

Normandy Park United Church of Christ (NPUCC) Safer Church Policy

Creating Christian community

Overview and vision

Normandy Park United Church of Christ (NPUCC) strives to be a welcoming space for all. Recognizing that no one can guarantee the absolute safety of others, NPUCC, as a Christian community, takes seriously its responsibility to provide a nurturing and safer environment for all. We recognize that we often are in a unique position to learn of circumstances in the lives of children and adults where there may be a need for intervention and healing.

The Safer Church Policy, for conduct with youth and vulnerable adults, outlines specific expectations of the Pastor, employees, Council, Committee members and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

Creating Christian community

Guidelines to create a safer and nurturing environment:

- Foster self-esteem, positive self-image, and personal responsibility in all programs
- Offer appropriate information about development and sexuality to our church community
- Provide training opportunities and support for anybody working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults

- Seek a diversity of adult leadership with any group of children and/or youth
- Maintain ratios of at least:
 - one adult to five children for grades K-5 and
 - one adult to six youth (grades 6-12) and
 - one adult to every six vulnerable adults
- Prohibit:
 - one-on-one interactions between adults and children or youth in a private setting,
 - foul language, and
 - inappropriate physical conduct (see Appendix A)

Social networking policy:

- On all social networking sites and platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, etc., no adult shall send a friend request to any youth. If a youth sends a friend request to an adult, it is up to the discretion of the adult whether they accept the request.
- If a request is accepted between a youth and adult, there shall not be any private chat groups or private messaging between youth and adults.
- All one-on-one communication between youth and adults shall be shared with another adult.
- Anyone taking photos of children and/or youth or posting to social media shall obtain consent from persons in the photos or information posted prior to posting.

Becoming an adult leader for children and youth

All potential adult leaders for children and youth programs shall:

- Undergo a background check
- Have been attending NPUCC and been engaged in the NPUCC community for a suggested period of at least six months
- Affirm the core beliefs of NPUCC and the United Church of Christ
- View training videos approved by the Personnel Committee
- Complete a Disclosure Statement (see Appendix C)

One-time partial day or substitute volunteers should complete as many of the above requirements as possible and shall not be alone with children or youth.

Conduct that harms the Christian community

Overview

NPUCC is committed to prompt, professional, and measured responses to all circumstances that is harmful to anyone in our community and which may range from violations of the above policies and procedures to suspicions or allegations of abuse.

NPUCC is committed to:

- Seriously consider the concerns of anyone who expresses an experience of harm;
- Undertake a fair investigation of policy violations;
- Protect the confidentiality of parties involved in an investigation while still obtaining help necessary to investigate and resolve the situation;
- Comply with legally mandated reporting procedures as required by law, and cooperate fully with public authorities; and
- Communicate with the congregation within the bounds of individual rights to confidentiality.

Responsibility of employees and volunteers

Each employee, including authorized clergy, and volunteers shall report any concern to a member of the Personnel Committee, who will share such concerns with the rest of the Personnel Committee to determine an appropriate response.

Reporting responsibility includes but is not limited to:

- Incidents of adult/child and child-on-child sexual activity,
- Dangerous behaviors,
- Employee-on-employee sexual harassment (see Employee Sexual Harassment Policy),
- Bullying of any kind,
- Exploitation of a minor,
- Exploitation of a vulnerable adult, and
- Circumstances which rise to the level of abuse requiring action by a mandatory reporter.

Responsibility of mandatory reporters

Regardless of the procedures outlined herein, each person who is considered a mandatory reporter under the statutes of the State of Washington shall in good faith report when there is reason to believe abuse and neglect has occurred as described in Washington State Law (the Revised Code of Washington—RCW) 26.44.020. Incidents shall be reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) and Adult Protective Services (APS).

NPUCC prefers that allegations requiring reporting first be reported to the Chair of the Personnel Committee (in the case of a volunteer or church employee). If the allegation(s) involve the minister, the allegation shall be reported to both the Chair of the Personnel Committee and the Moderator (who serves as the supervisor of the minister), or the Vice Moderator in the case of a conflict of interest. The chair of the Personnel Committee and the Moderator (or Vice Moderator as necessary) shall be considered mandatory reporters due to their supervisory roles per RCW 26.44.020, and shall, without delay, make the initial report to police or child welfare authorities on behalf of NPUCC. The determination of any of these individuals that a reportable incident did not occur shall in no way prevent any other individual from reporting an allegation in good faith.

Nothing in this policy shall be considered a restraint of an individual's statutory obligation to report to authorities. Furthermore, no person shall be restrained from reporting an incident on the basis that they are not a mandatory reporter.

Other reportable abuse

While the State of Washington has defined abuse for the purpose of child protection statutes and mandatory reporting in RCW 26.44.020, other kinds of abuse occur to which NPUCC shall respond. Such incidents may include:

- Adult/child and/or Child-on-child sexual activity;
- Dangerous behaviors (hazing, truth or dare, drinking, etc.);
- Bullying, whether child-on-child or adult-on-child;

- Exploitation of a vulnerable adult physically, mentally, or financially.

Other behaviors not necessarily involving children or vulnerable adults, or which may not be considered strictly illegal, are subject to other disciplinary practices as may be set out in governing documents of the congregation or of the denomination. Behaviors subject to other adjudication may include but are not limited to:

- Sexual harassment, whether among employees or volunteers;
- Clergy professional boundary violations;
- Sexual exploitation

All such activity shall be reported by employees, volunteers, or leaders in the same manner as any violation listed in the previous section.

Disciplinary processes

In response to any report of the above scenarios, NPUCC's response may include recommending or requiring:

- counseling,
- correction,
- progressive discipline, and /or
- termination.

Notification of parents

A child (under age 18) may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as a victim. Whether a child is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a child-on-child incident. A violation of policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

Therefore, a person having knowledge of an incident which warrants communication to a parent shall advise their immediate supervisor, who shall consult with the Chair of the Personnel Committee. While communicating with a parent, and being mindful of the importance of timely communication, care shall be given to assessing:

- The specific facts;
- Whether a disciplinary or termination process is required;
- Whether a child should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians);
- Whether mandatory reporting is a factor;
- Who shall and in what manner communicate with the parents/guardians;
- Whether the Pastor should be involved in the communication;
- Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident.

Notification of parents shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required.

Victim needs

In cases of reportable abuse, the policy of NPUCC is to be responsive to the needs of victims to the utmost ability allowed by its insurance contracts. In general, NPUCC shall attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

An incident of alleged abuse that requires medical or psychological care for a victim or family shall be reported to the Insurance Board by the Church Moderator or designee. The Moderator or designee shall discuss with the Insurance Board claims department whether the circumstances warrant initiation of crisis management services which may include psychological counseling. Upon approval, counseling services may be offered to a perceived victim(s), which may include family members.

Responding to media

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals and to NPUCC. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Church Council to represent the Church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the Church. Unless designated differently by the Church Council in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the Church shall be the Moderator.

Prior to speaking to media, the Church Moderator shall contact and consult with the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ legal counsel to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

The Moderator shall give immediate consideration to securing Insurance Board media relations and crisis management resources. Considering the speed of news cycles, a prompt determination is required, erring on the side of seeking help.

By following the above policies, NPUCC and its members commits to live into our responsibility to create and uphold a nurturing and safer environment for all, relying on God's grace.

Appendix A: Physical Interactions

Appropriate physical interactions

- Side hugs
- Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate
- Touching hands, shoulders, and arms
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)

These may be inappropriate if unwanted by any participant

Inappropriate physical interactions

- Full-frontal hugs
- Kisses
- Showing affection in an isolated area
- Lap sitting
- Wrestling
- Piggyback rides
- Tickling
- Allowing a child to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg
- Any type of massage given by or to a child
- Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or the employee or volunteer
- Compliments relating to physique or body development
- Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

Some situational occurrences, in particular those that are initiated by young people, such as full-frontal hugs or lap-sitting, may occur at the discretion of the adult participant(s) and shall not occur in private.

Appendix B: Definition of Harassment

Sexual harassment shall be defined as repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation 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, or invitations including through use of social media through e-mail, texting, Tweeting or Facebook comments;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, 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. For example, 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.

Appendix C: Volunteer Application

See following page

Application for Authorized Volunteers for Children, Youth, and
Vulnerable Adult Ministry Programs of
Normandy Park United Church of Christ

Name: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Street City State Zip

Contact: _____
Primary phone Secondary phone Email address

I have been a friend of Normandy Park United Church of Christ since _____

I have been a member of Normandy Park United Church of Christ since _____

References: One must be related to you and the other references must not be related to you.

Reference 1: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Street City State Zip

Contact: _____
Primary phone Secondary phone Email address

Reference 2: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Street City State Zip

Contact: _____
Primary phone Secondary phone Email address

Reference 3: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Street City State Zip

Contact: _____
Primary phone Secondary phone Email address

I have never been convicted of, nor pled guilty or no contest to, a crime. (Exclude convictions that have been sealed, expunged, or legally eradicated, misdemeanor convictions for which probation was completed, and the case was dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state.)

True _____ False _____

If not true, please briefly describe the nature of the crime(s), the date and place of conviction and the legal disposition of the case. The Church will not deny a position to any applicant solely because the person has been convicted of a crime. The Church may, however, consider the nature, date, and circumstances of the offense, as well as whether the offense is relevant to the duties of the position applied for.

No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.

True _____ False _____

If not true, please give a short explanation of the lawsuit, indicating the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit, where the lawsuit was filed, and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.

I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position or had my employment, professional credentials, or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct.

True _____ False _____

If not true, please give a short explanation, indicating the date of termination; name, address, and telephone number of the employer or volunteer supervisor; and the nature of the incident(s) leading to your termination.

I have a current and valid drivers' license or state-issued ID Yes _____ No _____

Please provide NPUCC with a photocopy of your valid drivers' license or state-issued ID. Furthermore, if you will be driving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, please also provide a copy of your driver and vehicle insurance.

With respect to my driving record, I have not had my license suspended or revoked due to reckless driving or driving while intoxicated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance.

True _____ False _____

If false, please provide a brief explanation.

There are no facts or circumstances involving me or my background that would call into question my being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which I am applying.

True _____ False _____

If false, please provide a brief explanation.

Persons seeking authorized volunteer positions in the church require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the church. To that end, I attest that the information set forth in this application is true and complete. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the position I am seeking to fill. I acknowledge that it is my duty in a timely fashion to amend the responses and information I have provided if I come to know that the response or information was incorrect when given or, though accurate when given, the response or information is no longer accurate.

An open exchange of relevant information between volunteers and the church they seek to serve builds the foundation for a continuing and healthy relationship. To that end, I authorize Normandy Park United Church of Christ and/or its agents to make inquiries regarding my character and qualifications, including all statements I have set forth above. I also authorize all entities, persons, former employers, supervisors, courts, law enforcement, and other public agencies to respond to inquiries concerning me, to supply verification of the statements I have made, and to comment on and state opinions regarding my background, character, and qualifications. To encourage such persons and entities to speak openly and responsibly, I hereby release them from all liability arising from their responses, comments, and statements.

The process for becoming an authorized volunteer for children, youth, and vulnerable adult ministry programs of NPUCC involves the sharing of information regarding applicants with those persons in a position to recruit, secure, and supervise both the position I am seeking to fill and program I am seeking to participate in. To that end, I authorize NPUCC United Church of Christ and its agents to circulate, distribute, and otherwise share information gathered in connection with this application to such persons for these purposes. I understand that NPUCC will share with me information it has gathered about me, if I request it to do so.

If I am offered and accept employment or volunteer service with NPUCC I agree to comply with its published policies and rules, including those related to harassment of employees, reporting known or suspected child neglect or abuse, and similar requirements. If requested to do so, I will cooperate with any church investigation of a possible violation of church policies and rules by providing complete and truthful information in an oral and/or written statement.

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the NPUCC Safer Church Policy and will abide by its requirements.

Printed name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

If applicant is under age 18, a parent or legal guardian shall also print, sign, and date below.

Printed name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

For Personnel Committee and Church Staff

Reference inquiries completed by _____ on _____
Name Date

A criminal background check was conducted on the candidate using the following sources:

- ____ National multi-state criminal records search
- ____ National sex offender registry search
- ____ Social security number trace and alias search
- ____ County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked over the past ten years
- ____ Motor vehicle record
- ____ Other: _____

The Personnel Committee has reviewed this application, references, and results of background checks and hereby

- ____ Grants Authorized Volunteer status to the applicant
- ____ Does not grant Authorized Volunteer status to the applicant

Conditions:

Signatures of the members of the Personnel Committee

Signature _____	Date _____
Signature _____	Date _____
Signature _____	Date _____

This application shall remain as a permanent record in the Authorized Volunteers file in the church office