

**United Parish in Brookline**

**Safe Church Policy**

**Received from the Children & Youth Deepening Ministry Teams on 6/1/2013**

**Approved by Church Council on September 1, 2013**

**Recommended for Review by 6/1/2018**

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**Table of Contents:**

Safe Church Policy Concerning Prevention	2
Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment	4
Exhibit A: Children & Youth Ministry Application and Disclosure Form	7
Exhibit B: Safe Church School Policy	9

## **United Parish in Brookline Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse Prevention**

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

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

### **Ministerial Conduct**

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all settled Pastors, interns, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers are Ministers to the congregation.

It is important that every Minister to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others.

It is the policy of United Parish in Brookline to encourage its Ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of United Parish in Brookline is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

### **Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry**

- All Ministers (as defined above) will receive and review a copy of the United Parish Safe Church Policy.
- All Pastors of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by their denomination(s) or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent. When a boundary training workshop suitable for Christian Educators is offered or available, the Coordinator of Christian Education will attend once every three years.

## **Additional Requirements for Church School and Children and Youth Music Programs**

United Parish in Brookline is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love.

In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form substantially similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit A.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding Safe Church and Safe Church School policies and procedures. United Parish Safe Church School Policy is attached as Exhibit B.

### **Definitions**

**Minister:** a person authorized by the church to carry out its ministry. Ministers include 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 American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Methodist Church, or another denominational body authorized to ordain ministers. An Authorized Minister is one type of minister within the meaning of this policy.

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

**Sexual Exploitation:** sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Minister engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior 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 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, e-mails, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, 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. 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.

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

#### I. Generally

A. A subcommittee of the Church Council and the Children and Youth Deepening Ministry Team with no less than two members, one male and one female, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee, hereinafter referred to as "The Response Team," will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

B. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:

1. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.
2. The complainant can report the incident to a called Pastor, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:

- The Response Team shall advise the Senior Pastor and Moderator of the Church Council of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Senior Pastor or Moderator of the Church Council is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.

- The Response Team shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged exploitation or harassment and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to the Safe Church Committee. The Safe Church Committee shall consist of 3-5 United Parish Church members whom the Church Council determines are suitable.

- The Safe Church Committee or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:

- a. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action accordingly; such action may include one or more of the following:

- (i) a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;

- (ii) recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;

- (iii) probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;

- (iv) dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.

- b. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

- The Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.

C. A written summary of the Safe Church Committee proceedings in such cases will be maintained.

D. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. At any time the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.

E. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation, consideration shall be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.

F. Any person bringing a sexual harassment or exploitation complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Safe Church Committee, he or she has the right to appeal to the Church Council Moderator, or to the Church Council

Clerk if the Moderator is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the Church Council. The subject of any such appeal to the Church Council shall be limited solely to whether the procedures of this policy were followed. The matter will not be reconsidered on the merits and the decision of the Church Council will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Church Council determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Safe Church Committee to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

## II. Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements, the United Parish in Brookline will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any Minister of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Coordinator of Christian Education or one of the Pastors so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Massachusetts Child Abuse Hotline currently is: 1-800-792-5200.

## III. Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any settled Pastor will promptly be forwarded to the denomination to which the pastor is affiliated. The Massachusetts/New England Conference for the three denominations may be contacted at: American Baptist Church (978-448-1445); United Church of Christ (508-875-5233); United Methodist Church (978-682-7676).

Exhibit A

**United Parish in Brookline**  
**Authorized Children and Youth Ministry**  
**Application and Disclosure Form**

Name: Last	First	Middle
Address: Street	City/State	Zip code
Daytime Phone	Evening Phone	Email

**References: One reference should be related to you and the other references should not be related to you.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

Address	City	State	Zip Code
Telephone	Email		

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

Address	City	State	Zip code
Telephone	Email		

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

Address	City	State	Zip code
Telephone	Email		

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

**I have never been convicted of, nor pled guilty or no contest to, a crime. (Exclude convictions that have been sealed, expunged or legally eradicated, misdemeanor convictions for which probation was completed and the case was dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state)**

**Q True** **Q Not True**

*If not true, please briefly describe the nature of the crime(s), the date and place of conviction and the legal disposition of the case. The church will not deny a position to any applicant solely because the person has been convicted of a crime. The church, however, may consider the nature, date and circumstances of the offense, as well as whether the offense is relevant to the duties of the position applied for.*

**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 authorized 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 volunteers and the church they seek to serve. To that end, I authorize the United Parish in Brookline and/or its agents to make inquiries regarding my character and qualifications, including 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, character, and qualifications. 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.

The United Parish in Brookline authorized volunteer recruitment process involves the sharing of information regarding applicants with those persons in a position to supervise both the position I am seeking to fill and program I am seeking to participate in. To that end, I authorize the United Parish in Brookline and its agents to circulate, distribute, and otherwise share information gathered in connection with this application to such persons for these purposes. I understand that the United Parish in Brookline will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the United Parish in Brookline Safe Church Policy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(PRINT NAME & SIGN)** **DATE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(PRINT NAME & SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN FOR APPLICANTS UNDER 18)** **DATE**

**For Staff Use:**

- Sex Offender Registry ([www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)) review performed on \_\_\_\_\_
- CORI check performed on \_\_\_\_\_
- References checked on \_\_\_\_\_
- (OPTIONAL) Personal interview conducted by staff on \_\_\_\_\_

## **EXHIBIT B**

### **United Parish in Brookline Safe Church School Policy**

United Parish in Brookline is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. Below are policies that assist to ensure we are doing our best to keep our children and those who work with them safe.

#### **Background Checks**

- All persons who come in contact with children and youth will have completed a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Acknowledgement Form that the Coordinator of Christian Education will process through the Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services. This includes Nursery staff, Church School teachers, children and youth music leaders, adult chaperones, and members of the Children & Youth Deepening Ministry Team.
- The Coordinator of Christian Education, and the Minister of Music, will review the results of the CORI screening and a Sex Offender Registry Screening and discuss information with the Senior Pastor, if needed. All information will be held in strict confidence and in accordance with the laws of the state of Massachusetts.
- After review, all items will be kept in a secure location. Background checks will be performed annually.

#### **Screening Process Requirement**

- To assume the role of a teacher or youth leader/mentor, adults must be a U.P. Church member and/or undergo a screening process that may include an interview with the Coordinator of Christian Education.

#### **Recommended Five Year Age Difference to Supervise**

- A volunteer or paid staff person should be at least five years older than the children/youth they are supervising. At his/her discretion, the Coordinator of Christian Education may waive this recommendation.

#### **“The Rule of Three”**

- Adults working with children and youth will adhere to the “Rule of Three.” The rule ensures that an adult is not alone with a child or youth. When possible, the “Rule of Three” will include two adults. If this is not feasible, the adult must have more than one child present with them.

#### **Open Door Counseling**

- Doors should be kept open at all times during “one-on-one” counseling or while advising any child or youth in the church. If personal privacy is a concern and the child or youth feels more comfortable with a closed door, the counseling session must be accessible to viewing at all times.

### **Child Drop-Off & Pick-Up Policy**

- ❑ Children in 4th grade and younger must be brought to class and be picked up from class by a parent or legal guardian. The Nursery operates a special sign-in/sign-out system. (With parental approval, children in 4th grade may leave unaccompanied at the end of class.)

### **Child Supervision**

- ❑ Children in 4th grade and younger must be accompanied by an adult if leaving the classroom.

### **Communication**

- ❑ Teachers are given parent/guardian names and contact information for communication purposes and in case of an emergency.

### **Report Suspicion of Child Abuse**

- ❑ Should an adult paid staff or volunteer suspect that a child in his/her care has been abused, the adult will report this suspicion to the Coordinator of Christian Education or one of the pastors.

### **Photo Privacy and Protection**

- ❑ Parents must indicate whether or not they give permission to have their child's photo displayed on the church Web site, in weekly and monthly church communications, on bulletin boards within the Church facility, or in the newspaper.
- ❑ Written permission is expressed through the registration paperwork associated with the Church School and Music programs.
- ❑ Written permission is valid from September through August of the program year but can be changed at anytime by notifying the Coordinator of Christian Education. Permission must be given each year at the time of registration.
- ❑ Permission to have photos and personal information available in the Church directory will be obtained at the time photos are taken.
- ❑ Individuals over eighteen years of age who do not wish to have their photos displayed are encouraged to speak with the Coordinator of Christian Education who will ensure the desires of the individual are communicated with those responsible for posting photos.