

United Church Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns Safe Church Policy Prohibiting and Preventing Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, the United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns (hereinafter “the Coalition”) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which employees, volunteers and persons served by the Coalition can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with the Coalition should be aware that the Coalition is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by Coalition policy. It is the Coalition's intention to take action to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Conduct of our Employees and Volunteers

Every person employed by the Coalition—including Authorized Ministers, independent contractors and volunteers—should 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 affect others.

It is the Coalition's policy to encourage its employees, independent contractors and volunteers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care and education, by maintaining appropriate boundaries, and by referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual exploitation or sexual harassment of employees, volunteers or others by anyone engaged in any ministerial, professional or volunteer relationship on the Coalition's behalf is unethical behavior, will not be tolerated by the Coalition and will be cause for immediate termination of employment with the Coalition. Similarly, workplace harassment, as defined in the UCC's Common Personnel Policies at Section 2.2 (attached), is strictly prohibited.

For further information and guidance you are encouraged to review Staff Screening Toolkit, third or most recent edition, when carrying out the tasks required by this policy.

Requirements for Employees and Volunteers

Before beginning their duties, all employees, independent contractors and volunteers will submit an application and/or disclosure form similar to the sample attached hereto. (This form may be superseded by forms required by other settings of the United Church of Christ when they are applicable.)

Before beginning their duties, all employees, independent contractors or volunteers will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.

Prior to employment, the Coalition will conduct a criminal background check and employment reference check for all prospective employees, including, but not limited to, a registered sex offender review for each prospective employee by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. The registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis.

Prior to assignment as an independent contractor or volunteer, the Coalition will conduct a criminal background check, including, but not limited to, a registered sex offender review for each prospective employee, by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. The registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis.

All employees, independent contractors and long-term volunteers will be required to attend boundary training as offered by Conferences, or its equivalent, and other workshops on Safe Church issues provided by the UCC at least once in two years. (A long-term volunteer is one serving the Coalition for two years, or whose term of service is expected to last at least two years.)

Short-term volunteers will be provided with a summary of this policy during their orientation. All other requirements in this policy concerning background checks and mandatory disclosure forms may apply to them as well. (A short-term volunteer is one serving the Coalition for a period less than two years.)

The Coalition expects all authorized ministers serving the Coalition to meet the requirements for maintaining their credentials as set forth by the denomination.

Employees, independent contractors and volunteers may submit evidence from other organizations that they have passed a screening process comparable to the one required by this policy. Evidence will include a copy of that organization's policy, contact information for a person in that organization who can verify the claim, and a completed Coalition Employment/Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

The Coalition is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's inclusive love.

In order to fulfill this commitment, we have established the following guidelines:

All volunteers who regularly work with minors will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form substantially similar to the sample attached hereto.

Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees, contractors and volunteers who work with minors 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, independent contractors and employees who work with minors will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.

It is the Coalition's policy to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. Coalition policy is that minors participating in our programs come with a chaperone who will provide responsible supervision for all youth activities. Designated chaperones shall meet Coalition requirements for chaperones.

Youth over the age of 14 may assist an unrelated adult in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two unrelated adults be present.

Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all Coalition activities.

Definitions

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).

Independent Contractor: a person contracted by the Coalition to perform services, normally on a short term or temporary basis, directly related to a ministerial relationship. An independent contractor, for purposes of this policy, does not include a vendor or third party who supplies goods or services not directly related to the ministerial relationship (i.e., outside accountants, auditors, suppliers of equipment/office supplies, etc.).

Ministerial Relationship: the relationship between a person who carries out the Coalition's ministry and a person served by that ministry.

Sexual Exploitation: sexual activity or conduct (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Coalition employee or volunteer takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing that person to engage in sexual behavior with the employee or volunteer.

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 Coalition activity.

Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or other Coalition-related decisions affecting an individual; or

Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in Coalition 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, or 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 or work, or the 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, leadership opportunities, or comfortable participation in the life of the Coalition. 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. The Personnel Committee, in collaboration with the Executive Director and/or the Coalition's Board of Directors, will lead the investigation into and response to any complaints under this policy.
- 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. If the complainant is an employee or volunteer of the Coalition, the complainant can raise the concern with their supervisor.
 3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate or possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may bring their concerns to the Coalition's Personnel Committee, Executive Director or Board of Directors.

C. The Personnel Committee, the Executive Director and/or the Board of Directors, or their designated representatives (“the fact-finding team”) shall work cooperatively in the fact-finding process and will interview and gather information from persons who may have pertinent information. Upon conclusion of the fact-finding process, a report will be presented by the fact-finding team to the appropriate representative of the Coalition.

D. The fact-finding team shall make determinations and make recommendations to the Personnel Committee, the Executive Director, and/or the Board of Directors to resolve the matter. These may include, but are not limited to:

1. a finding that the sexual exploitation has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the Coalition 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 volunteer position.
2. a finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

The fact-finding team and the appropriate representative of the Coalition who will determine the appropriate actions to resolve the matter may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.

E. A written summary of the fact-finding team's investigation and recommendations will be maintained.

F. 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 Coalition may initiate or proceed with a formal complaint process.

G. 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 occurred.

H. 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, unless the complaint is found to be false. It is the practice of the Coalition that anyone found to be falsely accused shall not be adversely affected in terms of conditions of employment, membership, or affiliation.

- I. The appeal process for any complaint under this policy is set forth in the Coalition's personnel policy.

II. Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements the Coalition will make a report to appropriate authorities if at any time the Coalition has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any employee or volunteer of the Coalition 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 Personnel Committee, the Executive Director or the Board of Directors so that the Coalition may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The nationwide Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-25-ABUSE. The State of Ohio child abuse hotline is 614-466-9274.

III. Authorized Ministers Apart from any disposition of the matter by the Coalition, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Association where the Minister currently has standing.

Attachments:

1. Sample disclosure form for employees and volunteers.
2. UCC's Common Personnel Policies Section 2.2

ADOPTED as revised January 24, 2011