

Irvine United Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
Safe and Healthy Church Community Policy
(Adopted May 2013)

Irvine United Congregational Church (hereafter “the Church”) is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which all people are welcomed and all can learn about and experience God’s love. The Church celebrates freedom, inclusion, and diversity of belief, and recognizes love as the creative and supporting force in life. The purpose of this Safe and Healthy Church Community Policy is to protect the physical and emotional safety and well being of all members of the church community.

1. Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Discrimination, Harassment, Exploitation and Intimidation

The Church is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, visitors, friends, staff, volunteers and clergy can worship, participate in fellowship activities, learn and work together in an atmosphere that is free from all forms of abuse, discrimination, harassment, exploitation, intimidation and coercion. Behaviors which constitute abuse, discrimination, harassment, exploitation, intimidation and coercion are prohibited by church policy and will not be tolerated.

The Church encourages its employees and leaders to nurture safety by being attentive to self-care, by educating themselves, and by maintaining appropriate boundaries. Employees will be taught, with the goal of a thorough understanding of the importance of referring those in need to supportive, helpful and appropriate resources.

2. Requirement for Ministries and Programs Involving Children and Youth

A. All staff members and volunteers who work with children and/or minor youth (persons under the age of 18) must be registered by a program staff or clergy member prior to beginning working with children and youth. Staff will be screened under the personnel policies in the IUCC Employee Handbook.

- B. Those who volunteer to work with children and/or minor youth on an on-going basis will have regularly and frequently attended the Church for at least three months, including the three month period immediately before beginning to work with children or youth.
- C. Registration as a volunteer will include completing and signing a self-disclosure form, submission of references with current contact information, and a meeting with the clergy or program staff member designated by the minister.
- D. All volunteers and staff members will review child protection and boundary awareness content, including this policy, prior to volunteering and at least every two years. Clergy will participate regularly in boundary awareness and safe church training as mandated by the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ or the local Association.
- E. Before beginning employment, all prospective church employees will be screened according to the church personnel policies. At the time this policy is adopted, current staff and volunteers will be given six months in which to comply with the provisions of paragraphs A-E.
- F. To the extent possible, there will be two unrelated adults in attendance at church-sponsored events, programs and activities that involve children and youth. For this purpose, an adult shall be at least 18 years of age and at least four years older than the oldest participant in the program. When there are not enough adults available to place two Sunday School teachers in each classroom, an adult will be designated to visit the rooms in which only one adult is present to offer assistance and support.
- G. The telephone number of Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services, including reporting guidelines, shall be posted in the church office.
- H. When staff or volunteers are transporting children and youth in the context of a church sponsored event, there will be an additional adult or at least two children in the vehicle. Volunteers and staff who will transport youth or minors on behalf of the church will provide copies of driver's license, auto registration, and insurance.
- I. Participation by youth or children not being accompanied by a parent or guardian at activities other than regular worship services and Sunday School requires prior written consent of a parent or guardian, including emergency phone numbers and medical release forms.
- J. Prior written consent of a parent or guardian is required for any photographs, videos or digital imaging of minors intended for publication in print or electronic media, including the church website.
- K. Doors must always remain unlocked and windows uncovered in rooms where any activities involving children or youth are in progress.

L. Proper judgment shall be used when having physical contact with children or youth in accordance with child protection and awareness training and use of healthy boundaries. Examples of inappropriate physical contact with children would include but not be limited to full frontal hugs, wrestling, tickling, touching knees and/or legs, massaging, or inappropriately commenting on the child's or minor's physique.

M. Incidents or accidents resulting in injury to a child or youth during church activities require a written incident report to be signed by the attending adult, a parent or guardian, and the program staff or clergy person with oversight of the program. A copy will be given to the parent and a copy will be kept on file in the office by the Safe Church Team.

3. The Safe Church Team

The Safe Church Team (hereafter, the Team) is established by the Church Bylaws. The Team administers this policy and assists other ministries in complying with this policy. The Team ensures that other users of church facilities are advised about this policy. The IUCC Coordinating Council shall serve as the Safe Church Team. The Coordinating Council is comprised of: the Senior Pastor, the Moderator, the chair of the Admin Board, and the chair of the Ministries Board.

4. Other Partners in Safety

A. IUCC's pastoral staff is expected to be committed to the Safe Church Policy. They will lead other staff members by supervision and personal example. They will assist the Team in locating appropriate resources and will encourage the other Ministries in their work towards a safe church. Their preaching and teaching will include appropriate attention to the safety and health of the church Community. They will provide pastoral counseling, within their expertise, to those who are healing from experiences with abusive behavior and will provide referrals to external professionals as appropriate.

B. The Adult Education Ministry/Ministry for Young People will be responsible for developing and continuing to develop appropriate training plans for all staff and volunteers. These Ministries will ensure that safe church training is included in the orientation of new staff and volunteers and will conduct refresher classes annually. Working with pastoral staff, these Ministries will provide opportunities for the church community to learn about and grow in the areas of personal boundaries and abuse prevention. This training will include a policy on the proper use of social media.

C. The Buildings and Grounds Committee will be especially alert to safety issues as they see to the maintenance of the church facilities. They will consider the safety implications of maintenance and repair projects. As part of the use agreements, they will require regular users of the facility to indemnify IUCC. In consultation with the church's insurance carrier, they will require appropriate documents showing that the Church is properly protected by the user's insurance.

D. The Safe Church Team will coordinate with other ministries to establish plans and procedures by which the church community may respond to emergencies such as medical problems, fire, earthquake, actual or threatened violence, or other interruptions to the safe and healthy community.

E. The Church Administrator will inform other users of church facilities about this policy and provide the information to them via the church website or printed copies.

5. Child, Elder, or Dependent Adult Abuse

Irvine United Congregational Church (the Church), will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Orange County Department of Child and Family Services or the Orange County Department of Aging and Adult Services, Adult Protective Services, and/or law enforcement if at any time the Church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor, elder or dependent adult may be an abused or neglected child, elder or dependent adult as defined by the law. In light of being a caring Christian community, a member of the Church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances indicating that child, elder or dependent adult abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child, elder or dependent adult abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future is encouraged to report the matter to the Minister or any member of the Team so that the Church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. Nothing in this paragraph is intended to prevent or discourage any person from calling police, fire, medical, or other emergency personnel when necessary to deal with an immediate threat or a dangerous activity in progress.

6. Procedures for Responding to Complaints of Sexual Abuse, Harassment, Exploitation, Intimidation or Coercion

A. Regardless of the actions that public agencies may take, the Safe Church Team must continue to provide for the welfare of the Community. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation, intimidation or coercion:

- 1) The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the accused individual.
- 2) The complainant may report the incident to the Minister or any other member of the Team, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
- 3) If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, achievable, or does not succeed, the complainant or the minister or other Team member may request that the Team be convened to initiate formal review. The complainant may make a request for formal review to any member of the Team as identified above.

B. Formal review may include the following steps:

- 1) The Team may gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged event or events.
- 2) The Team may gather information from others who may have pertinent information, such as witnesses to alleged events, persons who may otherwise have important information or insight into the alleged events, and qualified professional consultants.
- 3) The Team may seek the advice of legal counsel or others to advise it on ongoing investigations or other tasks being undertaken.
- 4) If the person against whom the complaint has been made is a paid member of the Church staff, then findings and reports of the Team will be made to the Administrative Board.
- 5) If the person against whom the complaint has been made is a volunteer, then findings and reports of the Team may be made to the staff member who has oversight of the program wherein the volunteer is working.
- 6) The Team may deem it necessary to request that the respondent not participate in specific Church activities until the matter is resolved.
- 7) The Team, in conjunction with the Administrative Board, will make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
 - a) A finding that no sexual abuse, exploitation, coercion, harassment, or intimidation has occurred.

b) A finding that sexual abuse, exploitation, coercion, harassment or intimidation has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the Church is called upon to take action accordingly. Such actions may include one or more of the following:

- (1) A formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;
- (2) Recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;
- (3) Requiring agreement to a Covenant of Limited Access, with the terms of contact clearly defined;
- (4) Probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
- (5) Dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position in the Church.

C. A confidential written summary of the Team proceedings in such cases will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the church office.

D. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Neither consent nor acquiescence by the person(s) to whom the behavior is directed, 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 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) took place.

F. Any person bringing a complaint of abusive or inappropriate behavior, 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. However, willful malicious use of this process may itself be investigated as a form of harassment. The Team will carefully discern the difference between misunderstandings or errors made in good faith and malicious actions.

G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Team, he or she has the right to appeal to the Administrative Board and then to the Church and Ministry Committee of the Southern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (hereafter C&M Committee). The subject of any such appeal to the C&M Committee 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 C&M Committee will be the final resolution of the matter. If the C&M Committee determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Team to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

H. If the results of any investigation by the Team call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister, these results will be promptly forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Southern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Conference may be contacted at (626) 798-8082. Information on current leadership may be found at www.scncucc.org.

7. Guidelines for Involving Sex Offenders

No person who has been convicted of, or with an unresolved accusation of, any sexual misconduct will be permitted to be involved in any children's religious education or youth group activities at the Church. A person with a known history of sex offenses against children or youth will never be allowed to interact with children, work with children or youth, or socialize with children or youth at any congregational functions. Exemption may be granted by the Safe Church Team, in conjunction with the Administrative Board after a comprehensive exploration of the specific situation.

Sex offenders who have completed prison sentences and mandated, as well as registered with the state have, according to the court system, complied with their sentences. However, the Church must assure that a convicted sex offender does not have the opportunity to re-offend in the church community. Additionally, the sex offender should not be permitted in situations where he or she can be falsely accused.

The also recognizes that the presence of any sex offender in the congregation creates concerns for membership. The physical and emotional safety and the well being of the congregation must be considered and weighed in any decisions that limit the participation of any church member. The Church's need to model forgiveness and help in the healing and reconciliation process must also be considered.

8. Summary

The safety and wellbeing of all God's children is of utmost importance and concern in our life as the body of Christ and to our service as Christ's Church. All forms of abusive behavior, including inappropriate sexual behavior, exact immeasurable spiritual, psychological, and physical costs in terms of suffering and lost potential for future growth and wholeness to victims. Abusive behavior (sexual or otherwise) within a church results in damage to the social stability of the church, and the peace, wholeness, and spiritual growth of all members of that church. Such a loss affects also all churches and diminishes their credibility and therefore the ability of the Church to demonstrate the peace of God in society as a whole. The Irvine United Congregational Church is called as an instrument of Christ's Compassionate Peace to continue to build an environment that seeks to:

- Prevent abusive behavior;
- Resolve directly, fairly, and definitively any instance or appearance of abusive behavior;
- Provide a safe and creative community and practice in which those affected by past abusive behavior may find support and healing.