, all incumbent board members, employees and all incumbent volunteers who work with children shall execute the following procedures.

A. Standardized Application

All applicants should be expected to complete an application prior to working at the Congregational Church of Mansfield. The application should be reviewed by the Search Committee (consisting of members of Church Council and PRT) for completeness, high risks and fit with position requirements. If the application is not 100% complete, the applicant may be screened out, the applicant may be asked to complete the application, or the missing information may be obtained during an interview. However, the Congregational Church of Mansfield should endeavor to follow a consistent approach to applications missing information.

Offers should not be made until an application is 100% complete. Applications

should be kept in the personnel file.

Volunteers must be active members of the Congregational Church of Mansfield for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs. There should be **no exceptions** to this policy, even when volunteer candidates come from another church with similar programs.

See Appendix A. for a Sample Application.

B. Interviews

All applicants should be interviewed during the selection process and prior to employment. The purpose of the interview is to determine whether the applicant possesses the skills needed to perform the job requirements and whether the applicant demonstrates characteristics of a potentially abusive person. The interview should also provide the applicant with information about job responsibilities and expectations.

A Search Committee shall be formed, and shall employ behavioral interviewing techniques to assess suitability for working with children, and specifically discuss the church's commitment to protect children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

The Search Committee should take notes as to applicant responses to the interview questions, and the interpretive guide should be used to evaluate applicant responses. After the interviews are completed, the applicant may be screened out or the applicant may continue in the Screening process. The information recorded will be kept in the personnel file if the applicant is hired or selected.

C. Reference Checks

Reference checks should be conducted for all applicants prior to employment. A minimum of three references is recommended, including two professional and one personal reference. The Search Committee will work with applicants to develop a good reference list. If the person responsible for screening the applicant does not believe the references are appropriate, he or she can ask for different ones. References should be conducted by telephone. The person responsible for the screening should inform the referent that the applicant is applying for a position with the organization and will explain that the applicant will have access to a vulnerable population. The Search Committee will use standard reference questions and will record the responses of the referents on the reference question form. The high-risk checklist will be used to help evaluate referent responses.

Offers of employment should not be made until the required number of references is contacted. Completed reference check forms should be kept in the applicant's personnel file if the applicant is employed.

See Appendix B. for Sample Reference Check Questions.

D. Background Checks

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks should be conducted for all applicants. Generally, the information should be obtained prior to employment of the applicant; however, if the length of time needed to receive the results of these checks is unduly long, the Congregational Church of Mansfield could have the applicant start the position and remain in the position until the criminal background results are obtained and reviewed. New employees and volunteers should not be left unsupervised with youths until the criminal history results are returned.

The background check(s) should include the following:

- National multi-state criminal records search;
- National sex offender registry search;
- Social security number trace and alias search; and
- County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked for the past 7 years

Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each applicant prior to executing the check.

In addition, all applicants may be subject to undergo criminal drug screening prior to employment, and applicants responsible for transportation should have a driver's license check performed to identify past driving concerns.

E. Employment Decisions

A member of the Search Committee shall review each background check and agree that the applicant is eligible for employment as Clergy, employee or volunteer.

Where a criminal record exists, consideration shall be given to:

- Seriousness of the crime;
- Statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors;
- Length of time since the last offense;
- Pattern of criminal activity; and
- Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.

Conviction for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to employment or volunteer work with children:

- Violent crimes;
- Sexual assault;
- Sexual abuse or neglect of a child; and
- Drug offenses or driving offenses (depending upon position requirements)

Arrest data are not grounds for disqualification, only convictions. The status or relevance of other crimes will be considered individually.

Before an offer of employment is made, screening managers involved in the Screening process should review all information obtained. The employment process should last a sufficient length of time to allow the Search Committee to carefully collect and evaluate information about applicants and to allow the applicant time to self-select out of the process if they have concerns about the position.

Following the review, each committee member shall sign and date one of two documents that becomes part of the applicant's or employee's permanent personnel file:

*"We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant would be **acceptable** for the position."*

OR

*"We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is **not acceptable** for the position."*

7. Training

The mission of the Congregational Church of Mansfield is first to prevent abuse of

children and other vulnerable adults. We wish to identify and nurture SafeConduct™, to lead and to guide through adequate training. It is difficult to comprehend that those among us, our friends and family, would commit such acts willingly. Nevertheless, persons who have presented no behavior standards and do not understand boundaries may unwittingly engage in behaviors that may be perceived as predatory. Their personal reputations and that of the Congregational Church of Mansfield are then at risk.

To fulfill our leadership obligation, each new employee and new volunteer shall complete a specific program of training within 30 days of assuming duties. Fulfillment of training requirements shall be documented by the (Training Administrator – *Armatus* program) and respective program Director (Christian Education; Youth Choir; Day Care; Pre-School, etc.).

Training shall be repeated annually. Records shall be maintained by the (Training Administrator – *Armatus* Program) and respective program Directors. Training records shall be audited annually by the Church Council and PRT.

Abuse prevention curriculum shall include:

- Organization level
 - Review of expected conduct and boundaries defined in this policy.
 - Review of standards applicable to ministry.
 - Explanation of procedures for reporting violations of standards of conduct and suspected child abuse.
 - Explanation of individual statutory reporting obligations.
 - Identifying and managing high-risk situations such as bathroom use, transition times, and free times.
 - Physical security procedures.
- Abuse prevention education:
 - Effects of sexual abuse.
 - Types of child molesters.
 - Characteristics of abusers.
 - 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.
 - High-risk activities and circumstances.
 - Specific monitoring and supervision activities to prevent child-on-child sexual activity.
 - How to respond to incidents of sexual activity between children.

(Your Program Directors) shall assure that each employee and volunteer has mastered requirements and provide additional supervision and guidance as required to assure required conduct.

*The **Armatus** training suite by **Praesidium, Inc.** is a robust on-line training program that you administer at your church/camp. It is completely paperless and provides a perpetual record of training. The program covers all curriculum outlined below, except for (1) the specifics of your policies and (2) your reporting procedures. Information about the training program can be found in the **Administrators Guide** at our website: www.InsuranceBoard.org Click on **Safety Solutions**, then **SafeConduct™ Workbench**.*

8. Monitoring and Supervision

When Clergy, employees, and volunteers are adequately supervised, potential offenders are less likely to act on their impulses because they face detection. When youths are adequately supervised, they too are less likely to engage in inappropriate interactions with others. Similarly, the facility must be monitored, particularly out-of-the-way locations or locations that might permit an offender undue access to or privacy with a youth. Effective supervision and monitoring require that a variety of methods be used frequently, at both scheduled and random times.

A. Facility Monitoring

Building architecture can increase or mitigate the risk of an incident or accident. Because most incidents of sexual behavior occur in private, the extent to which privacy is managed, risk is managed. In order to ensure that all of the locations are properly and consistently monitored, designate a staff member who must complete a site inspection checklist

B. General Supervision

General supervision procedures:

1. **Administrative and Supervisory Visits to Youth Programs-** Youth supervisors and administrators will regularly visit all youth programs to ensure that all activities are well-managed and that youth policies are observed by all in attendance.
2. **Ratios-** Each program will follow the ratio requirements that are directly to the goals of the program and the design of the program area. The employee or volunteer-to-youth ratio should be adjusted for programs that serve youths with special needs. Refer to local licensing requirements and general best practice guidelines for establishing adult-to-youth ratios. The current recommendation for churches is 2:10

for children and 2:8 for youth.

3. **Mixed Age Groups-** In most incidents involving one youth abusing another youth, the youths are from different age groups. Each program is responsible for establishing specific guidelines for additional monitoring and supervision of activities that involve youths from different age groups. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must be aware that close line of sight supervision is required when monitoring programs that mix age groups.

C. Monitoring Youth in Facilities

Because the Congregational Church of Mansfield is responsible for all youths in the facility, we recommend implementing the following practices:

1. Require a parent or legal guardian to complete a membership application which includes identifying information, any special medical or behavioral circumstances, any legal indemnifications, the youth's date of birth, and emergency contact information. In addition, require all youths to sign-in AND to sign-out of the facilities so that the program has a record of the youth who are in the facility at all times.
2. Require youths to sign a Code of Conduct that outlines the program's behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This Code of Conduct should also include a systematic disciplinary policy which explains that youths will be suspended or dismissed from the program for policy violations. Require parents to sign this Code of Conduct as well, so that they are aware of the program's policies and progressive disciplinary procedures.
3. While a parent orientation may not be feasible in all circumstances, we recommend encouraging parents to attend an information session with a program representative. This meeting will provide an opportunity to review expectations and requirements, and the chance to establish a relationship with the parents. This can be helpful if any problems arise in the future.
4. While in the facility, youths can be supervised directly, indirectly, or with a combination of the two techniques.
 - a. For direct supervision, the program may offer structured, scheduled activities like basketball tournaments, swimming activities, arts and crafts, etc. These activities should have one or more staff assigned to lead and supervise.
 - b. For indirect supervision, the program must designate certain building areas as authorized areas. Authorized areas could include a gymnasium, a game area, or a classroom for doing homework and so on. Authorized areas must be easily visible and routinely and systematically checked by staff. Youths should know that they will be

supervised by staff at all times, and all staff should know which areas are authorized and which are not.

5. Develop supervision standards for the authorized areas. For example:
 - a. Determine how frequently authorized areas should be monitored by staff.
 - b. Assign staff specific supervision responsibilities over authorized areas.
 - c. Require staff to record when they monitor authorized areas: this may be accomplished by using checklists.
6. All program staff should wear nametags or identifying clothing so that the youth can easily recognize them as staff.
7. Train all staff:
 - a. To greet youths that enter the facility; to direct youths to the structured activities or authorized areas; and, to redirect youths who are not in an authorized area or who are not participating in a structured activity.
 - b. To be aware of the risks involved with mixing age groups and how to monitor activities involving mixed age groups.
 - c. To routinely monitor high risk areas (such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and unused rooms). Praesidium recommends designating specific staff to supervise these areas (i.e., Managers on Duty). This staff should document the scheduled and periodic sweeps of high risk locations.

Ultimately, all youth must be supervised at all times, regardless of age. The key to remember is that they can be supervised directly in structured activities and indirectly when they are in authorized areas.

D. Monitoring High Risk Activities

i. Bathroom Activities

Most incidents of youth-to-youth abuse occur in the bathrooms. Therefore, the following supervision guidelines are recommended:

When supervising restroom use, adult staff members should first quickly scan the bathroom before allowing youths to enter.

- a. For “Group Bathroom Breaks”:
 - Require staff to take groups of two or more youths to the bathroom – following the “rule of three” or more.
 - If the bathroom only has one stall, only one youth should enter the restroom while the others wait outside with the staff.

- If there are multiple stalls, only send in as many youths as there are stalls.
 - Minimize youths of different ages using the bathroom at the same time.
 - Require staff to stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot.
- b. For single use restrooms:
 - Require youths to ask permission to use the bathroom.
 - Require all staff to frequently check bathrooms.
 - c. Prohibit staff from using the bathroom at the same time as youths.
 - d. If assisting young youths in the stalls, the staff should keep the door to the stall open.

Locker Room Activities

The locker room procedures include:

- a. Requiring staff to stand within earshot of the locker room when in use by youths.
- b. Requiring staff to intermittently and briefly check inside the locker room so users know the locker room is monitored.
- c. Discouraging the use of locker rooms by youths of different ages at the same time.
- d. Prohibiting the use of locker room horseplay such as towel snapping.
- e. When possible, arrange lockers to minimize unnecessary privacy.

Shower Activities

Staff and youths must shower at different times. Create shower schedules that will permit supervision of the youths while staff shower.

- a. While the youths shower, at least one staff member should be within earshot of the youths. Ensure that only one youth is in each shower.

Transition Times and Free Times

Transition times and free-choice times (or free times) pose a high risk for incidents because during these times, Clergy, employees, and volunteers may not be assigned a particular group of youths to supervise. To decrease the risk of incidents, implement the following procedures:

- a. Require youths to remain in line-of-site of staff at all times.
- b. Specify the staff-to-youth ratio.
- c. Specify narrow geographic boundaries in the program areas.

- d. Ensure that all staff are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).
- e. Include bathroom procedures.
- f. Require periodic roll calls for each age group.
- g. Require supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and sweeps of the entire activity area.

Playground Activities

The playground procedures require:

- a. Youths to remain in line-of-site of staff at all times.
- b. Definition of specific and narrow geographic boundaries around the playground area.
- c. Specific instructions on how to monitor barriers of supervision (such as storage sheds, playhouses, tunnels, and shrubs).
- d. That all staff are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).
- e. Specific bathroom procedures.
- f. Staff to conduct periodic roll calls for each age group.
- g. Supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and assessments of the activity period and of the entire activity area.

Transportation Activities

Transporting youths may increase the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse because Clergy, employees, and volunteers may be alone with a youth or may make unauthorized stops with youths. In addition, transportation activities may provide a time for unsupervised youths to engage in youth- to-youth sexual activity.

The transportation guidelines:

- a. Require written parent permission from all youths on the trip. Staff take these permission forms and medical releases with them on the trip.
- b. Require staff to have a list of the youths on the trip. The staff take roll when boarding the bus, when leaving the bus, periodically throughout the trip, and then again when boarding the bus.
- c. Specify staff-to-youth ratios. When possible, do not count the driver in the supervision ratio.
- d. Require staff to sit in seats that permit maximum supervision.
- e. Discourage mixed age groups from sitting together. When possible,

- high risk youths are seated by themselves or with a staff member.
- f. Prohibit drivers from making unauthorized stops.
 - g. Where applicable (such as in mentoring programs), require staff to document the beginning and ending time of the trip and the mileage, names of the youths being transported, and the destination.
 - h. Require documentation of any unusual occurrences.

When public transportation is used:

- a. In addition to the transportation procedures listed above, youths should remain in one area of the bus, if possible.
- b. Clergy, employees, and volunteers that are assigned to a group should remain with that group on the bus.
- c. Take a head count or call roll immediately after entering and leaving the bus.

In situations where staff transport youths in non-organization vehicles:

- a. Administrators must be notified of all transportation activities.
- b. Use the “rule of three” when transporting youths: At least two adults must transport a single youth, or at least two youths must be present if transported by a single adult.
- c. Youths must never be transported without written permission from a parent.
- d. Youths must be transported directly to their destination. No unauthorized stops may be made.
- e. A staff member must document beginning and ending times and mileage, the names of youths, and other Clergy, employees, and volunteers who are involved in transportation, purpose of the transportation, and destination.
- f. Staff must avoid unnecessary physical contact with youths while in vehicles.
- g. When possible, staff should avoid engaging in sensitive conversations with youths.

See Appendix D. for Sample Volunteer Driver Qualification Form & Agreement.

Off-Site Activities

The off-site procedures include:

- a. Requiring supervisor approval for all off-site activities.
- b. Requiring parental approval.
- c. Specifying staff-to-youth ratios for the activity.

- d. Requiring staff and youths to be easily identifiable.
- e. Including specific bathroom and locker room procedures as applicable to outing.
- f. Including transportation procedures.
- g. Including instructions for a supervisor to observe the off-site activities at scheduled times and random intervals.
- h. Considering specific recommendations based on the location and type of activity (for example, Amusement parks, Water Parks, Arcades, etc.).

See Appendix C. for Sample Field Trip Preparation Checklist.

Overnight Activities

Overnight stays present unique risks to youths and staff. They often involve changing clothes, groups of both genders and different ages in a more intimate atmosphere than usual, more unstructured activities, and increased supervision demands for staff.

Supervision Guidelines:

- a. All overnight activities must be documented and approved in writing by the Program Director.
- b. Administrators are expected to regularly and randomly observe overnight activities on a scheduled and periodic basis.
- c. The Director should appoint a “lead” staff to supervise the overnight. A meeting with all staff is conducted to discuss the unique risks of overnight trips, unique elements of the specific overnight trip and to review the specific policies and procedures.
- d. Provide parents with written information about the overnight activity. All parents must sign a permission slip for their youths to attend the overnight.
- e. Determine the appropriate staff-to-youth ratios before the event and schedule staff accordingly.
- f. Meetings with the group should be hosted in open and observable areas; meetings should not be hosted in staff or youth rooms.

Overnights at the Facility:

- a. Physical boundaries within the organization must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- b. Assign each staff to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each staff should then maintain a role sheet that lists all of the youths in his or her group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted

routinely throughout the evening.

- c. Assign staff to high risk areas in the Congregational Church of Mansfield's facility, such as the bathrooms, entrances and exits, hallways, etc. If it is not possible to assign specific staff to these areas, assign specific staff to conduct periodic facility "walk-throughs".
- d. With regards to sleeping arrangements, separate the male and female youths into separate rooms and post staff at the entrances and exits to these rooms. If this is not feasible, separate males and females by as much space as possible.
- e. When performing room checks, staff should always go in pairs.
- f. At least one staff must stay awake overnight.

Overnights Away from the Facility:

- a. Overnight stays at private homes are prohibited unless approved by the administration.
- b. Physical boundaries at the off-site location must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- c. Assign each staff to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each staff member should then maintain a role sheet that lists all of the youths in his or her group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the event.
- d. If in a cabin type setting, the staff should be placed in bunks to maximize supervision around the cabin and in a way that decreases the chances of youths sneaking out (such as by the door).
- e. In hotel rooms, assign youths to rooms based on sex and age. Staff should have their own rooms. If staff must share rooms with youths, they must have their own beds and never change in front of youths.
- f. All staff are to be on duty in the halls or cabins at night until an hour after lights out and all rooms are quiet

Teen Leadership Development

Older youths who participate in teen leadership development are still youth participants and not staff or volunteers. Therefore, even though they are often given more responsibility, teens in the leadership development must be provided with guidelines regarding appropriate behavior, and then supervised accordingly. In addition, Clergy, employees, and volunteers must understand and recognize that these teens are still youths and not their peers. Therefore, the following guidelines are recommended for teen leadership development:

- a. Create a screening process for teen leaders which includes
 - A standard application

- An interview with behaviorally based interview questions
 - References (from teachers, counselors, family friends, etc.)
- b. Train teen leaders in their role in development and on program policies about appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This training should include the following information:
- Appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions and the importance of maintaining behavioral boundaries between teen leaders and younger youths and between teen leaders and Clergy, employees, and volunteers.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from being one-on-one with youths.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from escorting youths to the bathrooms.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from assisting youths with changing their clothes.
- c. Create a system to monitor the teen leaders.
- Designate a specific employee or volunteer who is in charge of teen leadership development and its participants.
 - Require a supervisor to conduct regular check-ins with teen leaders and their program supervisors.
 - Consider requiring teen leaders to keep a log documenting their activities and any problems they encounter. The development program supervisor should review these logs regularly.

D. Supervisors and Administrators Monitoring On-Site and Off-Site Programs

- **Keep a record.** Document your supervision visits. Include information like your arrival and departure times, which youths and parents were present, and a summary of the information collected. Provide staff with feedback about visits.
- **Vary your observation times.** Do not develop a predictable pattern of observation. Drop in at different times each day. Occasionally leave and come back immediately.
- **Arrive before staff.** Check punctuality and the routine that staff follow to prepare for the youths to arrive.
- **Survey the physical environment.** Is this a suitable location for the activity (e.g. size of area for number of youths, ability to supervise all areas used by youths, landscaping that may inhibit supervision)?
- **Watch activities.** Are they planned and organized? Are the staff actively

involved? Ask to see the schedule of activities and compare with what is actually going on at a given time.

- **Bathroom and locker room activities.** Conduct check-ins with staff to ensure they are complying with the established policies and procedures.
- **Observe Interactions.**

9. Responding

How an organization responds to suspicious or inappropriate interactions, policy violations, and incidents or allegations of abuse can dramatically affect the harm to the individuals involved and the damage to the organization. Once a Clergy member, employee, volunteer, youth, or parent has expressed a concern or made an allegation about the treatment of a youth, swift and determined action must be taken to reduce any subsequent risk to the youth, to the accused staff member or volunteer, and to the organization. Organizations must establish precise, unequivocal requirements for reporting to the authorities and for adhering to a serious-incident response plan.

A. Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations

Because the Congregational Church of Mansfield is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that everyone actively participates in the protection of youths. In the event that a Clergy member, employee, or volunteer observes any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations on the part of others, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations.

Remember, at the Congregational Church of Mansfield, the policies apply to everyone.

Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors Between Employees/Volunteers, Youth, and Vulnerable persons.

- Violation of the abuse prevention policies described above
- Seeking private time or one-on-one time with youths
- Buying gifts for individual youths
- Making suggestive comments to youths
- Picking favorites

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youths will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

i. Employee and Volunteer Response:

If an employee or volunteer witness suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from another employee or volunteer, they are instructed to do the following:

Guidelines for Employees/Volunteers Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations

- Interrupt the behavior.
- Report the behavior to a Parish Relations Team, Moderator, or other authority.
- If you are not comfortable making the report directly, make it anonymously.
- If the report is about a supervisor or administrator, contact the next level of management.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

ii. Supervisor and Administrator Response:

In the event that a supervisor or an administrator receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member or volunteer, the supervisor is instructed to do the following:

Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations

- Report to the next level of administration and determine the appropriate administrator to respond to the concern.
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report.
- Speak with the employee or volunteer or volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the state authorities and file a report.
- If appropriate, notify parents and/or guardians.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- b. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Progressive Disciplinary Process outlined in this manual.
- c. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other Clergy, employees, and volunteers or youths.

Organizational Response:

<i>Guidelines for Organizational Response</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review the need for increased supervision.● Review the need for revised policies or procedures.● Review the need for additional training.

B. Responding to Suspected Abuse by an Adult

i. Employee or Volunteer Response to Abuse:

As required by mandated reporting laws, Clergy, employees, and volunteers must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a youth or vulnerable person—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by employees, volunteers, or others—to state authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice. **Refer to state specific mandated reporting requirements for definitions of abuse more specific reporting information.*

In addition to reporting to state authorities, Clergy, employees, and volunteers are required to report any suspected or known abuse of youths perpetrated by employees or volunteers directly to leadership so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk. Reports of suspected or known abuse may be made confidentially to the following:

- a. Immediate supervisor
- b. Clergy, and/or,
- c. Moderator, PRT, Deacons, or staff

Additional Guidelines for Employee/Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse

- If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that he or she was correct to tell to you.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- Immediately report the allegation or incident to the proper organization authorities (based on mandatory reporting requirements) and the designated authority.
- Be sure to document the incident, disclosure, or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse. State only the facts.
- It is not your job to investigate the incident but it **IS** your job to report the incident to your supervisor in a timely manner.
- Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again to your supervisor or the designated organization authority.

Supervisors and Administrators Response to Abuse:

In addition to the above response procedures, supervisors and administrators should ensure the following:

<i>Guidelines for Supervisor and Administrators Responding to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● First, determine if the youth is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.● Gather as much information about the allegation as you can. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc.● Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.● Contact the appropriate local authorities as indicated by your mandatory reporting procedures. Make sure you get a case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you speak at the reporting agency.● If the alleged abuse involves an employee or volunteer, notify your Parish Relations Team and follow your crisis management plan.● Suspend the accused employee or volunteer until the investigation is completed.

C. Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Abuse and Sexualized Behavior

The thought that one youth may sexually abuse another youth does not occur to many people. Unfortunately, abuse between peers has increased 300% in the past few years. Youth-to-Youth sexual activity and sexualized behaviors often remain unreported in organizations because Clergy, employees, and volunteers are not comfortable documenting these situations, or may not know how.

Most serious incidents of youth-to-youth abuse are preceded by more subtle incidents such as name-calling, taunting, or roughhousing. Interrupting these interactions early and establishing and communicating standards of conduct can keep the program environment safe. The Congregational Church of Mansfield recognizes that the following interactions are high risk and should be prohibited:

Prohibited Youth-to-Youth Interactions

- Hazing
- Bullying
- Derogatory name-calling
- Games of Truth or Dare
- Singling out one child for different treatment
- Ridicule or humiliation

In order to adequately respond to and track incidents within the organization, all sexual activity between youths and sexualized behaviors of youths must be consistently documented.

i. Employee and Volunteer Response:

Youth-to-youth sexual behaviors can include inappropriate touching, exposing body parts, using sexualized language, making threats of sexual activity, engaging in sexual activity, and similar types of interactions.

If employees or volunteers witness youth-to-youth sexual behaviors, they are instructed to follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Clergy, employees, and volunteers Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity

- If you observe sexual activity between youths, you should immediately separate them.
- Calmly explain that such interactions are not permitted and separate the youths.
- Notify your supervisor.
- Complete the necessary paperwork including what you observed and how you responded.
- Follow your supervisor's instructions regarding notifying the authorities and informing the parents of the youth involved.
- In some cases, if the problem is recurring discipline may be required including not allowing one or both youths to return to the program.

Supervisors and Administrators Response:

In the event that a supervisor or administrator receives a report of a youth's sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the supervisor should do the following:

Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity

- Meet with the staff who reported the sexual activity to gather information.
- Confirm that the youths involved have been separated or placed under increased supervision.
- Review the steps taken by the staff on duty.
- Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.
- Meet with parents of the youths involved.
- Determine what actions should be taken to make sure there is no recurrence, including assessing the suitability of the program for the children involved.
- Notify the proper authorities.
- Develop an appropriate written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. Review the need for additional supervision.
- b. Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- c. Review the need for additional training.
- d. Alert others in the organization.

Organizational Response:

After the internal review of the sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the organization will determine what can be done to prevent a reoccurrence, such as:

Guidelines for Organizational Response

- Review the need for additional supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.
- Alert others in the organization.

D. Responding to Victims

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of the Congregational Church of Mansfield is to be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, we will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

E. Notification of Parents, and/or, Primary Legal Guardian

A minor child may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a child is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a child-on-child incident. And violation of policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents, and/or, primary legal guardian of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

While communicating with a parent or primary legal guardian, and **being mindful of the importance of timely communication**, care shall be given to assessing:

- The specific facts;
- Whether a disciplinary or termination process is required;
- Whether a child should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/primary legal guardians);
- Whether “mandatory reporting” is a factor;
- Who shall and in what manner communicate with the parents/primary legal guardian;
- Whether the Pastor should be involved in the communication;
- Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident.

Notification of parents and/or primary legal guardian shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required.

F. Responding to Media

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals, the congregation and the Congregational Church of Mansfield. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Board of Directors to represent the church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the church. Unless designated differently by the Board in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the church shall be the Moderator, Clergy, or legal counsel.

Prior to speaking to media, Moderator, Clergy, or legal counsel shall contact

and consult with Old Colony Association or Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) Legal Counsel to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

10. Congregational Awareness

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the children, parents, vulnerable adults and guardians we serve. They are entitled to know what to expect of our ministries, the Ministers who serve them, and to know the related policies and procedures created to protect the respective ministry constituencies. Constituencies include the children, the parents, the vulnerable adults, the guardians, and the Ministers.

This entire policy shall be posted on the Congregational Church of Mansfield website, [www.occmansfield.org].

At the time children or vulnerable adults are enrolled in the Congregational Church of Mansfield programs, parents or legal guardians shall be provided:

- A copy of the Congregational Church of Mansfield Code of Conduct.
- A copy of the Congregational Church of Mansfield Policies for Working with Youth.
- A summary of the content of the orientation to be provided to children and vulnerable adults regarding boundaries and reporting.
- Information regarding the means to report violations of policy or suspicions of abuse.
- Information regarding their personal obligation to report suspected abuse as it may exist under the laws of the State of Massachusetts.
- An invitation to visit programs in progress at any time at their convenience.

Children and vulnerable persons shall be provided an orientation covering the following subjects:

- Age-appropriate information about boundaries (with reference to the Code of Conduct);
- How to protect themselves from abuse; and
- How to report boundary violations or incidents of abuse.

The orientation shall be provided:

- Individually at the time a child or “vulnerable persons” begins participation in a ministry of the church; or
- As a group at the opening of a school term, event or league; and
- Annually when a program, event or league is perpetual.

Parents and primary legal guardians shall receive training on “abuse prevention” provided by the minister or staff.

Parents or primary legal guardians shall be encouraged to report violations of policy, boundaries or suspected abuse to the Supervisor or Administrator of the respective ministry at which an incident has occurred. Alternatively, they may report incidents to the Parish Relations Team (PRT). Anonymous reporting is permitted in the same manner and with the same precautions as reporting by Ministers or other observers.

If for any reason, parent/guardian believes that the primary contacts have failed to respond or have not given credibility to the parent’s/guardian’s concerns, the latter may contact the Parish Relations Team (PRT) to report those concerns.

11. Registered Sex Offender Policy

As a community of faith, serving by the example of Jesus Christ, we also seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption and fellowship among us. We shall be prepared to accept in our midst those who have violated the most sacred mores of our society at large, in order to provide them refuge, peace, example and support in their recovery and penitence. We commit to doing so with utmost care for the welfare of our congregation, collectively and individually, and the community we serve.

We accept that there are risks to be born in our deliberate association with and ministry to sex offenders who are considered a pariah among the community-at-large as evidenced by the many constraints placed upon their interaction with the community. We agree to honor the needs of the congregation and our community to have reasonable assurance that a sex offender in our care will not have an opportunity to re-offend as a result of lapses in our management of the offender.

We shall consider limited participation or membership of a sex offender in our congregation with utmost care which shall include the following elements:

Document understanding of the statutory limitations applying in the State of Massachusetts to the movement and activities of a sex offender, taking into account the programs of the church or the operations of tenants. (Examples: Sunday school, day care, pre-school, sports leagues, seasonal camps and associations which serve children and “vulnerable persons”.)

Consider and understand the character of the crimes which have resulted in requiring an individual to register as a sex offender, the passage of time without repeated conduct or behavior and the risk and opportunity of re-offending that is presented by the particular programs of our congregation.

Document understanding of limitations and prohibitions placed upon the offender by courts and probation authorities. The opinion of a mental health professional regarding the suitability of the person to participate in the life of the church shall be obtained. In all cases where probation is in force, we shall obtain the explicit approval of and conditions of participation specified by the probation officer. A recommendation by law enforcement or mental health professionals to deny participation to an offender shall be honored in all cases.

Understanding that, with respect to a person who is an employee, volunteer or in a position of church leadership, who has previously been conviction for acts of sexual misconduct as defined by insurance contracts, knowledge by church leaders and managers of such prior conviction will have the effect of voiding coverage for the individual employee, volunteer or church leader and for the church for future acts of sexual misconduct by that person.

Given that criminal convictions are a matter of public record, there shall be no expectation of secrecy on the part of the offender. As a condition of participation in our faith community, the offender must agree that the leadership of the church shall make it known to the members, constituencies and customers of the church that we have accepted among us a registered sex offender. The conditions and limitations that apply to participation in the life of the church shall be known to all.

With the advice of legal counsel, and in all cases, the conditions of participation by a registered offender shall be defined by a "limited access agreement" executed by the offender and church. Such agreement shall be approved by probation authorities as may be necessary according to para. 3., above. The agreement shall be reviewed annually to validate ongoing eligibility. Violation of the agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the agreement.

The following additional considerations shall apply:

Victims in the congregation – In the case that a victim of a RSO (registered sex offender) is a member of the congregation, employee or is a client of other services provided by the congregation, the RSO shall not be permitted to attend the church or church activities.

Clergy-penitent privilege – “Clergy-penitent privilege” is a “Rule of Evidence” defining or limiting information which clergy may reveal in a court of law only. “Clergy penitent privilege” does not prevent clergy from informing the congregation of matters which may be relevant to their safety; it does not require clergy to hold information in secrecy.

Ordained clergy shall assume responsibility and take extraordinary care to understand the scope and limitations of clergy-penitent privilege in the State of Massachusetts (Your State), and the parameters of confidence and privilege as defined by our denomination. Authorized clergy shall inform the leadership of the church of the general principles of confidence and privilege under which they performs their clerical duties.

Chaperone (Parish Associate) – Conditions of limited access for a RSO will commonly require that the offender have a chaperone while on the church premises or at church events elsewhere. A person serving as a chaperone shall not be a spouse, partner or relative of the offender.

Approval & Supervision –

With the advice and prior approval of the Church Board, a Limited Access Agreement with a Petitioner (known RSO) may be signed only by the Pastor.

The Pastor, in association with other “authorized clergy” and parish associates (chaperones), who shall be named in the Limited Access Agreement, shall be responsible for the general supervision of the Petitioner in all of the latter’s activity in relation to the church. Elements of supervision shall include the following:

- Knowledge of the terms of the Limited Access Agreement, including activity limitations placed upon the Petitioner.
- Knowledge of the Petitioners offense history sufficient to understand the risks of association with the church and its ministries.
- Willingness to assert activity limitations and to report any violation of restrictions placed upon the Petitioner.
- Willingness to intervene in any onset of a risky or problem behavior. Willingness to report all cases of non-compliance to the Pastor.
- The Pastor shall assess, prior to selection, whether a proposed parish associate is willing to fulfill the above elements of supervision.

Professional privacy – Members who are employed in certain occupations may have a statutory obligation to maintain privacy around the criminal history of their clients who may also be parishioners. Such members shall decline to accept leadership roles which may put them in a position of decision-making regarding individuals who may be their professional clients.

Juveniles – While the criminal record of a juvenile is ordinarily concealed by the courts, the church may come to know the juvenile’s history by other means. Honest disclosure by a juvenile and parents in the volunteer application and screening process may reveal that a record exists without knowing the specifics. While a limited access agreement will be required for the juvenile, as for others, every precaution will be taken to preserve the privacy and confidentiality which the law affords a juvenile.

See Appendix E. for Sample Limited Access Agreement.

12. Acknowledgment of Safe Church Policies and Procedures

I have read and agree to comply with my organization’s policies regarding sexual abuse prevention.

Signature of Employee or Volunteer

Date

13. Appendices

Such as employment application, documentation/journaling after meeting with someone etc, elements of WISE congregation stuff. –written by John P on Jan 2025