

# **Church as Safe Space Policies:**

(Protecting everyone from sexual exploitation, violence and ministerial misconduct)

## **Trinity United Church of Christ Statement of Christian Conviction**

Because we believe that all people are created in the image and likeness of God; and because we seek to following the way of Jesus the Christ who commanded us to “Love the Lord, your God with all your mind, with all your heart and with all your strength...and to love your neighbor as you love yourself” we will assure to the best of our ability, in all circumstances, Trinity United Church of Christ will be a safe place for all who enter here for work, worship, and fellowship.

### **Ministerial Conduct**

The ministers of Trinity United Church of Christ are all who serve in its name for the purpose of furthering the good news of Jesus the Christ. This includes, but is not limited to the Pastor, the Minister of Music, the Treasurer, and the elected or appointed volunteers such as the members of the Consistory, the Elders, the Christian Educators (including Sunday School Teachers, Nursery Care Providers and Youth Leaders).

As leaders in this church, the Pastor, all employees and the volunteers are seen as role models for the congregation. Therefore, they will refrain from any behavior that would reflect poorly on the church. The role of leader in the congregation is one that carries with it the expectation of trust and safety. In all that we do, we need to insure that everyone is listened to, supported, and treated as a precious child of God.

Ideally, leaders in the church will be persons who are secure, mature, and emotionally stable. They will be flexible and adaptable, patient, empathetic, and understanding. We would hope the leaders of the church would have a sound, positive and growing faith. It is unethical, wrong, and inappropriate for any person engaged in the ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ (whether lay or ordained, employed or volunteer) to engage in any type of sexualized behavior with any person with whom a ministerial relationship exists.

We recognize that there are times in the life of the congregation when persons will come to one or more of the leaders of the church with concerns and will need help dealing with grief, anger, healing, conflict, and/or fear. It is during these times of particular vulnerability that we, as volunteers and staff in leadership, need to be careful and it is advisable that when counseling/ advising such persons, at least one other leader be informed of the contact (but not necessarily the content of the conversation). Any abuse of the trust and confidence of another member of the church will have adverse affects on the leader, the member and the congregation as a whole.

### **Requirements for Ministry**

The Pastor shall be in good standing with the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Pastor will have completed the Voluntary Disclosure Form and Criminal Background Check (as a part of the Ministerial Profile), and will have documentation of completing the following workshops within the last three years: Boundaries Training, Anti-Racism Training, and if from another denomination, the UCC History and Polity class; and shall be in good standing with an Association of the United Church of Christ or be eligible to receive Privilege of Call. If the Pastor is a Student-in-Care, they will meet the requirements established by the Central Southeast Ohio Association for Licensure.

Volunteers shall be an active member of the congregation prior to accepting a leadership role within the church, especially one that involves care and responsibility for the youth, seniors and/or finances of the church. Each volunteer will complete a voluntary disclosure form, and if deemed appropriate, will receive criminal background check. The names of each volunteer working with children will be checked against a national registry of registered sex offenders ([www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)) before being allowed to work with children at Trinity UCC. Volunteers will be trained using the Safe Sanctuaries curriculum, or an equivalent curriculum approved by the Consistory and the Pastor. All information received during the screening process will be kept in a file cabinet and locked in the Pastor's office.

### **Distribution and Dissemination of this Policy:**

We will provide this information for all members and/or regular visitors to Trinity United Church of Christ. We will also give these policies to any community group or individuals who would like to use Trinity United Church of Christ for any reason (i.e. Brownie Troop, Red Cross Blood Drive, etc.) This information will be provided to new members when they join the church. It will be reviewed annually at the Annual Meeting of the congregation in January of each year. A copy of these policies will be given to and reviewed with new leaders when they are elected.

### **Allegations:**

Every report of misconduct will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Every responsible effort will be made to bring the misconduct to an end. All persons involved in an allegation will receive compassion, sensitivity and concern. In so far as possible, the identities of all persons involved in a report will be maintained in confidence (that is, a strict need-to-know basis). Information relayed by the report will be shared as required by the policies and procedures, in order to investigate and decide on an appropriate response to report misconduct. The right of all persons to receive a fair hearing will be respected. Recognizing that often no single person can provide adequate counsel and support to all parties involved, and that some situations call for specific skills, counseling or other avenues for assistance can be made available.

## **Child and Youth Protection**

One of our core values at Trinity United Church of Christ is the value we place on the care and nurture of our children and youth. “Let the children come...” We believe that Christ welcomed children in the life and ministry of the Realm of God (Kingdom of God) and as members of the body of Christ; we welcome our children into the life and ministry of the church.

We will expect the children and adult leaders of the church to respect one another and respect the church building and facilities. We expect that everyone will treat people the way in which they want to be treated. Everyone deserves to expect that they will not be harmed in any way (physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually) while they are at Trinity United Church of Christ. To ensure the safety of everyone concerned we will strive to follow the guidelines below:

1. We will have at least two adults present for any youth event held at the church.
2. When possible there will be two people in the Nursery, and when that is not possible, the adult responsible for the children will be able to use the “Panic Switch” located on the wall in the Nursery. This switch trips a red light that flashes in the sanctuary, alerting the ushers and/or greeters that assistance is needed in the Nursery.
3. The group will travel as a group, and when appropriate, the group can travel in pairs (restroom).
4. Any adult transporting youth will be at least 25 years old and will possess a valid driver’s license. They will have proof of current automobile insurance (including physical damage liability, bodily injury liability and medical coverage). Ideally, there will be two adults in each car that is carrying youth.
5. Parents will sign a permission to participate slip prior to any youth event. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate in any and all youth events.
6. Children are reminded to walk inside the building, to use “inside voices” when speaking, to listen to and obey the adults in whose care they are entrusted, and help clean up the spaces they use. Further, they are asked to avoid using the objects adults need for worship or work and to play cooperatively and non-violently. These “Church Promises” are posted throughout the church.

**Authority to Act on these Policies:**

In the case of lay leaders, volunteers, and employees who are not authorized by the United Church of Christ: The Pastor and/or Consistory has the authority to implement these procedures and act on the recommendations.

The non-legal interests of the accused, the accuser, their families, and the church will be addressed by representatives of the Emergency Response Team of the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ.

**Intervention, Pastoral Care and Support:**

When an allegation of misconduct has been presented against a person who is serving on a committee, or is in any way involved with the mission and ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ, the accused will be asked to step down from their position while the investigation is underway. The Chairperson of the committee or the Nominating Committee will appoint a substitute or interim leader during the time of the investigation.

If the accusation is without foundation, the accused will be allowed to resume their position (if they would like to do so). If the accusation has merit and the accused is found to be guilty, then the accused, the Pastor and the Consistory will work together to discuss the future relationship of the accused with the congregation.

Options for disciplinary action may include, but are not be limited to:

- Removal from leadership position(s)
- Recommendation for counseling with a mental health professional
- Removal from membership in the congregation
- Cooperation with any legal investigation that may take place in reference to the accusation.

## **Reporting, Investigation, and Communication of Concerns**

**A.** A response team with no fewer than two members, one male and one female, will be established by the Consistory of Trinity United Church of Christ each year at its first meeting, in preparation for the possibility of hearing concerns or complaints brought under the Church as Safe Space policy. The response team will familiarize itself with the policy as well as the procedures for response to concerns and complaints.

**B.** When information is received regarding alleged abuse or mistreatment of a child, the response team will immediately notify secular authorities (i.e. police department, child protective services, etc.) and will cooperate fully in the investigation. If the allegation involves criminal behavior, then we will secure legal counsel and cooperate with any investigation. All allegations will be taken seriously. These procedures will also be followed to determine whether the person under investigation will continue in their present position. The insurance company will be notified as soon as it is appropriate to do so.

**C.** When concerns are raised about an authorized minister of the United Church of Christ (ordained, commissioned or licensed), whether an employee or volunteer, the response committee will notify the Department of Church and Ministry of the Central Southeast Ohio Association of the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ. Trinity United Church of Christ will cooperate fully in any procedures of the United Church of Christ related to ministerial authorization, while retaining the right and responsibility to make decisions regarding employment and volunteer ministries within Trinity United Church of Christ as it determines best.

**D.** Several options may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:

**1.** If the concern does not involve a child, the person reporting concerns may choose to resolve the matter directly with the person accused.

**2.** The person raising concerns may report the incident to the pastor, if they wish, in an effort to resolve the matter.

**3.** If an informal resolution of the concern or complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the person raising concerns may institute formal proceedings. At this point the Pastor, current Consistory President, and/or selected individuals will offer pastoral care and concern to all those included in the investigation. The proceedings will include the following steps:

**a.** The response team will gather statements or other information from individuals involved in the harassment or exploitation or other incident of concern, and from others who may have pertinent information.

**b.** The response team will present information gathered to the supervisor of the employee or volunteer about whom a concern has been raised, and to Consistory.

**c.** The Consistory will make determinations and take appropriate actions to resolve the matter. These may include:

**i.** Finding that sexual exploitation or harassment [or other serious misconduct covered by the policy] has occurred and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action, which may include one or more of the following:

- Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior, with possible public notification;
- Recommending or requiring a program of growth which may include education or counseling;
- Probation, with terms of the probation clearly defined;
- Dismissal from employment or volunteer leadership position; or, in extreme cases, affiliation with or membership in the church as provided for in the church bylaws.

**ii.** Finding that no sexual exploitation or harassment (or other infraction of policies) occurred. This may involve formal notification of those who had a “need to know” and thus were previously notified of the concern and investigation.

**E.** A written summary of the Response Team and Consistory’s proceedings in such cases will be maintained.

**F.** In considering whether the reported conduct constitutes sexual harassment, exploitation or other infraction, consideration shall be given to the record of the reported incident as a whole, and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the incident occurred.

**G.** Any person who brings a concern or complaint forward, or who assists in investigation of such a report, will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or employment, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

**H.** If the person bringing the concern or complaint, or the accused person, is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Consistory, he or she has the right to appeal to the Association Minister of the Central Southeast Ohio Association who will refer the matter to the Department for Church and Ministry for resolution.

## **Definitions**

**Minister:** a person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers, as well as authorized ministers.

**Authorized minister:** a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an association of the United Church of Christ. Ministerial relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

**Consistory:** The governing board of the church. The Consistory is comprised of nine members, each serving a three year term, with a new class elected by the congregation each year. This group meets monthly and all meetings are open to the church.

**Response Team:** a team with no fewer than two members, one male and one female, will be established by the Consistory of Trinity United Church of Christ each year at its first meeting, in preparation for the possibility of hearing concerns or complaints brought under the Church as Safe Space policy. The response team will familiarize itself with the policy as well as the procedures for response to concerns and complaints. They will be trained using the Safe Sanctuaries Curriculum, or other curriculum recommended by the Pastor and the Consistory.

**Sexual exploitation:** sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a minister engaged in the work of the church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister.

**Sexual harassment:** repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- 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;
- 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
- 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 work or church environment.

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

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

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome-and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church. For example, it is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

**Trinity United Church of Christ  
Employment/Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
                    LAST                                    FIRST                                    MIDDLE

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
                    STREET                                    CITY                                    STATE ZIP CODE

(\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
DAYTIME PHONE  EVENING PHONE

AGENCY NAME \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS  CITY                                    STATE ZIP CODE

\_\_\_\_\_  
CONTACT PERSON  PHONE

AGENCY NAME \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS  CITY                                    STATE ZIP CODE

\_\_\_\_\_  
CONTACT PERSON  PHONE

AGENCY NAME \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS  CITY                                    STATE ZIP CODE

\_\_\_\_\_  
CONTACT PERSON  PHONE

**My previous experience in the past five years (paid or volunteer) related to the ministry I am seeking to fill includes:** (Attach additional page(s) as necessary.)

**Name of church where I am currently a friend or member.**

- I have been a member of this church since \_\_\_\_\_
- I have been a friend of this church since \_\_\_\_\_

**I have never been found guilty, or pled guilty or no contest, to a criminal charge.**

True  Not true

If not true, give a short explanation of the charge. (Please indicate the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the charge; where the charge was filed; and the precise disposition of the charge.)

**Do you have a valid driver's license?**  Yes  No

**State where driver's license issued Driver's license number** \_\_\_\_\_

**No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.**

True  Not true

If not true, give a short explanation of the lawsuit. (Please indicate the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit; where the lawsuit was filed; and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.)

**I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position or had my employment, professional credentials, or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct.**

True  Not true

If not true, give a short explanation. (Please indicate the date of termination; name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor; and nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.)

**With respect to my driving record, I have not had my license suspended or revoked within the last five years due to reckless driving or driving while intoxicated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance.**

True  Not true

**Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?**

Yes  No

If yes, please provide a brief explanation.

The covenants between persons seeking employment or sanctioned volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the church. To that end, I attest that the information set forth in this application is true and complete. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the position I am seeking to fill.

I acknowledge that it is my duty in a timely fashion to amend the responses and information I have provided if I come to know that the response or information was incorrect when given or, though accurate when given, the response or information is no longer accurate. Beginning such relationships with an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for a continuing and healthy covenant between employees or volunteers and the church they seek to serve.

To that end, I authorize Trinity United Church of Christ and/or its agents to make inquiries regarding all statements I have set forth above. I also authorize all entities, persons, former employers, supervisors, courts, law enforcement, and other public agencies to respond to inquiries concerning me, to supply verification of the statements I have made, and to comment on and state opinions regarding my background and character.

To encourage such persons and entities to speak openly and responsibly, I hereby release them from all liability arising from their responses, comments, and statements made in good faith and without malice. Trinity United Church of Christ's hiring and authorized volunteer recruitment process involves the distribution of information regarding applicants with those persons in a position to recruit, secure, and supervise the position I am seeking to fill.

To that end, I authorize Trinity United Church of Christ and its agents to circulate, distribute, and otherwise share information gathered in connection with this application **only** to such persons for these stated purposes. I understand that Trinity United Church of Christ will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

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(SIGNATURE)

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(PARENT'S OR GUARDIAN'S SIGNATURE FOR APPLICANS UNDER 18)

DATE \_\_\_\_\_