

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF BIG RAPIDS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA & THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse & Harassment Prevention**

**Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment**

As a community of Christian faith, The United Church of Big Rapids 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 The United Church of Big Rapids 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.

**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 United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or The Presbyterian Church USA. 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 and Electronic 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.

## **Ministerial Conduct**

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, 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 the United Church of Big Rapids 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 The United Church of Big Rapids is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

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

Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit the disclosure form in Exhibit A.

Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will be provided an orientation by a 2-person committee appointed by the Governing Board to review this policy and the Minister's responsibilities in accordance with the policy. The two-person committee will ideally identify as different genders.

The church will conduct a criminal history review for each Minister by searching their name on the Michigan State Police Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) at <https://apps.michigan.gov/> This criminal history review will be repeated on a triennial (every three years) basis for all Ministers. The search will be conducted by the Governing Board chair of the Administration Commission or the Director of Christian Education or the Governing Board chair of Christian Education or the church's ICHAT administrator.

Authorized Ministers of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by Grand West Association, Michigan Conference - UCC, or The Presbytery of Lake Michigan.

## **Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry**

The United Church of Big Rapids 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.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will be members of The United Church of Big Rapids or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with the United Church of Big Rapids.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit the form in Exhibit A.
- Before beginning their duties, all volunteers will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third-party vendor.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures. *(In January of each year, the Governing Board will appoint the individual(s) who will perform these orientations and it will be recorded in the personnel/volunteer file (on the form).* It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, any overnight activities, and any one-on-one meetings (such as confirmation) with an adult mentor and a youth.
- Every church activity involving youth will be supervised by at least one adult who meets the above guidelines.

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

### **A. General**

- a. A subcommittee of the Governing Board with no less than two members, (two persons that identify as different genders), will be established by the Governing Board by January 30<sup>th</sup> 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:**

- a. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.
- b. The complainant can report the incident to an authorized minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.

- c. 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:
  - i. The Response Team shall advise the Senior Minister and Moderator of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Senior Minister or Moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.
  - ii. 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 Administration Commission or an appropriate subcommittee thereof.
  - iii. The Governing Board, or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include 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:
    - a. a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior.
    - b. recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment.
    - c. probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined.
    - d. dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.
    - e. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

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

- a. A written summary of the Response Team proceedings in such cases will be maintained by the Clerk of the Governing Board.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Administration Commission, he or she has the right to appeal to the Moderator or to the Vice Moderator if the Moderator is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the Governing Board. The subject of any such appeal to the Governing Board 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 Governing Board will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Governing Board determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Administration Commission to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

#### D. Child Abuse

- a. Apart from any legal requirements, The United Church of Big Rapids will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 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 Senior Minister and Moderator so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The State of Michigan Child Abuse Hotline currently is: 855-444-3911.

#### E. Clergy

- a. Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Grand West Association of the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ and the General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan.
- b. Grand West Association of The Michigan Conference United Church of Christ may be contacted at: 1-517-332-3511 and/or conference@michucc.org.
- c. The General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan may be contacted at 1-269-381-6367 and /or office@lakemichiganpresbytery.org.

#### F. Response Team

- a. A written summary report of any activities taken during the calendar year will be submitted to the Governing Board by the Response Team. Report will be submitted by December 31st of the calendar year.

## **ADDENDUM TO SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

### **UNITED CHURCH BIG RAPIDS**

#### **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION**

For reasons of propriety and safety, electronic communications between adult leaders and church youth should be carefully considered before being initiated. It is the responsibility of the adult leader to insure all communication is appropriate and to immediately report any inappropriate communication to the Senior Pastor.

Adult leaders should not use Facebook or similar communication sites to communicate with church youth. The exception is an open Facebook page or other social media if maintained by the United Church BR.

Texts, e-mail and similar electronic communication should always be cc (copied) to parent or guardian. Before initiating phone calls to youth, adult leaders should insure parents are aware of the calls and approve of the communication.

None of these comments apply to adult leaders and their communication with youth who are part of their family and extended family.

A completed copy of the following Authorization Form (Exhibit A) will be maintained in the church office in locked, on-site files. Files may be signed out, upon a need to know, to the Senior Pastor, Moderator of the Governing Board, Christian Education Director, Governing Board chair of the Administration Commission, current Governing Board members of the Christian Education Commission, Clerk of the Governing Board and/or the administrator of the church's ICHAT account.

**Exhibit A**

**The United Church of Big Rapids  
Authorized Staff/Volunteer  
Application and Disclosure Form**

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Name: Last First Middle

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Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)

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Address: Street City/State Zip code

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Daytime Phone Evening Phone Email

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

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Name

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Address City/State Zip code

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Telephone Email

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Name

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Address City/State Zip code

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Telephone Email

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

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 closed or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state)

True

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 Church of Big Rapids 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 Church of Big Rapids authorized volunteer recruitment process involves the sharing of information regarding applicants with those persons in a position to recruit, secure, and supervise both the position I am seeking to fill and program I am seeking to participate in. To that end, I authorize The United Church of Big Rapids 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 Church of Big Rapids 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 Church of Big Rapids Safe Church Policy.

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

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

Date and Signature of Person Completing the Items Below

- Michigan State Police Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) <https://apps.michigan.gov> review performed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Personal orientation conducted by staff on \_\_\_\_\_
- Reference inquiries completed on \_\_\_\_\_
- United Church Big Rapids Safe Church Policy In-service Completed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Date and Signature of Approval by Governing Board representative \_\_\_\_\_

## OUTSIDE GROUPS APPROVED TO USE UNITED CHURCH FACILITIES

In its mission to serve the greater community, The United Church of Big Rapids, allows approved organizations to use the United Church of Big Rapids facilities. The approval of such use is delegated to the Senior Pastor with concurrence by the Governing Board. Such groups include, but are not limited to, The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America and their subparts, Voca Lyrica and its youth choir component, 4-H programs, Project Starburst, STAGE-M, and other civic community groups as may be approved.

In consideration of such groups being allowed to use the United Church of Big Rapids facilities, each group, by signing a copy of the following affidavit of compliance, will assure the group's compliance with the spirit and practices of the on-site Safe Church Policies of the United Church of Big Rapids. That all adults working with youth on church grounds or activities will be screened through ICHAT (or similar screening) on a yearly basis.

### AFFIDAVIT OF COMPLIANCE

As the authorized representative of \_\_\_\_\_,  
Name of Organization

I affirm this organization's policies and procedures meet the minimum standards set forth in the United Church of Big Rapids Safe Church Policy. These procedures will be followed whenever our organization is conducting activities on grounds of the United Church of Big Rapids. We (the group) will maintain ICHAT (or similar screening) and background records for 10 years after adult leaves service to our organization.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title as Organization Agent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date