

Rock Spring Congregational UCC
Safe Church Abuse Prevention Policy
Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment

Adopted by Church Council, 6/15/2021*

As a community of Christian faith, Rock Spring Congregational United Church of Christ (RSCUCC) 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 RSCUCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. 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 Authorized Ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and 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 RSCUCC 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, sexual harassment, or harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of RSCUCC is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

- The appropriate church Board or Committee, or designee, will speak with prospective volunteers and paid staff 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 Abuse Prevention Policy, and will be required to acknowledge in writing receipt thereof and agreement to comply with all Safe Church guidelines.
- Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees and volunteers who will regularly work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third-party vendor. Prospective employees will be provided with appropriate notices under the Fair Credit Reporting Act. The cost of background checks will be paid by RSCUCC.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will have been members of, or regularly and frequently associated with, RSCUCC for at least six months.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will receive orientation regarding abuse prevention policy and procedures.
 - Adults (age 18 or older and graduated from high school) who have satisfied these requirements shall be considered “approved” adults.
- Authorized Ministers of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by the Potomac Association Committee on Ministry. Pastoral Interns will be required to meet all boundary training requirements of their program.

Additional Requirements for Child 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. To promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- **Supervision:** It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. There will be no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children, at least one of whom will be an approved adult (as defined in the preceding section). Exceptions may be made with parent/guardian approval or in exigent circumstances.
 - Youth age 16 or older may serve as a “second adult” and assist an unrelated approved adult in leading and supervising children’s activities. The youth should be at least 3 years older than the oldest child being supervised.
- **Parental Consent:** A blanket permission slip/medical form must be filled out at the beginning of each school year and kept on file with the program leader. 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. Parents will be informed of transportation arrangements for off-campus activities and sleeping arrangements for overnight activities.
- **Driving Policy:** Transporting children and youth in vehicles is a unique situation. There are times when the “two adult” practice may not be feasible. Care should be taken to minimize risk when feasible, including having an approved adult operate the vehicle and at least three persons in a vehicle. All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
- **Virtual/Online Meetings:** All virtual or online meetings involving children and youth are subject to the same requirements as in person activities: no fewer than two unrelated adults will be online with children and consent of a parent will be required for participation. Additionally, parents will be provided with attendance credentials and invited to attend if they choose.
 - During the meeting, if the second adult unexpectedly leaves, strategies may include putting all attendees into the Waiting Room until the second adult returns, recording the meeting, asking a parent to join the meeting, or closing the meeting and ending early. At the beginning of the meeting, the host should grant all other adults co-host privileges. It is not typically feasible for two adults to be present in breakout rooms – instead, each adult will drop in and out of the various breakout

rooms to check in, with the youth always having the option of leaving the breakout room to return to the main room of the meeting.

- Youth and adult attendees at a virtual event shall conduct themselves in a manner befitting a church event and be attentive to their backgrounds and what is visible to others. Persons behaving inappropriately will immediately be excluded from the meeting.
- **Communications with Youth:** Adults are encouraged whenever possible to limit one-on-one electronic communications by using public social media pages, copying parents or other adults on e-mails, and keeping parents apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations. Adults may not use non-traceable forms of communication and forums, such as Snapchat and private groups not set up by the church consistent with the principles of this document. Adults will not initiate emails or texts with youth without copying the Director of Faith Formation or a parent. Adults will not initiate a friend or follow request with youth on any social media platform. If a youth sends an adult a friend request or requests to follow the adult, the adult will discern the level of contact they wish to maintain with the youth prior to responding to the request. Adults should save all messages for a reasonable period of time, and if a youth contacts them, should report the contact (but not necessarily the content) to the Director of Faith Formation or a parent, as appropriate. Approved adults should also consult the youth's permission form and follow parent/guardian requests for electronic communication and photo releases.

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.

Authorized Minister: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing, lay 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). An Authorized Minister is one type of Minister within the meaning of this policy.

Harassment: verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of their race, color, gender, gender identity and expression, national origin, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, genetic information or that of relatives, friends or employees, and that

- constitutes discrimination in the terms, conditions, and privileges of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity; or
- has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's job performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to the following:

- epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping or threatening, intimidating or hostile acts, that relate to race, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, genetic information; and

- written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group because of race, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability and that is placed in emails, text messages or other electronic communications, on walls, bulletin boards or elsewhere on the church's premises, or circulated in the church.

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.

Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to that person's 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 church activity.
- 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
- 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, 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, 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, Sexual Harassment, or Harassment

I. Generally

RSCUCC does not condone or tolerate acts of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment. Employees and volunteers are under a duty to report any acts of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment they may observe whether in the workplace, life of the church, or in any of the church's ministries. Any employee, volunteer, or church member or visitor who believes they are a victim of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and/or harassment in the church should immediately report the behavior as indicated below.

A. A subcommittee of the Christian Education and/or Personnel Boards, with no less than two members of two different genders, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee, hereinafter referred to as "the Response Team," will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint.

B. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment:

1. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.
2. The complainant can report the incident to an Authorized Minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:
 - The Response Team shall advise the most senior Authorized Minister and the Council Chair of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. If either the most senior Authorized Minister or the Council Chair is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply as to that person, and instead the second most senior Authorized Minister and/or the Vice Chair of Council shall be notified.
 - The Response Team 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, and present such information to the Christian Education Board (in the case of a volunteer) or the Personnel Board (in the case of a staff member) or an appropriate subcommittee thereof.
 - The notified Board, or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:

- a. finding that sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, 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:
 - 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. dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.
 - b. finding that sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment did not occur.
- The Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it in performing its functions.
- C. A written summary of the proceedings in such cases will be maintained.
 - D. 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.
 - E. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment 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.
 - F. Any person bringing a sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment 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 in retaliation.
 - G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the notified Board, that person has the right to appeal to the Council Chair, or to the Council Vice Chair if the Chair is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the Church Council. The subject of any such appeal to the Council 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 Church Council will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Church Council determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the notified Board to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

H. At any time during an investigation, members of the Pastoral Team will be available to provide pastoral care to all parties involved.

II. Child Abuse

RSCUCC will adhere to any legal requirements regarding the reporting of child abuse. Apart from any legal requirements, RSCUCC will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Virginia Department of Children and Family 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 most senior Authorized Minister and Council Chair so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Virginia Child Abuse Hotline currently is: 1-800-552-7096.

III. Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Potomac Association of the United Church of Christ.

The Potomac Association may be contacted via the Associate Conference Minister for the Association, currently Rev. Marvin Silver (pastormarvinsilver@gmail.com)

Policy on Sex Offenders in the Life of the Church

Convicted sex offenders, registered sex offenders, or those who have been convicted of a sex-related offense who wish to participate in the life of the church by attending worship, attending church functions, as a church member, or as a visitor must identify themselves to the most senior Authorized Minister prior to participating. A limited access agreement will be required. The Church Council is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.

Policy on Excluding Behaviors Harmful to the Life of the Church

RSCUCC reserves the right to require a limited access agreement of any individual who has exhibited behavior that is not welcome in the life of the church, in the sole discretion of the Church Council. The church also reserves the right to exclude any person from the property or events of the church, or membership in the church, who has exhibited behavior that, in the sole discretion of the Church Council, is harmful to the life of the church. The Church Council is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.

Review of Safe Church Policy

Responsibility for implementation and review of this policy shall rest with the Board of Christian Education. A review shall be undertaken every 5 years. Any revisions will be brought to the Church Council for final approval through the regular order of business.

**This adopted policy supersedes the original policy (adopted 1/24/2010) and revised policy (adopted 4/21/2015)*