

**Church on the Hill (UCC in Lenox)
An Open and Affirming Congregation
55 Main Street
Lenox, MA 01240
413-637-1001**

**STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND VOLUNTEER CONDUCT
“SAFE CHURCH POLICY”**

Church on the Hill is an Open and Affirming congregation that welcomes and embraces the participation of all interested persons, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, or citizenship status, marital status, creed, genetic predisposition or carrier status, height or weight, sexual orientation or any other characteristic protected by law. The Church is committed to maintaining a worship and work community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. Specifically, all persons associated with Church on the Hill should be aware that the Church will not tolerate assault, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, sexual exploitation, or harassment (Collectively “Abuse”) of any person. It is the intention and commitment of the Church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior which is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy. While every complaint or report of conduct that is contrary to these standards will be taken seriously and shall be promptly investigated, persons accused will be assumed innocent until such time as the allegations may be substantiated by evidence. Certain allegations pertaining to child abuse will be reported to designated child protection agencies as required by law.

The standards of behavior set forth in this document apply to staff, volunteers, congregants, students-in-care, or anyone having business with Church on the Hill or using Church on the Hill facilities.

Ministerial Conduct

All persons engaged in the ministry of Church on the Hill (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, and ordained clergy) are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority or influence. Abuse as understood in this document will generally involve a relationship in which both parties do not have equal power. Mutual consent is not possible where there is an imbalance of power, for example, between pastor and congregant, church school teacher or youth leader and child, or supervisor and subordinate. Abuse of parishioners or other individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of Church on the Hill is unethical and unprofessional behavior, it may be unlawful, and it will not be tolerated by this congregation.

Child abuse refers to physical injury or injuries inflicted upon a child or youth under the age of 18 by a caretaker or school employee other than by accidental means or injuries which are at variance with the history given of them. It also includes a condition that is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment, or cruel punishment, or being neglected. Any person who willfully or unlawfully causes or permits any child

under the age of 18 to be placed in a situation where the life or limb of the child is endangered, the health of the child is likely to be injured or the morals of the child are likely to be impaired, or does any act likely to impair the health or morals of any child or if any person has contact with the intimate parts of a child under the age of 18, or subjects a child under the age of 18 to contact with the intimate parts of such person, in a sexual or indecent manner likely to impair the health or morals of the child, will be guilty of injury, or risk of injury to, or impairing the morals of children.

Sexual exploitation includes sexual activity or contact (not limited to intercourse) in which a person engaged in a church activity takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant in such activity by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the person ministering.

Sexual harassment may include a range of subtle and not so subtle behaviors and may involve individuals of the same or different gender. Depending on the circumstances, these behaviors may include, but are not limited to: unwanted sexual advances or requests for sexual favors; sexual jokes and innuendo; verbal abuse of a sexual nature; commentary about an individual's body, sexual prowess or sexual deficiencies; leering, catcalls or touching; insulting or obscene comments or gestures; display or circulation at Church facilities or events of sexually suggestive objects or pictures (including through e-mail); and other physical, verbal or visual conduct of a sexual nature.

Harassment on the basis of any other protected characteristic is also strictly prohibited. Under this policy, harassment is verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of the individual's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, citizenship status, marital status, creed, genetic predisposition or carrier status, height or weight, sexual orientation or any other characteristic protected by law or that of the individual's relatives, friends or associates.

Harassing conduct includes, but is not limited to: epithets, slurs or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating comments or jokes, and the display or circulation at Church facilities or events of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group (including through e-mail.)

Youth Protection Policy

Church on the Hill is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. It is the policy of Church on the Hill to provide adequate supervision for all youth activities.

Acknowledgment Required

All persons engaged in ministerial activities at Church on the Hill (other than church school and youth group participants working under adult supervision) will be provided with a copy of the Standards of Professional and Volunteer Conduct and instructed to read it and complete the attached Acknowledgment and Receipt of Standards of Professional and Volunteer Conduct form before engaging in any ministerial conduct. These forms shall be collected by the staff person whose responsibilities are most closely associated with the ministerial conduct at issue, who shall then give the completed forms to the Pastor. The Pastor shall be responsible for distributing the

standards to individual staff members and collecting their personal forms, and shall advise the Church Council in writing that all staff forms have been collected, including one from the Pastor. The Pastor shall retain all completed volunteer and staff forms for a period of three years.

The Standards shall be distributed and the forms shall be completed annually for persons who are involved in on-going ministries, such as staff members, church school teachers, youth, and music program volunteers.

Complaint Procedure

Any participant in a business, religious, civic or social activity occurring at Church on the Hill or at a Church-related event shall have standing to make a complaint that the Standards for Professional and Volunteer Conduct have been violated. Such a complaint may be made directly to the Pastor, any staff member, or the Moderator. Upon receipt, the complaint shall be promptly communicated to the Moderator or a staff person not involved in the complaint. With respect to complaints made against a non-staff person, the Moderator and the Pastor who have received the complaint directly or by referral shall convene a committee to investigate the complaint comprised of the Pastor and Moderator plus at least two Members of the church appointed by the Moderator. Any person who is personally implicated in the complaint or who may be a material witness may not participate as an investigator, and the investigative committee must include at least one man and one woman. The designated investigators should endeavor to meet as a team individually with the person(s) making the complaint, the person(s) accused of violating the Standards, the parties' representatives, if any, and any witnesses necessary to enable the investigators to reach a factual determination with respect to the alleged misconduct.

The investigators shall report their factual findings to a committee consisting of the Pastor (or, in the event that the Pastor's conduct is under review, another staff person), the Moderator, and the staff and board chairpersons whose assignments are relevant to the alleged misconduct. No person who has been accused of the misconduct under review may participate on this committee. The committee shall review the factual findings of the investigators and make a determination as to whether the Standards have been violated. The Pastor and Moderator shall communicate the findings to the parties involved. In the event of an affirmative determination, the Committee shall determine what discipline, if any, and other remedial action is appropriate and whether the misconduct at issue would be or is required to be reported to a public authority and/or the Berkshire Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC. Determinations concerning the removal of a staff person shall be subject to the Church by-laws.

When a complaint is made under this policy, the individual accused of misconduct may be suspended by the Pastor and Moderator from all ministerial activities at Church on the Hill until such time as a final determination has been made with respect to the merits of the complaint. Suspensions of staff members shall be with pay. The complaint, investigation, deliberations and findings shall be kept confidential to the extent practicable.

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