

Safe Practices Policy



**The Congregational Church in South Glastonbury
United Church of Christ
An Open and Affirming Church for All God's People
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Safe Practices Statement

The Psalmist knows God as Creator, Protector and Deliverer. The people of God are called by Jesus to “Do to others as you would have them do to you” ... to “be merciful, just as your God is merciful.” (Luke 6:31, 36)

Seeking to be faithful to God’s call, the community of faith known as the Congregational Church in South Glastonbury (hereinafter “the Church”) endeavors to be diligent and faithful to the Christian community and to foster an environment that is safe for all of God’s children; to faithfully create a sanctuary to the best of our ability; and with all that implies as we care for and support all among us in vulnerable positions and to promote an environment of mutual respect where all are safe from harm. We offer these Safe Practices to guide the Church to create and maintain programs, facilities and a community where all persons can worship, learn, and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of abusive behavior, including but not limited to: sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, abuse of authority, discrimination or intimidation regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identification or mental capacity, which is prohibitive to such an environment and will not be tolerated.

Guiding Mission

Safe Practice communities model healthy relationships. Offering hospitality does not mean that people are welcomed in with no expectations or boundaries. The best hospitality has very high expectations of people. The Church has been a faith community for generations. Its children and youth have found the Church to be an inspiration in their faith journey and a welcoming refuge in times of doubt, distrust, and uncertainty. Called by Christ to “love the Lord your God with all our heart, soul and strength and our neighbor as yourself,” we will strive in this community that affirms itself Christian, to preserve the wholeness and holiness of God’s creation by working to assure the health, well-being, and integrity of each individual to the best of our God given ability.

It is expected that all who find themselves in work and worship, in and through the Church, will respect and adhere to the Safe Practices set forth below. Any actions taken contrary to the Safe Practices will result in corrective actions, discipline or any further measures warranted.

Definitions

Authorized Minister: Any person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ.

Child: Any person less than sixteen years of age who has not been emancipated.

Child Abuse: As defined by Connecticut Statute § 46b-120, means that a Child or Youth has been inflicted with physical injury or injuries other than by accidental means, or has injuries that are at variance with the history given of them, or is in a condition that is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to malnutrition, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

Church: Means the Congregational Church in South Glastonbury, its Authorized Ministers, Members, Employees, Friends, Volunteers and Invitees.

Claim: Shall mean any past or present allegation, cause of action, demand, lawsuit, or administrative proceeding.

Confidential: Shall mean in strict privacy.

Covenant: Pertaining to the promises stated or made in the act of formalizing membership within the Church.

Friend: A person who has not completed the steps to become a Member of the Church and who cannot vote, but is welcome to participate in all but the Church Council.

Incident: An occurrence that necessitated the filing of an Incident Report Form.

Invitee: Any person invited onto the properties owned or leased by the Church.

Mandated Reporter: Any physician, medical intern, hospital personnel, medical examiner, psychologist, emergency medical technician, dentist, nurse, chiropractor, podiatrist, osteopath, public or private school teacher, educational administrator, guidance or family counselor, probation officer, social worker, foster parent, firefighter, and police officer, member of the clergy or other person as defined by the child protection laws of the State of Connecticut. See Connecticut General Statute § 46b-120.

Member: Any person who has entered into a formalized Covenant membership with the Church.

Minor: A person under the age of 18 (also referred to as a child or youth).

Participant: Any person who engages in an activity, event or interaction sanctioned by the Church or allowed to occur in or on the properties owned or leased by the Church.

Person: An Adult, Vulnerable Adult, or Minor. =

Safe Practices: The guiding principles established by the Church which outline the expected behavior of Authorized Ministers, Members, employees, volunteers, Friends, Minors and Invitees to the Church.

Youth: Any Person sixteen or seventeen years of age who has not been legally emancipated.

Vulnerable Adult: Any Person aged 18 or older who is or may be in need of community care services by reason 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,

Safe Practices

The following Safe Practices are intended to assist Persons in making decisions about interactions with all Participants on church properties or engaged in church sponsored activities or events. For clarification about the Safe Practices listed below, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact an Authorized Minister, Church Council President, or a member of the First Response Team.

- All Persons will be treated with respect at all times.
- All Persons will be treated fairly regardless of race, sex gender, age, or religion.
- Mistreatment or abuse of any Person by another will not be tolerated.
- Authorized Ministers, employees, members, friends, and volunteers will adhere to Safe Practices as outlined in the Safe Practices Manual.
- All Persons will avoid affection with Minors and Vulnerable Adults that cannot be observed by others.
- All Persons will avoid inappropriate verbal interactions and be respectful in their communications with others.
- All Persons will not stare at or comment on other Persons' bodies.
- Adults are prohibited from dating or become romantically involved with Minors and Vulnerable adults.
- All Persons are prohibited from being under the influence of alcohol at Church sponsored events or activities, unless the event is restricted to adults and access to alcohol is approved by Church Council.
- All Persons are prohibited from using illegal drugs, as defined by Connecticut Law, at Church sponsored events or activities.
- Sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, are not permitted on the Church property or at Church sponsored events or activities.
- Adults will not have secrets with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- Adults will only give gifts to Minors or Vulnerable Adults with prior permission from parents or legal guardians.
- All Persons are prohibited from engaging in inappropriate electronic communications, including but not limited to harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating comments; sexually oriented conversations, posting pictures of other Persons on social media sites without permission; and posting inappropriate comments on pictures.
- All Persons are prohibited from engaging in any abusive behavior in any way including, but not limited to, the following:
 - *Physical Abuse*: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints;

- *Emotional Abuse*: shaming humiliation, cruelty which results in an observable and material impairment or psychological functioning;
- *Verbal Abuse*: degrading, threatening, and swearing;
- *Neglect*: withholding food, water or shelter;
- *Sexual Abuse*: inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations;
- *Sexual Exploitation*: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse), in which a Person takes advantage of the vulnerability of a Participant by causing or allowing the Participant to engage in sexual behavior;
- *Sexual Harassment*: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another Person contrary to his or her wishes and after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome. It includes behavior directed at another Person's sexuality, sexual orientation or sex with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other Person, or subjecting the Person to public discrimination by written contact (including written contact through electronic communications), such as suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations, verbal conduct, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender specific traits or sexual orientation, 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. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and 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.
- *Bullying*: aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength and 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. Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. Bullying behavior includes:

- Physical Bullying: engaging in physical force against another Person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another;
- Verbal Bullying: using words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names;
- Nonverbal or relational bullying: manipulating 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;
- *Cyberbullying*: intentional and overt acts 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 another Person look bad; intentionally excluding someone from an online group; 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, i.e. hazing; sexting, or exposing of private body parts, or using sexualized language or innuendos.

Registered Sex Offenders

As set forth in the Safe Practices Statement, the Church is a community of faith, serving by the example of Jesus Christ, and desires to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption, and fellowship among us. As such, there may come a time when the Church is asked to accept in our midst one who has 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 borne 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 caution.

Connecticut law recognizes four types of sex offenders – those convicted, or found not guilty due to mental disease or defect, of:

1. criminal offenses against minor victims,
2. non-violent sexual offenses,
3. sexually violent offenses, and
4. felonies committed for sexual purposes (CGS §§ 54-250(2), (5), (11), and (12)).

Those convicted of crimes in the first three categories must register as sex offenders; courts may require registration of those in the fourth. Registration is with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection; it maintains an on-line, searchable registry containing offenders' names, photographs, addresses and descriptions of the sex crimes for which they have been required to register. Registrants must keep the department apprised of their whereabouts, school attendance, and workplaces, and notify it within five days of any changes (CGS § 54-250).

Probation and parole officers dictate other conditions with which sex offenders must comply while under community supervision, including completing treatment plans and living in pre-approved locations. Courts can also set conditions when sentencing an offender to probation.

The Congregation, when considering limited participation or membership in the Church of a sex offender, will review records from the courts and probation authorities to 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. 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, the Church 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 by a sex offender shall be honored in all cases.

With respect to a person who is an employee, volunteer or in a position of church leadership, who has previously been convicted of acts of sexual misconduct as defined by the Church 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. Because of restrictions in the Church insurance contracts, the Church may be required to decline participation of certain sex offenders.

With the advice of legal counsel, if the Congregation decides to allow membership or limited participation in the Church by a sex offender it will document the understanding of limitations and prohibitions placed upon the offender in a "Limited

Access Agreement” executed by the offender and the Church. The Limited Access Agreement shall address all allowed contact with regard to Sunday school, day care, pre-school, sports leagues, seasonal camps and associations which serve children and “vulnerable adults.” The Limited Access Agreement shall be reviewed annually to validate ongoing eligibility. Violation of the Limited Access Agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the Agreement.

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 the sex offender’s participation in the life of the Church shall be known to all.

How to Report an Alleged Safe Practices Violation

An Incident Report Form will be completed by any Person who witnesses or is notified of an alleged Safe Practices violation and submitted to the First Response Team or to the Church Office.

The Incident Report Form is attached to this document and can also be found on CCB under Safe Practices Group/Files tab, or in the Church Office.

Nothing in this policy shall be considered a restraint of an individual's statutory obligation to report to authorities. Furthermore, no person shall be restrained from reporting an incident on the basis that they are not a Mandatory Reporter.

Responding to an Alleged Safe Practices Violation

Upon receiving an Incident Report, the Team Leader will immediately assemble the First Response Team and provide all facts necessary for each Team Member to carry out their assigned tasks as set forth in the First Response Team Manual.

All reports of alleged Safe Practice violations will be taken seriously. The Church will cooperate to the fullest extent possible with any external investigation by outside authorities or internal investigation conducted by the First Response Team or persons given investigative authority by the Church.

The Congregational Church in South Glastonbury

INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Please complete this form honestly and openly to the best of your ability. The information provided will be kept confidential and only shared on a need to know basis by the Ministerial staff or members of the First Response team.

Incident date: _____ Time: _____AM/PM

Date of report: _____

Persons involved - name, address, phone number, age and relationship to The Congregational Church in South Glastonbury, i.e. employee, volunteer, member, visitor:

Nature of injury or damage and whether medical attention was required:

Specific location of incident:

If appropriate, list any witnesses to incident:

Description of incident: (Be specific and use back of form if necessary.)

Please print and sign name of person preparing this report:

If First Response Team member contacted, provide name contacted and date:

Please leave the completed form in the church office, Attn: Chair First Response Team or mail to: Chair First Response Team, The Congregational Church in South Glastonbury, P.O. Box 187, South Glastonbury, CT 06073