

Safe Church Policy-Abuse Prevention Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ

As a community of Christian faith, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ (hereinafter the ICUCC) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which employees, volunteers, and persons served by the ICUCC can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation and/or intimidation.

All persons associated with the ICUCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Harassment and physical or verbal abuse and that such behavior is prohibited by the ICUCC policy. It is the intention of the ICUCC to take action to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Conduct of Employees and Volunteers

Consistent with the priesthood of all believers, every employee, including Authorized Ministers, and volunteers, must be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others and to understand ways in which the use or misuse of authority may impact others. It is the policy of the ICUCC to encourage its employees and volunteers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships and ministry activities by being attentive to self-care, education, maintenance of appropriate boundaries, and referral of those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Harassment, physical or verbal abuse of employees, volunteers or others by anyone engaged in ministry, including any program or Outdoor Ministry activities, on behalf of the ICUCC is unethical behavior, will not be tolerated by the ICUCC, and may be cause for immediate termination of employment or volunteer leadership with the ICUCC.

Other workplace harassment is defined in the ICUCC's Personnel Manual, Section 2.2 and 2.3 with consequences specified.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Employment or Volunteerism

Before beginning any assigned duties, all employees and volunteers will submit the IL Conference Safe Church Application and Disclosure form attached hereto or a similar version thereof.

Before beginning any assigned duties, all employees and/or volunteers will be personally interviewed by the assigned immediate supervisor to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position sought.

Prior to **employment**, the ICUCC will conduct a criminal background check and employment reference for all prospective employees, including, but not limited to, a registered sex offender

review for each prospective employee by searching by name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. The registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all employees.

Prior to **assignment as a volunteer**, the ICUCC will carry out a registered sex offender review by searching by name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. The registered sex offender review will be repeated annually for volunteers who return to or continue in their positions. In addition, reference checks may also be conducted for volunteers.

All employees and volunteers who return to or continue in their positions will be required to attend mandatory workshops on “Safe Church” issues and practices as scheduled by the ICUCC no less than once in each three-year period.

In addition, all Authorized Ministers employed by the ICUCC will attend boundary workshops required by their Association or Conference, attending at least one approved workshop on this topic every three years.

Additional Requirement Child and Youth Ministry

The ICUCC 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 goal, the following requirements apply in addition to the general requirements listed above.

- All prospective **employees and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth** will submit a disclosure statement substantially similar to the IL Conference Safe Church Application and Disclosure form hereto attached.
- Before beginning their duties, **all prospective employees for youth and children ministry** will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and criminal history verification by a third party vendor.
- All prospective **volunteers for children and youth ministry** will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to, inquiries of references. Volunteers for Conference programming for youth (including Outdoor Ministry and Illinois Conference Youth Initiative, ICYI, events) are preferred to have twelve months of active involvement with the local church.
- All employees and volunteers who work regularly with children and youth must attend Conference approved orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.
- All adults are expected to present a mature model of Christian behavior for those being supervised. The use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, ammunition or firearms is not permitted.

The following expectations and regulations shall also apply to any Conference youth and/or child programming including Outdoor Ministry and ICYI Events.

- It is the desire and expectation of the ICUCC to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth and child activities. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, no fewer than two preferably unrelated adults will be present with children. Youth over the age of 16 may assist an unrelated adult in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two preferably unrelated adults be present.
- The ratio of adults to youth or children for supervision of overnight and off-site activities will be one to six. If groups of youth include both male and female youth, there must be both male and female adult supervisors.
- In situations of overnight housing, if adults are housed in the same room as youth, at least two preferably unrelated adults must be assigned to the room. When housing is in hotels or college dormitory rooms, it is recommended that youth and adults be housed in separate rooms.
- Signed written consent of one custodial parent or guardian of a minor (including transportation consent if appropriate) will be required for all activities off the property of the ICUCC or a UCC affiliated church or any overnight activity.
- A valid health form is required for all children and youth attending an ICUCC sponsored event taking place away from parental supervision.

In the event youth are used as volunteers with children, every attempt will be made to insure they are 18 years of age or to team the youth with a preferably unrelated adult. At least five years separation between adults in supervision and the children/youth they supervise is the recommended rule.

Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment

Alleged incidents involving Conference employees will be addressed as outlined in the Personnel Manual of the Illinois Conference United Church of Christ.

The Illinois Conference Minister or his/her designee will oversee the investigation into and response to any complaints under this policy involving volunteers.

Several approaches may be used to resolve the complaint.

- a) The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent—the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment or physical or verbal abuse.

- b) The complainant can report the incident to the supervisor of the event, program, or ICYI or Outdoor Ministry program, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
- c) If the informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Conference Minister institute formal proceedings to investigate the matter.

A decision on removal of the accused must be made:

- a) In all cases, if the situation has the potential of harm to any individual, the person against whom the complaint is made will be immediately suspended from the position while investigation is carried out.
- b) If the alleged behavior took place in an Outdoor Ministry setting or ICYI event by a volunteer, the appropriate Site Manager or ICYI event coordinator (if not the accused) will take the leadership in determining how best to assure the safety of all. If necessary, the Site Manager/Coordinator may make an immediate decision to remove the individual against whom a complaint has been made from the leadership position.
- c) If the alleged behavior is that of a volunteer and took place in an ICUCC youth ministry setting, and, if conversations among the persons involved do not assure the safety of all, the leader of the event (if not the accused) may immediately decide to remove the individual against whom a complaint has been made from the leadership position and from the event.
- d) Before any individual against whom the complaint has been made may return to volunteer ministry, a full investigation of the matter must be made with written records filed and a determination made of the volunteer's fitness to return.

If the formal investigation is required, it shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter.

If it is found that sexual exploitation or harassment or physical or verbal abuse has occurred, action taken may include:

- a) a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior
- b) an assignment to probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined
- c) dismissal from volunteer ministry

General Conditions

The investigating individual may seek the advice of legal counsel to advise him/her in performing the investigation.

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. The ICUCC may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process at any time.

In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation or physical or verbal abuse, consideration shall be given to the record of alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstance, including the context in which the alleged incident occurred.

Any person bringing a sexual harassment, exploitation or physical or verbal abuse complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

A written summary of the investigation and recommendations will be maintained in the Conference Office.

Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements, the ICUCC will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Illinois Department of Family and Children's Services, if at any time the ICUCC has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child.

Any employee or volunteer of the ICUCC who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Illinois Department of Family and Children's Services. The Illinois child abuse hotline number is 800.252.2873. (The nationwide Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-25ABUSE).

Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the ICUCC, all allegations of behavior that call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Association that has commissioned or licensed that Minister.

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).

Ministerial Relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the ICUCC and the one being served by that ministry.

Sexual Exploitation: sexual activity or conduct (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a person engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing that person to engage in sexual behavior with the UCC 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 ICUCC activity; or

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

Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in ICUCC 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, 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, 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, leadership opportunities, or comfortable participation in the life of the ICUCC. 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.