

Plymouth Congregational UCC

Safe Church Policy Concerning Abuse Prevention

Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, Plymouth Congregational UCC 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 Plymouth Congregational UCC should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual 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 (e.g., pastors), employees (e.g., program and administrative staff), and Christian Formation and other volunteers who work with minors, Calling/Caring Ministry 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 Plymouth Congregational UCC to encourage its Ministers, employees, and Christian Formation volunteers 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 Plymouth Congregational UCC is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

- Before beginning their duties, all ministers will go through a criminal records background check.
- 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 by administrative staff.
- Authorized Ministers of the church will attend all Healthy Ministry Relationships training as required by Rocky Mountain Conference UCC, or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent.

Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

Plymouth Congregational UCC 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, 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 participated in the community of Plymouth Congregational UCC for at least twelve months and/or will have been members for six months and will complete a Safe Church Orientation.
- Before beginning their duties, all prospective Christian Formation volunteers will undergo a criminal records background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries and a criminal history verification by a third-party vendor as administered by Plymouth Congregational UCC. Evaluation of the background check will be performed by the Director of Christian Formation, who will then consult with the Senior Minister in a confidential manner.

- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive safe church orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property and any overnight activities.
- It is the policy and intention of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth and children's activities.
- Our policy is to always have two unrelated adults present whenever youth or children are gathered. However, at present we allow one exception. If the location of the bathroom is not close to the learning center or gathering area, we allow 1 adult to take children (plural) to the bathroom, but never a one-on-one ratio.
- All children and youth learning spaces will have an open line of sight. Learning spaces are to be made as public as possible.

Definitions

Minister: a person authorized by the church to carry out its ministry. Ministers include employees of the church, Christian formation volunteers either elected or appointed, 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 a 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 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, or 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 not permissible 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 or Harassment

I. Employees and Ministers of Plymouth Congregational UCC

Upon learning of a complaint, the Senior Minister (or Associate Minister when the Senior Minister is absent) and Moderator or Personnel Committee Chair will make a report to appropriate authorities. This may include Fort Collins Law Enforcement to investigate any wrong-doing; for children, this may include the Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1-844-CO-for-Kids). The Conference Minister will be notified when any complaint is made.

II. Authorized Ministers of Plymouth Congregational UCC

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 Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ as well as the appropriate local authorities, which may include Fort Collins Law Enforcement.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the Plymouth Congregational UCC’s Safe Church Policy.

(PRINT NAME)

(SIGNATURE & DATE)

• Personal interview conducted on _____

• Background Check completed on _____

• (If Applicable) Healthy Ministry Relationships Training completed on _____
