**Trinitarian Congregational Church**

**Safe Church Procedures**

**I. SAFE CHURCH COMMITTEE (The Committee)**

The Nominating Committee shall seek recommendations from the ordained staff for candidates to fill any vacancies on the Safe Church Committee. From this pool, candidates will be selected for election by the congregation at an annual or special congregational meeting.

Vacancies occurring between congregational meetings shall be filled by appointment of clergy-recommended candidates by the Church Committee, as presented by the Nominating Committee.

The Committee will include both men and women. Terms shall be for three years, staggered so that two persons are elected every two years and a single vacancy is filled on the third year.

**II. DOCUMENTS**

The Committee shall maintain current copies of the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedures available for inspection in the church library, administrative office and Christian Education resource room;

The Committee shall ensure that all confidential documents related to the Policy and Procedures are stored in a locked cabinet, including but not limited to, employment applications, disclosure forms, incident reports, reports of suspected child abuse or neglect, and criminal record (CORI) reports.

**III. REVIEW AND UPDATE**

The Committee shall institute review of the Safe Church Policy and the Safe Church Procedures, as it deems necessary.

**IV. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION**

The Safe Church Policy shall be distributed to the congregation through the newsletter, web-site and new member packets.

**V. APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

The Safe Church Policy applies to all church activities that take place within the building and on the property of the Trinitarian Congregational Church of Concord and at any programs; activities or events scheduled as part of the ministry of Trinitarian Congregational Church that take place off church property.

**VI. SCREENING PROCEUDRES**

**A. Employees**

All applicants for employment over the age of 18 shall go through a regular application procedure that will include the submission of references and a personal interview.

All applicants for employment shall complete a disclosure form (Attachment A) as well as a criminal record check request form. Criminal record checks for applicants for employment will only be conducted after a candidate has been interviewed and determined otherwise appropriate for employment.

**B. Volunteers**

Volunteers responsible for the chaperoning and/or supervision of children or youth under the age of eighteen (18) shall complete a disclosure form (Attachment B) as well as a criminal record check request form.

There will be a six-month waiting period for volunteers new to the community applying to chaperone or supervise activities for children or youth.

**C. Criminal Offender Record Information Check (CORI)**

All applicants for employment, age 18 or over, volunteers responsible for the chaperoning and/or supervision of children or youth under the age of eighteen (18); chaperones and volunteers who attend overnight events with youth group, confirmation mentors, and anyone else deemed appropriate by the Safe Church Committee shall require a criminal record check and shall complete a criminal record request form from the state of Massachusetts (Attachment C). Applicants who have resided in other states within the last 10 years may be requested to complete a criminal record request form for those states.

The appropriate hiring or recruiting committee or individual shall coordinate obtaining the disclosure and CORI request forms.

The CORI Submitter will submit the request forms to the appropriate state agency. When a criminal record report is received, it will be forwarded unopened to the CORI Administrator. If a criminal conviction is shown on the record, the CORI Administrator may consult with other members of the Safe Church Committee to consider any necessary and appropriate action.

Disclosure forms, CORI request forms and all documents and information pertaining to any relevant CORI findings shall be kept at the church in a locked file with restricted access.

New CORI request forms will be required every three years.

**D. Sex Offender Registry (SORI)**

The CORI Administrator will periodically review the SORI list for our area and report any Level 2 or Level 3 sex offenders in the congregation to the Safe Church Committee and relevant church staff for the purpose of ensuring that these individuals are not interfacing with our children, youth or elderly.

**VII. TRAINING**

All employees over the age of 18 and volunteers involved in any activity with children or youth shall acknowledge receipt of the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedures; familiarize themselves with the policy and procedures; agree to abide by them; and attend training programs that will include information regarding the recognition, prevention and reporting of child abuse.

All employees over the age of 18 and volunteers involved in activity with children or youth shall receive any updates or changes to the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedures and be re-trained in safe church procedures within three years of their initial training.

We recognize that on occasion volunteers may be guests or visitors in activities with children or youth. These guests maybe exempted from training and screening producers as long as they are participating in the presence of trained and screened adults.

**VIII. CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**A. Supervision of Children**

No adult will be alone in the church, or at a church scheduled activity, with a child/youth that is not his or her own, or a relative, without written permission from the child’s parent.

**B. Classroom**

Under normal conditions, two adults (18yrs or older) will be present to care for and supervise children and youth in each classroom. In some circumstances, when only one teacher can be present in an individual classroom or supervision is being provided by a teen or teens, a door will be left open door to an area where an adult or adults are present.

Snacks are discouraged due to allergies. If provided, they must be nut-free and approved by the CE director.

Teachers should familiarize themselves with the classroom phone system, evacuation procedures and the first aid kits.

**C.** **Bathroom**

Persons working with children or youth shall avoid being alone with a child in a bathroom for the purposes of toileting, clean up, the care of illness or injury, or for any other reason.

Whenever possible, persons who accompany a child to the bathroom should remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside.

If a child needs assistance with zipping, buttoning, buckling, cleanup, wiping, etc., two adults will be present, whenever possible.

Diapering will only be done by the child’s parent.

**D. Behavior and Discipline**

The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, cooperation, and the developmental needs of the child. Teachers are encouraged to set high standards for behavior and communicate expectations clearly.

The use of any form of physical punishment is prohibited. If a child’s behavior is unacceptable and it does not improve after a warning, the Christian Education Director should be notified and involved. Parents will be notified of a pattern of disruptive behavior.

Children may not be left unattended while church is in service. If not attending church school, they will be asked to remain with their parent.

Parents will be responsible for their children on the church property before and after the church school session or program.

**E. Health and Safety**

Parents and guardians of each child attending church school will be asked to provide Trinitarian Congregational Church with a registration form that describes all the child’s relevant behavioral and medical conditions (including allergies), special needs and special accommodations required for participation in church school.

Children who have had vomiting or a fever of 100 degrees or more or any contagious disease in the preceding 24 hours should not attend church school.

All children in grades K and under will be picked up promptly at the conclusion of the service at their classrooms, by a parent unless other arrangements have been made with the teachers.

Unless parents are instructed to meet their children in the classroom or other area of the site, children in grades 1 and up will be walked to the parish hall as a group to meet their parent at the conclusion of the church school session.

At the conclusion of class, if possible, teachers will inform parents or guardians about any injuries, cuts, or falls involving their child. Teachers will report all such incidents to the CE Director or Superintendent. If it is not feasible to inform the parents immediately after class, the CE Director will communicate any relevant information to the parents at home.

**F. Emergency Procedures**

Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each classroom. In the case of an emergency evacuation, teachers will escort students to the nearest exit and proceed directly to the designated spot where they will take attendance. Parents should not go to their child’s classroom but should exit through the closest exit and pick up their children outside on the Walden Street lawn.

**G. Youth (including Grades 6-12) Activities**

All youth activities will be attended by at least two leaders both of whom will be at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group- one leader from each gender, when possible. Leaders are responsible for setting the boundaries of appropriate behavior.

There will be no smoking, alcohol use, illegal drug use, or sexual activity at any youth event.

Youth are expected to be respectful of other persons and of property; to participate in all group activities; to work together to accomplish group goals; and help with routine chores.

Expectations for appropriate conduct may be communicated verbally and/or in writing.

Youth who have reached the age of 18 are expected to abide by the same rules (with regard to parental consent forms, etc.) as other members of youth group.

Youth leaders, staff and volunteers may not initiate, encourage, or engage in sexual contact with youth or allow inappropriate contact between the youth.

Youth Groups are group ministries. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the activity. No pairing or otherwise separating off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds is permitted except with the permission of a group leader.

**H. Parental Consent**

Signed, written consent of a parent or guardian will be obtained to enable youth to attend overnight events at the church or activities or programs away from the church. (Attachments D and E)

**I. Overnight Activities**

Transportation, lodging and activities taking place during overnight events will be reviewed in advance by the Associate Minister or Youth Group Leader. All adult chaperones supervising overnight stays of youth, whether in the church or outside the church, will be subject to the screening requirements of those working with children and youth under the age of 18.

There will be at least three chaperones present during overnight activities, whenever possible. There will be at least one chaperone from each gender supervising mixed gender groups. At least one adult male will dorm with boys and one adult female will dorm with girls, if possible. If circumstances require that boys and girls sleep in one area, adult leaders will maintain and oversee appropriate behavior.

There will be a suggested ratio of one chaperone for every six youth attending an overnight event. For overnight events longer than a weekend, a ratio of one chaperone for every seven youth is recommended.

Youth participating in a Mission Trip are expected to sign a covenant that includes a code of conduct.

**J. Transportation**

Staff, youth leaders, teachers and assistants may not transport children or youth between church and home, without the consent of a parent or guardian.

All vehicles used to transport children and youth to field trips, activities or other events will be properly insured.

All vehicles used for field trips, activities or other events will include properly working seatbelts to accommodate one youth per seatbelt. No child under the age of 12 will be seated in the front seat of a vehicle, unless their parent is the driver.

All drivers of vehicles used for field trips, activities or other events will be a minimum age of 21 and will have at least 3 years driving experience. Drivers will submit copies of their valid driver’s license, vehicle registration, and a Vehicle Operator’s Application. (Attachment F)

Drivers should not use cellular phones while driving, except as necessary in emergency situations or if needed to communicate with other leaders or parents.

When possible, there will be two adults in each car carrying children or youth. If it is not possible to have two adults, then there will be more than one child or youth in the car.

**K.** **Activity dismissal for all children and youth related activities**

At the close of a youth activity or a meeting at which youth are in attendance, no child or youth under the age of eighteen (18) may remain alone with only one adult. Two adults must be present at all times if any one child or youth under the age of eighteen (18) are on church premises or grounds.

Parents will respect concluding times and arrange to pick up children and youth accordingly.

**IX. CONCERNS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

**A. Response**

When the abuse or neglect of a child is suspected, the foremost priority is to ensure the safety of the child. If necessary, remove the child from immediate danger; take care of any injured person; and obtain any necessary medical attention as soon as possible. Seek professional care or call an ambulance if necessary.

**B. Observe and Record**

Anyone present should carefully observe and record any indications of an injury or causes for concern.

**C. Report**

If it is determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred, Massachusetts law mandates that the Department of Social Services (DSS) be notified

If the person who witnesses or suspects that child abuse or neglect has occurred is a mandated reporter (see Definitions) he or she shall notify DSS as soon as possible by calling the DSS area office and by mailing or faxing a written report (Attachment G) within 48 hours of making the verbal report. Persons needing to file a report shall consult DSS guidelines for further information and procedures.

If the person who witnesses or suspects child abuse or neglect is *not* a mandated reporter, he or she may: 1) Report the allegations directly to DSS, or 2) Report the concern to a member of the clergy, who shall take appropriate action.

**X. CONCERNS ABOUT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND HARASSMENT**

**A. Reporting**

Options taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual harassment and misconduct include:

Informal Response: If the concern does not involve a child, the person reporting a concern may attempt to resolve the matter directly with the person accused or informally with the assistance of a complainant’s supervisor, a member of the Safe Church Committee or a member of the clergy.

Formal Proceedings: If the concern involves a child or if an informal resolution of the concern or complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, formal proceedings shall be instituted. A Safe Church Incident Report shall be completed and submitted to the Safe Church Committee. (Attachments H and I)

Any person who brings a concern or complaint forward, or who assists in investigation of such a report, will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, Church membership or employment, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

**B. Response**

Formal proceedings shall include the following steps:

The Safe Church Committee will gather statements or other information from individuals involved in the alleged harassment or misconduct or other incident of concern, and from others who may have pertinent information.

The Safe Church Committee will make determinations and take appropriate actions. These may include:

Finding that no sexual harassment or misconduct or other infraction of policies have occurred. This may require formal notification of those who had a “need to know” and thus were previously notified of the concern and investigation.

Finding that sexual harassment or misconduct or other infraction of policies has occurred, The Safe Church Committee will present their findings to the supervisor, the appropriate body of the Church, or staff who shall take action in conjunction with The Safe Church Committee.

Such action may include one or more of the following:

Formal reprimand with defined expectations for changed behavior, with possible public notification;

Recommending or requiring a program of growth that may include education or counseling;

Probation, with terms of the probation clearly defined;

Dismissal from employment or volunteer leadership position; or, in extreme cases, affiliation with or membership in the church, or following any other policies that are spelled out in Church policies, bylaws, etc.

**C. Documentation**

A written summary of the Safe Church Committee proceedings, determinations and actions taken in such cases shall be maintained in a locked file.

**D. Appeal**

If the person bringing the concern or complaint, or the accused person, is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the supervisory body, he or she has the right to appeal to the Moderator of the Church, who shall refer the matter to the Church Committee for resolution.

**XI. BUILDING SAFETY, SECURITY AND USE**

**A. Building Security**

The Property Committee is charged with the responsibility to implement policies and procedures for a safe church as regards building security including:

Distribution of keys: The Property Committee is charged with the responsibility of determining the need to assign keys, to whom keys will be issued, and the length of time to hold a key.

Key Receipt Form: All key holders shall complete a key receipt form (attachment J).

Reasons for requesting that a key be returned include:

Failure to comply with the policies and procedures for a safe church

Loaning a key to another person

Duplicating the key

Other reasons and conditions the Property Committee may deem necessary.

**B. Building Safety**

The Property Committee is charged with the responsibility to implement policies for a safe church as regards building safety including:

**First aid supplies and fire extinguishers**

Maintain posted floor plans indicating where exits, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, fire pull stations, and telephones with emergency numbers are located.

**Periodic safety review of facilities**

Establish an evacuation plan and communicate the plan periodically to the congregation.

Maintenance of safe diapering stations.

**Insurance**

The Finance Committee and Property Committee shall periodically review insurance policies.

**C. Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups**

All groups and individuals using or renting facilities at the Trinitarian Congregational Church, with the exception of the cases noted below, shall be provided with and acknowledge having read the Safe Church Policy and agree to comply with its provisions as pertain to their use of the building by signing the Use of Facilities application form (Attachment K).

Exception: Groups and individuals renting the church facilities that involve contact with children under the age of 18 that do not conform to the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedure shall provide the church with a signed agreement form (Attachment L) stating that they will require the parents of all participants in their program to sign permission forms (Attachment M) stating that they understand that the program is not church sponsored and will not necessarily be conforming to the Trinitarian Congregational Church Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedures.