

# NORTH HAVEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

## SAFE CONDUCT POLICY

(Approved by Congregation on January 27, 2019)

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## **Mission, Purpose, and Intent**

Our church's mission is to bind ourselves with Jesus Christ in worship together, nurture of Christian discipleship, and compassionate service to our community and beyond. We believe all persons are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26), and that God calls us – individually and collectively – to nurture faith in our community in a caring, safe, and loving manner.

Our church believes that all children, adults (whether members or friends), employees, and authorized ministers (“Minister(s)”) are valuable gifts entrusted to our care spiritually, physically, and emotionally, and the purpose of this Policy is to protect them in a safe Christian community.

It is the intention of this congregation to have a clear policy to discourage, and seek to prevent, abuse within our Christian community, and to promote an avenue for an appropriate response should allegations of misconduct arise at any time.

## **Statement of Policy**

It is NHCC policy that all persons engaged in the ministry of NHCC, including but not limited to elected or appointed leaders, Ministers, employees, members, friends, and volunteers, are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Abuse (including child abuse), sexual abuse (including child sexual abuse), sexual harassment, or sexual exploitation of others (regardless of age, tongue, race, ability, circumstance, and sexual orientation) by anyone engaged in the ministry of NHCC is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated.

We recognize that mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of powers (for example between Minister and congregant, church school teacher or youth leader and child, choir director and choir members, and supervisor and employee), and when a person is unable to consent (for whatever reason).

Further, NHCC shall encourage those engaged in the ministry of NHCC to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care and education, and realizing the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

With regards to children, NHCC requires that all people applying to be volunteers working with minors have:

1. Been members for at least six months, or friends of NHCC for one year
2. Completed the Application for Volunteers, and
3. Completed the Volunteer Driver Qualification Form and Agreement for Use of Personally Owned Vehicles

Finally, it is NHCC policy that this is an individual as well as collective responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward each other, through words and actions,

and we expressly acknowledge that all of us (not just the Minister(s), employees, and Safe Conduct Policy Mission Team) are responsible to and for this Policy.

### **Education and Training**

The Safe Conduct Mission Team will be responsible for the implementation of procedures designed to educate Minister(s), employees, members, friends, and volunteers regarding this Policy.

As part of each new employee's orientation to NHCC, the Minister(s) will educate the employee about this Policy and the employee's responsibility to abide by it, and the employee shall complete and sign a disclosure and/or acknowledgement form(s).

The Ministry Coordinator for Children will ensure that the Faith Formation Mission Team defines and implements procedures designed to further the intent of this policy, and educate members, friends, and volunteers on these procedures through regular training programs.

The Ministry Leadership Board ("MLB") shall design and maintain procedures related to building use that uphold this Policy.

Annual training programs will teach Minister(s), employees, members, friends, and volunteers how and when to report an allegation of misconduct and how to discuss questionable behavior with either the Minister(s) and/or the Response Team.

### **Maintenance of Records**

Records of all actions required by this Policy and any material pertinent to it, including reports, workers' surveys, and application and acknowledgement forms, shall be kept for seven (7) years in a secure place.

### **Response Team**

A Response Team will consist of three members of the congregation (representing varied age groups, with at least one male and one female) appointed by the Moderator for indefinite terms, responsible to the Moderator and MLB, and identified at the first MLB meeting each year.

The Response Team shall: (1) take seriously and objectively investigate all allegations of abuse, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation, (2) oversee compliance with this Policy and an annual review of it; (3) handle the above matters with confidentiality; and (4) extend God's grace and compassion to all parties involved in the above matters.

The Response Team shall have the sole authority to engage with the media, and by majority vote shall designate one of its members (and/or other(s) they identify) to communicate with the media, and report its activities and decisions to the Congregation after consultation with NHCC's attorney.

**Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Harassment, or Sexual Exploitation**

Here are the procedures that apply to **all** allegations:

1. All allegations must be reported to the Minister(s), Moderator, and/or Response Team.
2. Our first priority shall be the care and safety of the complainant and his/her family, including but not limited to extending whatever pastoral resources are needed.
  - If the complainant is a NHCC employee or member, bringing a complaint alone shall not be grounds for any adverse action in terms of employment or membership status and its associated rights and privileges.
3. We shall treat the accused with dignity and respect, and offer pastoral resources to him/her.
  - If the accused is a NHCC member, an allegation alone does not otherwise affect his/her membership status and associated rights and privileges.
4. NHCC shall complete an Incident Report regarding the complaint.
5. The Response Team shall evaluate and address the incident, including but not limited to:
  - a. Conversations with the complainant and the accused, and
  - b. A decision whether the allegation is frivolous or non-frivolous.
6. For non-frivolous allegations, the Response Team shall continue to evaluate and address the incident, including but not limited to:
  - a. If the accused is a NHCC employee or volunteer, notifying the accused that he/she is relieved temporarily of his/her duties (with pay, if the accused is a paid employee), until the Response Team otherwise decides
  - b. If the accused is a Minister, the Response Team shall inform the appropriate body of the wider United Church of Christ (e.g., Regional Minister, Consociation Committee on the Ministry) of the allegation
    - In this situation, NHCC shall cooperate in any procedures of the United Church of Christ related to the person's ministerial authorization, while retaining the right and responsibility to employ or designate leadership within NHCC as it determines best.
  - c. Making decision(s) on the accused's ability to return to his/her duties
  - d. Making decision(s) on an accused church employee's employment and pay status, and
  - e. Making decision(s) on a member's membership status.
7. At all times, the Response Team may involve the Minister(s) and Moderator in its sole discretion.
8. NHCC shall cooperate with state and local agencies and law enforcement, when and as required.
9. When the Response Team deems it appropriate, it shall file a formal report with law enforcement, which may take responsibility for further evaluation and investigation of the allegation.

10. NHCC's attorney must be present while any questions from law enforcement or social service agencies are directed to the Response Team, Minister(s), Moderator, and/or NHCC employees.
11. If the complainant or the accused (other than an accused Minister) is dissatisfied with the Response Team's resolution of the matter, he/she may appeal to the Moderator, who shall refer the matter to the Ministry Leadership Board for final resolution.
12. The Response Team shall submit an annual report for the Congregation of its members and an appropriate summary of any actions it took in that calendar year.

Here is **additional information** that applies when a minor (under 18 years old) is involved:

- All Minister(s) are mandated state reporters, and shall report all allegations of child abuse (and any other situation required by law) to the applicable state and local agencies and law enforcement.
- NHCC shall notify the parents/guardian of a minor, whether the minor is the complainant or accused, regarding the allegation.

## Appendix -- Definitions

For the purposes of this policy we are using the following definitions:

**Abuse:** Physical injury(ies) inflicted upon another other than by accidental means, or injury(ies) which are at variance with the history given of them.

**Authorized Minister:** A person who holds authorized ministerial standing (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) by an Association of the United Church of Christ, or another denomination.

**Child:** Anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as **Minor** and **Youth**, and these words are used interchangeably in this Policy, unless otherwise noted).

**Confidentiality:** Only those who need to know are given information when that information enables them to make informed decisions that they are duly authorized to make. Sharing information with those who need to know is not viewed as compromising the integrity or confidentiality of the Safe Conduct Policy process.

**Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual activity or contact of a sexual nature that is nonconsensual and/or prohibited by law, including but not limited to activity meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of another.

**Sexual Exploitation:** Taking advantage of the vulnerability of another by causing or allowing the person to engage in any sexual activity or contact of a sexual nature.

**Sexual Harassment:** Repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation 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:

- 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, verbal contact, physical contact, and visual contact.
- Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome.