

**ROCK SPRING CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
DRAFT – Adopted by the Safe Church Task Force July 2009**

Statement of Christian Conviction:

As a community of Christian faith, Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ (RSCUCC) seeks to be a sanctuary – a place of refuge, hope and safety – a sacred space where anyone who enters is safe in God’s hands. To that end, we are committed to creating and maintaining a community of faith and ministry in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can safely worship and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with RSCUCC should be aware that the church is opposed to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and other abuse, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of RSCUCC to take action to attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline persons who violate this policy.

Ministerial Conduct:

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, we recognize that all authorized ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and volunteers are engaged in ministry to the congregation. It is important that all persons engaged in ministry at RSCUCC 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 affect others.

It is the policy of RSCUCC to encourage all persons engaged in ministry to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education and maintaining appropriate boundaries, and to emphasize the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and verbal and physical abuse of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in paid or volunteer ministry on behalf of RSCUCC is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation. Moreover, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and verbal and physical abuse between individuals in non-ministerial relationships will not be tolerated on church property or at church-sponsored events. RSCUCC’s procedure for addressing complaints and allegations of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse are described below.

Requirements for Authorized Ministers and Pastoral Interns:

Before beginning their duties, all authorized ministers and pastoral interns will submit a self-disclosure form.

All authorized ministers and pastoral interns will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references, criminal history verification by a third party, and a review of relevant Federal and State registries of convicted sex offenders.

Authorized ministers of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by the Potomac Association of the Central Atlantic Conference, or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent. Pastoral interns will be encouraged to attend such workshops.

Requirements for Children’s and Youth Ministry:

RSCUCC 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.

Affiliation and Self-Disclosure Documents

We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will be members of RSCUCC or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with RSCUCC for at least six months prior to volunteering or referred by a member of RSCUCC.

All volunteers and staff who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit an application and self-disclosure document (examples provided in Attachment A) annually to the Rock Spring Safe Church Working Group. Positions that will be subject to this requirement will include authorized ministers, pastoral interns, paid and volunteer childcare providers, church school teachers, Our Whole Lives (OWL) instructors, YORS advisors, YORS chaperones, drivers for youth and children’s events, choir directors for children and youth, and other leaders for children and youth programs. Drivers will be required to also provide a copy of their driver’s license.

Before volunteer and paid staff decisions are final, the self-disclosure documents will be reviewed by the Safe Church Working Group. Prospective volunteers and paid staff will be interviewed by the appropriate church Board or Committee to determine their suitability for the position sought. Before beginning, the volunteer or staff will be provided with a copy of the RSCUCC Safe Church Policies and Procedures, and will be required to acknowledge in writing receipt thereof and agreement to comply with all Safe Church provisions.

Criminal Background Checks

Before beginning their duties, all prospective paid employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references, criminal history verification by a third party vendor, and a review of relevant Federal and State registries of convicted sex offenders.

Criminal background checks will also be required for volunteers who regularly work with children and youth, including authorized ministers, pastoral interns, paid and volunteer childcare providers, church school teachers, Our Whole Lives (OWL) instructors, YORS advisors, YORS chaperones, drivers for youth and children’s events, choir directors for children and youth, and other leaders for children and youth programs.

The cost of said background checks will be paid by RSCUCC.

Supervision of Children and Youth Activities

Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ 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 for supervision of children's and youth activities.

Team Approach: At least 2 approved adults must be present before, during and after all church activities while children and youth are in attendance. Exceptions may be made with parent/guardian approval.

Overnight policy: At least 2 approved adults must be present during any overnight church activity. This includes any off-site trips, camps or retreats. Only approved adults may spend the night. If the activity includes both male and female participants, both male and female adults must be present.

Open Visitation Policy: All are welcome to visit and observe all programs or ministries involving children and youth.

Drop-Off Policy: Our congregation welcomes the participation of all parents and guardians in our ministry with children and youth. Parents/guardians are encouraged to accompany their children at all times while on church property. When dropping off a child or youth for an activity or program, we ask that the child be accompanied into the church building, and to the designated meeting place for that activity or program. We ask that parents/guardians check in with the leaders, and complete any necessary sign-in sheet or registration forms.

Registration Policy: A blanket permission slip/medical form must be filled out at the beginning of each school year and kept on file with the church office. This form allows participation in all children's and youth activities, including activities requiring transportation provided by the congregation. Parents/guardians shall notify the church of any changes in information. Written parental/guardian permission is needed for "one-on-one" activities. A verified verbal telephone contact shall be acceptable in emergency situations (a verified contact is one that is heard by two individuals).

Driving Policy: Transporting children and youth in vehicles is a unique situation. There are times when the "two adult" practice may not be feasible. In order to minimize risk, there must be at least one approved adult operating the vehicle. All drivers must be 21 years of age or older. There must be at least three (3) persons in a vehicle.

Orientation and Training about RSCUCC Safe Church Policies and Procedures

All employees and all volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding Safe Church policy and procedures. The content and frequency of such training will be developed by the Safe Church Working Group in consultation with the Pastors and other appropriate RSCUCC entities.

Children and youth at RSCUCC will receive instruction about RSCUCC Safe Church policies and procedures as part of the yearly church school curriculum. Such instruction will be age-appropriate and appropriate to the participation of children and youth in the life of congregation. This curriculum will be developed and administered by the Safe Church

Working Group in conjunction with the Board of Christian Education and in consultation with the Pastoral Team and other appropriate RSCUCC and United Church of Christ entities. The training will be administered by the RSCUCC Board of Christian Education, Pastors and/or other appropriate entities.

Definitions of Misconduct

Misconduct is behavior and conduct by a person in a position of authority or power in which another person is made more vulnerable and powerless through boundary-crossing activities, regardless of whom initiates the behavior.

Sexual Exploitation is defined as sexual activity or contact (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 ministered to by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior.

Harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome conduct that feels intrusive, intimidating, hostile, offensive, and/or humiliating to the victim. Sexual harassment is defined by law as “the use of one’s authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations, or to punish another for her/his refusal; or the creation of an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment through verbal, physical or electronic conduct of a sexual nature.

Abuse is a pattern of behavior that is used to control and/or dominate another person. It can be physical (actual or threatened harm, such as hitting, shoving, kicking or throwing things), psychological (mental or emotional mistreatment, such as being insulted, ridiculed or threatened verbally), or sexual. Sexual abuse pertains to unwanted and recurrent sexualized behaviors. Three major areas of concern are (a) sexual contact between an adult and a minor; (b) sexual contact between minors that violates a trust relationship or power relationship; and (c) sexual contact between adults that violates a trust relationship or power relationship.

Other Definitions

Authorized Minister – Any person who holds standing as an ordained minister, commissioned minister or licensed minister in the Potomac Association, Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ.

Safe Church Inquiry Team – The Rock Spring Safe Church Inquiry Team (SCIT) will consist of three persons, including at least one male and one female. The members will be appointed jointly by the President of the Church Council and a member of the Pastoral Team. Members of the SCIT will be responsible for investigating complaints under this policy.

Safe Church Working Group – The Rock Spring Safe Church Working Group will consist of a representative of the Pastoral Team, and representatives of each of the Boards of Deacons, Christian Education and Personnel. It is the job of the Safe Church Working Group to develop and maintain Rock Spring’s Safe Church policy and to implement its preventative procedures as outlined in the policy.

Procedures for Reporting Allegations of Misconduct

- 1) Against Authorized Ministers and Pastoral Interns
 - a. An allegation shall be reported to the Church Council President and Senior Pastor, if that person is not accused. If the Senior Pastor is accused, it shall be reported to another member of the Pastoral Team.
 - b. The Council President shall report the allegation to the Associate Conference Minister of the Potomac Association of the United Church of Christ. The Association will intervene as outlined in the most recent edition of its Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy & Procedure Response. (A copy is available in the church office.) This procedure provides that the response shall occur as “soon as possible,” usually within hours, and details the complete investigative procedure including the interviewing of all parties.
 - c. The Safe Church Inquiry Team shall work with the Conference Response Team.
 - d. If action is indicated, a recommendation (see 4 below) shall be made by the Safe Church Inquiry Team to the Senior Pastor (or another member of the Pastoral Team if the Senior Pastor is the accused), the Church Council President and the Chair of the Board of Personnel.

- 2) Against Staff or Volunteers
 - a. An allegation shall be reported to a member of the Pastoral Team, the Church Council President, or the Chair of the Personnel Board.
 - b. The Safe Church Inquiry Team shall be notified and shall gather information from the accuser(s) (and parent/guardian in the case of a minor), the accused, and from others who may have pertinent information. At all times, the SCIT will act in a manner of confidentiality for all parties.

- 3) The Safe Church Inquiry Team will make a determination of fact on the allegation in a timely manner, and report their findings to the Senior Pastor, the Church Council President, and the Chair of the Board of Personnel. In making this determination, 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. This report will be the final determination on the allegation, and will provide recommendations for fairly resolving the allegation (see 4 below).

- 4) Resolution of the Matter
 - a. If there is a finding that the allegations are without merit, the accuser(s) and the accused will be notified in writing by the Safe Church Inquiry Team, with sensitivity paid to those who have brought the allegations, as well as the pain experienced by the accused and his/her family.
 - b. If there is a finding that misconduct has occurred, the Safe Church Inquiry Team is charged with defining that misconduct, and recommending action(s) for fairly resolving the allegation. 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 probation clearly defined;
 - iv. Executing a “Limited Access Agreement or Covenant” between the offender and the congregation;

- v. Dismissal from employment, leadership or volunteer position by or affiliation with RSCUCC;
 - vi. Pursuit of legal action through the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- c. In either case, the Senior Pastor, President of Church Council and Chair of the Board of Personnel shall meet with the accused and separately with the accuser and/or victim (and parent/guardian in the case of a minor) to notify them of the determination of fact. They will also inform those involved of the recommendations from the Safe Church Inquiry Team, and act to carry out those recommendations (if applicable). These meetings shall seek to bring closure to the matter and to seek a restoration of relationship within the church family, as appropriate.
- d. A written summary of all Safe Church Inquiry Team proceedings will be maintained. The summary may distinguish between text for the general file and text for a confidential file.
- 5) The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant(s). 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.
- 6) 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.

Procedures Pertaining to Child Abuse

Apart from any legal requirements, RSCUCC will make a report to appropriate authorities if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any person engaged in the ministry of RSCUCC who believes 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 a member of the Pastoral Team so that the church will take appropriate action in a timely manner. A list of such authorities and how they may be contacted shall be provided to the SCIT and the SCWG.

Pastoral Care during a Safe Church Inquiry

At any time during a Safe Church Inquiry Team investigation, members of the Pastoral Team will be available to all parties involved. If requested by the victim or the victim's family, the congregation will assist in finding appropriate resources outside of the pastoral staff.