**Introduction --**

The mission of CHURCH is first to prevent abuse of children and other “vulnerable adults”. We wish to identify and nurture SafeConduct™, to lead and to guide through adequate training. It is difficult to comprehend that those among us, our friends and family, would commit such acts willingly. Nevertheless, persons who have been presented no behavior standards and do not understand boundaries may unwittingly engaged in behaviors that may be perceived as predatory. Their personal reputations and that of CHURCH are then at risk.

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the children, parents, “vulnerable adults” and guardians we serve. They are entitled to know what to expect of our ministries, the Ministers who serve them, and to know the related policies and procedures created to protect the respective ministry constituencies. Constituencies include the children, the parents, the “vulnerable adults”, the guardians, and the Ministers.

Parents and guardians shall be invited to receive the same “abuse prevention” training as provided to Ministers to be taken at their option.

**Progressive Discipline for ALL interaction --**

A system of escalating discipline as an alternative to summary termination for a policy infraction, even a minor one. Progressive steps in discipline are as follows:

1. Counseling or a verbal warning -- It is necessary to document that such a meeting occurred. It is sometimes appropriate that more than one supervisory person be present for this step.
2. Written warning -- A formal letter is prepared and delivered to the employee/volunteer, while a copy is maintained in the employee/volunteer file.
3. Suspension or demotion – This may be appropriate for repeated violations of Ministry Standard violations. This step might be skipped for Code of Conduct violations.
4. Termination – Repeated willful violations of the Code of Conduct or Ministry Standards call for termination of employment, whether employee or volunteer. However, no Minister has authority to terminate an employee or volunteer unilaterally; at least two levels of supervision must make a judgment on termination. No one shall be terminated without the advice of legal counsel.

In extreme circumstances it will be appropriate to skip steps and proceed with immediate termination. However, the same rules apply to a summary termination.

An equivalent to progressive discipline shall apply to children and “vulnerable adults” (clients) served by our church. When clients are observed engaging in inappropriate interactions or sexual contact, it is expected that they will be immediately stopped or redirected to another activity. When violations are repeated and the client is unresponsive, the next step is to engage the parent or guardian in a meeting about the behavior with the expectation that the parent will provide follow-up discussion and discipline of the client. If this step fails to achieve positive results, then additional steps must be taken culminating with expulsion of the client from the church program. Legal counsel shall also be engaged before expulsion, especially if there may be the appearance of unjustified discrimination.

***Reporting Child/Adult Abuse or Violations***

It is the obligation of anyone participating in an activity on CHURCH property, or in a CHURCH-supervised activity, to report suspected child/youth abuse or any violations. Participants in these activities are encouraged to warn each other when any questionable behavior is displayed. Allegations of abuse or violations should be reported immediately using the following discrete and confidential reporting procedure.

Allegations of child/youth abuse or violations of the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reported to the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator. In their absence (or if they are directly involved in the allegation), reports can be made to any CHURCH Minister, any member of the CHURCH Personnel Committee, or the activity leader. They will take the responsibility to respond to the allegation as outlined in the next section.

It is best for any reports of allegations to be made in writing for accuracy of facts and documentation requirements. Report outlines with key information. Reporters of these allegations of abuse or policy violations will be asked to sign the original documentation, but once this report is provided to the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator (or their backups), the identity of the reporter will remain confidential during the process of responding to the report. Importantly, this step will alleviate the reporter from any further reporting or investigation of this incidence, and now puts the responsibility to address the report allegations with CHURCH.

If the reporter of allegations needs to remain anonymous, it may be important for them to make the report over the phone in the presence of an attorney or other independent witness who can verify later, if necessary, the identity of the reporter. This can be important if the reporter is later charged with negligence for failing to make a report.

It is possible that an allegation related to an activity on CHURCH grounds or at a CHURCH-supervised activity could be made directly to an agency or authority outside of CHURCH. If CHURCH is contacted about such an allegation, the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will complete an incident file for CHURCH records, and then assist the outside agency/authority and their investigation.

As this CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Policy is put into practice and congregational trainings and discussions increase, it is also possible that CHURCH may receive a report of an allegation for an activity that occurred outside CHURCH and away from a CHURCH-supervised activity. In this case, the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator can still complete an incident report, and then determine the appropriate response.

Once a report is provided to the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator (or their backup), it will be their responsibility to follow the process to respond to the allegations described in the next section.

***Process to Respond to Allegations of Abuse or Violations of the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Policy.***

All allegations will be taken seriously and handled discretely and confidentially to protect both the reporter of the allegations, and anyone accused of abuse or violations of the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Policy. We will take very seriously any allegation of abuse or violations of the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Policy. We do not tolerate such actions and all allegations will be investigated immediately, thoroughly and confidentially. The identity of the allegation reporter as well as the accused will remain confidential to the extent possible, and we will not tolerate any retaliation to either party outside of the legal system, no matter how the issue is resolved.

The CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will be the key point contact for CHURCH in the response to these allegations. In the case that this individual is not available, or if they are directly involved in the allegations (reporter, witness, accused), one of their backups will be designated the point contact.

The point contact may use their backups (Ministers, Personnel Committee) to evaluate the allegation and determine if any additional facts are needed before beginning the response process. The response process will carry the details of the allegation, but keep the identity of the reporter confidential to the extent possible. The identity of the accused and the allegations will also remain confidential to others in the congregation and community to the extent possible. The response process will be documented in the allegation file and can consist of:

* 1. Inform the church’s insurance company of the allegation.
  2. Inform the Regional Office, Disciples of Christ.
  3. Inform legal counsel. This may come from the insurance company, the regional office, or other counsel retained by church.
  4. Fulfill any local or State of Ohio reporting obligations. At this point, CHURCH is turning the case over to civil authorities for their independent investigation. The identity of the reporter may need to be disclosed so they can complete their investigation.

Once the case has been turned over to an outside agency/authority, the CHURCH Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will determine any action required to minimize contact between the accused and children/youth, the victim, or the reporter. This should be done in conjunction with the officials investigating the allegation. The CHURCH Personnel Committee, in conjunction with legal counsel, will make determinations regarding employment options for any accused CHURCH employee.