Groton Congregational Church - Groton, Incorporated

**POLICY ON CONDUCT FOR A SAFE CHURCH**

Approved at the Church Council Meeting of January 31, 2016

Groton Congregational Church 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. This policy not only sets forth the standards of conduct to which Groton Congregational Church holds its, staff, volunteers, members and friends, but also delineates the handling of any reported allegations involving the children or adults of this congregation, which violate this policy.

Christian fellowship requires that we recognize the need to maintain clear and professional boundaries. **It is the intention of this congregation to have a safe-church policy that will discourage and prevent any sexual abuse or harassment within our Christian community, and to ensure that an appropriate response to any situation will be handled fairly and timely.**

1. **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 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.

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 (as defined above) 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 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 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.

1. **MINISTERIAL CONDUCT**

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, 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 this church 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 Groton Congregational Church is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

1. **REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMENCING AND CONTINUING MINSTRY**

• Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit a disclosure form provided by the church.

• The church will conduct a registered sex offender review for each Minister by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsopr.gov. This registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all Ministers.

• Authorized Minsters of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by the Connecticut Conference and the New London Association of the United Church of Christ**,** or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent.

1. **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILD AND YOUTH MINISTRY**

Groton Congregational Church 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.

• We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been members of Groton Congregational Church for at least six months or, if not members, regularly and frequently associated with Groton Congregational Church for at least a year.

• All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document in a form provided by the Church.

• Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third party vendor.

• All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.

• 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 no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children. For the purposes of this paragraph only, youth age sixteen (16) and over shall be considered adults and 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.

• Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities

**E. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS**

**1. General Provisions of This Policy**

**a**. The person bringing an allegation and the alleged offender are to be treated with respect.

**b.** All allegations are to be taken seriously and are not to be dismissed without careful investigation by a duly appointed Situation Response Team.

**c.** Depending on the nature of the allegation, additional reporting may be necessary to state agencies, local law enforcement officials, the church’s insurance company, and the New London Association – Committee on Ministry.

**d.**  The Situation Response Team shall consist of the Moderator, Assistant Moderator, and a designated representative from the Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Christian Education Committee, and Special Events Committee (refer to Article 5.15 of the By-laws, approved by the Special Corporate Meeting of November 21, 2010 or most recent revision thereof as duly approved by the church membership); will meet in accordance with Paragraph E.2.b. below.

**e.** In the event that the news media makes a request for information about an alleged complaint involving the church, such inquiry should be discussed with a representative from the church’s insurance company. Based on this discussion, the insurance company may either (i) designate an attorney to answer the inquiry from the news media, or (ii) authorize the Situation Response Team to designate a spokesperson to respond to the request. In any event, details of the allegation will not be released.

**2. Reporting a Complaint**

**a.** Any complaint, which involves an allegation of sexual harassment and/or sexual abuse, should be reported as soon as possible to a member of the Situation Response Team. The names and telephone numbers of all the members of the most current Situation Response Team will prominently displayed at all times on the Midway bulletin board*,* and in every room where children gather.

**b.** After notification of an allegation involving sexual harassment and/or sexual abuse, the Moderator shall promptly convene a meeting of the Situation Response Team.

**F. DUTIES OF THE SITUATION RESPONSE TEAM.**

**1.** This Team shall gather important information concerning the complaint, and shall also ensure that additional reporting responsibilities, as stated below, are completed as necessary.

**a.** If the allegation involves a minor child under 18 years of age, local law enforcement officials shall be contacted by telephone.

**b.** If an allegation involves the Pastor as the alleged offender, the Chairperson of the Board of Deacons shall be informed and asked to contact (i) the Regional Minister of the Connecticut Conference – United Church of Christ (UCC); and (ii) the New London Association – Committee on Ministry. The UCC **Manual on Ministry (March 2001 edition), entitled “The Oversight of Ministries Authorized by the United Church of Christ – Nurture and Accountability for Authorized Ministry”** shall be used as a guide to maintain communication with the Committee on Ministry.

**c.** If an allegation involves the Church Staff, a Church School Teacher, Youth Group Advisor, or a Volunteer, it may be necessary to ask that person to temporarily refrain from their assigned duties until such time as the matter is fully resolved.

**d.** The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees shall be informed of all allegations of sexual harassment and/or sexual abuse, and this person shall be asked to contact the church’s insurance company and report the incident within sixty days of discovery of the incident as required under the terms of the church’s insurance policy.

**2.** All allegations will be treated with extreme care and sensitivity for the alleged victim and the alleged offender. The Situation Response Team will document the gathering of sufficient information to ensure a clear and objective understanding of the allegation. All persons involved in the allegations must be treated with due respect for their privacy and confidentiality.

**3.** After careful examination of the facts, and consultation with a representative from the church’s insurance company, the Situation Response Team shall designate a spokesperson to inform the congregation of the factual matters related to the allegation.

**4.** The Situation Response Team may, if warranted by the circumstances, recommend that the Board of Trustees engage an attorney to review the allegations. However, written approval of this action must first be obtained from a representative of the church’s insurance company.

**5.** As appropriate, the Situation Response Team will cooperate fully with any investigation or review by local law enforcement officials and/or the New London Association – Committee on Ministry. In the event that the New London Association – Committee on Ministry decides to conduct a Fitness Review of the church’s Pastor, the church must be informed about and involved in such a review.

**6.** The Situation Response Team will prepare a final written report on the allegations. This report shall be presented at both a scheduled meeting of the Church Council and at a special meeting of the Church Council and a special meeting of the congregation.

**7.** All information gathered during the investigation of an allegation, along with all written notes and the final report, will be placed in a locked confidential file and maintained by the Situation Response Team.

**G. IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY**

**1.** This policy will be submitted to the Church Council for acceptance and approval. It shall be the responsibility of the Situation Response Team to review this policy on an annual basis.

**2.** A copy of this policy will be given to each church officer, and every church board and committee. It shall be the responsibility of the appropriate church board or committee (as set forth below) to ensure that all current and future Pastor(s), paid Church Staff, Church School Teachers, Youth Group Advisors, and Volunteers of the Groton Congregational Church – Groton, acknowledge in writing that they have received a copy of this policy.

**Church Board or Committee** **Responsibility**

Board of Trustees Administrative Assistant, Sexton

Board of Deacons Pastor, Assistant Pastor, Associate Pastor, or Interim Minister, Organist and Choir Director(s)

Special Events Committee Volunteers for Special events

Christian Education Committee Christian Education Director(s), Church School Teachers, Aides, Hall Monitors, Child Care Paid Staff and Volunteers, Youth Group Advisors , Youth Director and Adult Volunteers

These written acknowledgements (see Appendix A) will be placed in the church office in a *locked* file cabinet in folder designated “Safe Church Policy”.

Approved/Accepted Annual Corporate Meeting on January 31, 2016

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Phyllis Gregory

Clerk

**Appendix A**

**Policy on Conduct for a Safe Church**

**Acknowledgment Form**

I acknowledge that I have received and read the document entitled Policy on Conduct for a Safe Church. It is a policy statement, which deals with sexual harassment and/or abuse, and I agree to follow this policy in the performance of my duties and responsibilities with the children and adults of this church.

Printed Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position of Trust\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Responsible Church Board or Committee\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(To be filed in church office)