

SAFE CONDUCT POLICY CONCERNING ABUSE PREVENTION

2.3.1. Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, the National Ministries of the United Church of Christ is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which employees, volunteers and persons served by the NMUCC can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with the NMUCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by NMUCC policy. It is the intention of the NMUCC 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.

2.3.2. Conduct of our Employees and Volunteers

Consistent with the priesthood of all believers, it is important that every employee, including Authorized Ministers, independent contractors and volunteers 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 NMUCC to encourage its employees, independent contractors and volunteers to nurture safety within the work performed on behalf of the NMUCC by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

2.3.3. Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships:

The NMUCC prohibits romantic or sexual relationships between a supervisor and employees who report directly or indirectly to that supervisor by way of the same team or ministry, because such relationships tend to create compromising conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts. In addition, such a relationship may give rise to favoritism or bias in employment decisions affecting the staff member. Moreover, given the uneven balance of power within such relationships, consent by the staff member is suspect and may be viewed by others, or at a later date by the staff member, as having been given as the result of coercion or intimidation. The atmosphere created by such appearances of bias, favoritism, intimidation, coercion or exploitation undermines the spirit of trust and mutual respect that is essential to a healthy work environment.

2.3.4. Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Employment or Volunteerism

- a. Before beginning their duties, all employees, independent contractors and volunteers may be required to submit an application and/or disclosure form.
- b. Before beginning their duties, all employees, independent contractors or volunteers may be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and

qualifications for the position they seek.

- c. Prior to employment, the NMUCC 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.nsopw.gov. The registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all employees.
- d. Prior to assignment as an independent contractor or volunteer, the NMUCC will conduct a background check which will include at minimum, a registered sex offender review for each independent contractor, or volunteer, by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopw.gov.
- e. All employees will be required to complete mandatory training on “Harassment, Abuse and Exploitation Prevention” as scheduled by the NMUCC, not less than once each three-year period.
- f. All Authorized Ministers employed at the NMUCC are expected to attend all boundary workshops required by the Association where the Minister currently has standing.

2.3.5. Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

- a. The NMUCC is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God’s love.
- b. In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry.
- c. All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document.
- d. Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third-party vendor.
- e. All volunteers, independent contractors and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding the abuse prevention policy and procedures.
- f. It is the practice of the NMUCC to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. In situations where participants are readily visible to each other, there will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children. 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.

- g. Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the property of the NMUCC or a NMUCC affiliated church, and any overnight activities.

2.3.6. Definitions

Authorized Minister: a person who holds Ordained Ministerial Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, or has been commissioned, licensed, or granted Lay Ministerial Standing by an Association of the United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Independent Contractor: a person who is contracted by the NMUCC to perform services that are not ordinarily performed by a NMUCC employee, normally on a short term or temporary basis. An independent contractor, for purposes of this policy, does not include a vendor or third party who supplies goods or services to the NMUCC. (i.e. attorneys, auditors, suppliers of equipment/office supplies, caterers, musicians, etc.).

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

Sexual Harassment: Refer to section 2.2 of this Handbook.

2.3.7. Complaint Procedures

- a. The Director of Human Resources will lead the investigation into and respond to any complaints under this policy. The Director of Human Resources is familiar with the terms of this policy as well as the established policies of the NMUCC for addressing concerns, complaints and grievances, as set forth at paragraph 8.1 of the Common Personnel Policies. 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 NMUCC, the complainant can raise the concern with their supervisor.
 - 3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may bring their concerns to their supervisor or the Director of Human Resources.
- b. The Director of Human Resources and the appropriate representative (“the fact-finding team”) such as the Office of General Counsel 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 complainant and the appropriate Officer of the Church and/or to the Audit Committee of the United Church of Christ Board (“UCCB”).

- c. To resolve the matter, the fact-finding team shall make determinations and make recommendations to the appropriate Officer of the Church and/or the Audit Committee of the UCCB to resolve the matter. These may include, but are not limited to:
1. 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 formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;
 - recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;
 - probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
 - dismissal from employment or volunteer position.
 2. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.
 3. The fact-finding team and the appropriate Officer of the Church, 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.
- d. A written summary of the fact-finding team's investigation and recommendations will be maintained.
- e. 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 NMUCC may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
- f. 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.
- g. 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 discriminates against or discharged.
- h. The appeal process for any complaint under this policy is set forth at section 8.5 of the Common Personnel Policies.

2.3.8 Child Abuse

The NMUCC will follow legal requirements for reporting child abuse at all times. Apart from any legal requirements the NMUCC will make a report to the appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, if at any time the NMUCC has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any employee of the NMUCC who becomes aware, in the context and circumstances of their employment, of the 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 Ohio Department of Job & Family Services by calling 855-O-H-CHILD (855-642-4453), and also report the matter to the Human Resources Office so that the NMUCC may take appropriate action in a timely manner.

2.3.9. Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the NMUCC, 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. The Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) ministry team provides process guidance and support to Committees on Ministry and Conference staff, and is the team to which any questions or concerns shall be directed.

2.3.10. Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances to protect the privacy of persons involved.

For additional information regarding this policy, contact humanresources@ucc.org.