

Safe Church Policy

May 28, 2021

Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, St. John's Center UCC (SJCUC) 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 SJCUC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that church policy prohibits such behavior. 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.

Ministerial Conduct

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all pastors, 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 SJCUC 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 SJCUC is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

1. Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit the appropriate Disclosure Form (Exhibit A or Exhibit B).
2. Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.
3. The church will conduct the required background checks for all Ministers. See Exhibits A and B. These background checks will be repeated in compliance with state regulations (every 5 years) for all Ministers.
4. Authorized Ministers of the church will attend at least one SJCUC approved workshop on this topic every three years.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

SJCUC 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.

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1. We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been members of SJCUC for at least six months or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with SJCUC for at least a year.
2. All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth are required to obtain all clearances pursuant to the PA Child Protection Service Law (CPSL). An overview of this requirement can be found at (Keepkidssafe.pa.gov) along with answers to frequently asked questions.
3. All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.
4. 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 at least two unrelated adults present with children. Youth over the age of 17 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.
5. Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities.

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.

Pastor/Authorized Minister: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or is licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ. A pastor 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.

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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:

1. 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.
2. 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
3. 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:

1. Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails, invitations, or any kind of social media.
2. Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, sexual propositions;
3. Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding, or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
4. 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.

Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment

1. Generally
 - a. Spiritual Council will be responsible for hearing complaints under this policy. All members of the Council will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

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- b. The following steps shall be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or harassment:
- (1) The complainant shall report the incident directly to the Pastor or Moderator who shall then report the incident to the Spiritual Council.
 - (2) The Spiritual Council shall advise the Pastor and Moderator of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the Pastor or Moderator is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person.
 - (3) The Spiritual Council 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.
 - (4) The Spiritual Council shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
 - (a) Finding that sexual exploitation or harassment has occurred, the Spiritual Council shall take action accordingly; such action may include one or more of the following:
 - i. a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;
 - ii. recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;
 - iii. probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
 - iv. dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.
 - (b) Finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur. The Spiritual Council may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.
 - (5) A written summary of the Spiritual Council proceedings in such cases will be maintained.
 - (6) 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.
 - (7) 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.

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- (8) 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.
- (9) If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Spiritual Council, 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 Consistory. The subject of any such appeal to the Consistory 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 Consistory will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Consistory determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Spiritual Council to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

c. Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements, SJCUCG will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Pennsylvania Department of 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 Pastor and Moderator so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. Contact the ChildLine and Abuse Registry Intake Unit at (800-932-0313).

2. 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 Pastor will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Lancaster Association of the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ.
- b. The Penn Central Conference may be contacted at 717-652-1560.



Rev. R. Kenneth Evitts, Pastor
432 Reading Road
East Earl, PA 17519
(717) 445-5622
office@stjohnscenterucc.org
www.stjohnscenterucc.org

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EXHIBIT A

St. John's Center UCC Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form (Non-child/youth ministry volunteer)

Revised 4/25/21

Legal Name: Last, First, Middle

Legal Address: Street, City/State, Zip code

Primary Phone Cell Phone Email

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

Relationship _____

Reference #1 Legal Name: Last, First, Middle

Legal Address: Street, City/State, Zip code

Primary Phone Cell Phone Email

Reference #2 Legal Name: Last, First, Middle

Legal Address: Street, City/State, Zip code

Primary Phone Cell Phone Email

I have been a member of this church since _____

I have been a friend of this church since _____



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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 dismissed, 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 on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it. 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 on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it.

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 SJCUC 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 SJCUC 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 SJCUC 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 SJCUC will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.



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I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the SJCUCG Safe Church Policy.

_____ Printed Name Signature Date

*The following line is used only for applicants under 18-years of age,
 and requires the name and signature of a parent or legal guardian.*

_____ Printed Name Signature Date

Verification Steps:

- PA State Police Criminal History Clearance received on _____ by _____
- If required, FBI Criminal History Clearance received on _____ by _____
- Personal interview conducted by staff on _____ by _____
- Reference inquiries completed on _____ by _____



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Exhibit B

**St. John's Center UCC
 Employment/Authorized Children and Youth Volunteer
 Application and Disclosure Form**

Name: **Last** **First** **Middle**

Address: **Street** **City/State** **Zip Code**

Daytime Phone/Mobile **Evening Phone** **Email**

References:

One reference should be related to you and the other reference should not be related to you.

1) **Name** **Relationship**

Address **City/State/Zip Code** **Phone** **Email**

2) **Name**

Address **City/State/Zip Code** **Phone** **Email**

3) **Name**

Address **City/State/Zip Code** **Phone** **Email**



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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 dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state.)

TRUE _____

FALSE _____

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 on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it. 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.

No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.

TRUE _____

FALSE _____

If not true, give a short explanation of the lawsuit on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it. (Please indicate the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit; where the lawsuit was filed; and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.)

I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position or had my employment, professional credentials, or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct.

TRUE _____

FALSE _____

If not true, give a short explanation on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it. (Please indicate the date of termination; name, address, and telephone number of employer or volunteer supervisor; and nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.)

Do you have a valid drivers' license?

YES _____

NO _____



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With respect to my driving record, I have not had my license suspended or revoked within the last five years due to reckless driving or driving while intoxicated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance.

TRUE _____

FALSE _____

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 on a separate sheet, which shall be attached to this application and become part of it.

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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 SJCUC 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.

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I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the SJCUCS Safe Church Policy.

(PRINT NAME & SIGN)

DATE

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

Verification Steps:

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- PA State Police Criminal History Clearance received on ____ by _____
- If required, FBI Criminal History Clearance received on _____ by _____
- Personal interview conducted by staff on _____ by ____
- Reference inquiries completed on _____ by ____
- Abuse prevention awareness training and policy orientation performed on: _____
by _____
- **For employees:**
- Criminal History Verification to include Fair Credit Reporting Act notices completed on _____
by _____
- Drug Test results received on _____ by _____
- **For volunteers:** Church membership for at least 6 months, or regular association with SJC or
at least one year, confirmed on: _____ by ____.