

*Somesville Union Meeting House*

*United Church of Christ*

***Safe Church Policy & Procedure***

Adapted from ©Insurance Board, June 2017 edition  
Adopted by Somesville Union Meeting House, UCC May 15th, 2022

## **Table of Contents**

---

I. Statement of Policy	2
II. General Definitions	3
III. Code of Conduct with each other	4
IV. Policies for Working specifically with Youth and vulnerable adults	5
A. Physical Contact	
B. Verbal Interactions	
C. One-on-One Interactions	
D. Off-site Contact	
E. Electronic Communication	
F. Gift Giving	
V. Screening and Selection of Employees and Volunteers who work with youth	9
VI. Training	11
VII. Monitoring and Supervision	12
VIII. Responding to Complaints and the Role of the Safe Church Response Team	12
A. General Infraction Response	
B. Child Abuse	
C. Behaviors harmful to the life of the church	
D. Responding to Victims	
E. Responding to Media	
IX. Sex Offender Policy	16
X. Appendices.	
A. Safe Conduct Poster	18
B. Sample Behavioral Covenant	19
C. Resource List	22

## **I. Statement of Policy**

As a community of Christian faith and both an Open and Affirming and a Just Peace Church, Somesville Union Meeting House (SUMH) is committed to creating a safe environment of programs, facilities and community in which members, friends, clergy, employees, and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation.

### **We believe in:**

- Promoting respect for and affirming the sanctity of all human life
- Creating ways to meet the basic human needs of all people for personal safety
- Calling for an immediate end to disrespectful behavior in all of its forms
- Demonstration of our belief in a God of love, peace, and justice.

### **We will make these changes through:**

- A policy that reflects our commitment to caring for each other.
- Development of a living consciousness reflecting awareness of this policy in all we do together.
- Training or education offered on an annual basis.

### **Contents of this policy will include:**

- Parameters for non threatening communication and interaction that provide physical and emotional safety
- Development of a Safe Church Response Team

This Safe Church Policy and Procedure is posted on the Somesville Union Meeting House website [www.sumhucc.org](http://www.sumhucc.org) with a link to the full approved policy document. Print copies may be obtained from the church office.

A poster size version is posted in the parish house and can also be found in Appendix A of this document.

## II. General Definitions

1. An Adult is any member, visitor, or friend of the Somesville Union Meeting House (SUMH) family, including lay persons, leaders, parents or guardians, volunteers, staff or employees affiliated with SUMH.
2. Authorized Clergy includes any person who is admitted to ministry by the United Church of Christ or any mainline Protestant denomination, who serves the congregation in any capacity whether called as pastor or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, or volunteer capacity
3. Behavioral Covenant - An agreement that outlines the conditions of participation for a friend or a member of SUMH. The agreement shall be reviewed twice annually by the Safe Church Response Team to validate ongoing eligibility.
4. Clergy-Penitent Privilege - “Clergy-penitent privilege” is a “Rule of Evidence” defining or limiting information which clergy may reveal in a court of law only. “Clergy penitent privilege” does not prevent clergy from informing the congregation of matters which may be relevant to their safety; it does not require clergy to hold information in secrecy.
5. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a person that results in an observable and material impairment in the person’s growth, development, or psychological functioning.
6. Mandatory Reporters for the purpose of this document, are those persons, both hired and volunteer, as required by the State of Maine law to report suspected abuse to police or child welfare agencies including clergy and elected leaders.
7. A Minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as youth or child throughout policy).
8. Neglect is the failure to provide for a person’s basic needs or the failure to protect a person from harm.
9. Parish Associate - Conditions of limited access for a sex offender will commonly require that the offender have an associate with them while on the church premises or at church events elsewhere. A person serving as an associate shall not be a spouse, partner or relative of the offender.
10. Physical Abuse is injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a person.
11. Rule of Three is considered general good practice when working with youth and can be applied to a variety of scenarios beyond bathroom use and especially off campus. Anytime there is a need to be separate from the group, in rooms, elevators, cars, etc. there shall be a group of at least three people.
12. Safe Church Response Team\* - A team composed of no less than three members with an eye toward diversity, that includes the pastor, and a member each of both the operations and spiritual ministries, will meet at least quarterly for the purposes of training, reviewing policy and existing covenants, vetting new hires other than the pastor, and responding to issues as they arise.  
\*committee has yet to be created
13. Sex Offender - A person either convicted of or who has admitted to committing an act of sexual abuse. This includes, but is not limited to, those persons who are registered sex offenders.
14. Sexual Abuse is any non-consensual contact between two people. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the other person.
15. A Vulnerable Adult - is anyone aged 18 or over, who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of oneself, or unable to protect oneself against significant harm or exploitation.

## III. Code of Conduct with each other

1. Everyone will be treated with respect and fairness regardless of race, gender identity, age, ethnicity, or religion
2. Everyone will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection.
3. Everyone will adhere to uniform standards of appropriate verbal interactions.
4. Everyone will refrain from bullying. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
  - a. *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
  - b. *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, whether that person is present or not, such as by belittling, demeaning, or calling another hurtful names. Words can also be used to create an imbalance of power or influence as well as intimidation.
  - c. *Nonverbal or relational bullying* –This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip.
  - d. *Cyberbullying* – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool or social media

Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. Group responsibility when witnessing bullying may include guidance, redirection, or reporting.

What SafeConduct means:	What SafeConduct looks like:	What SafeConduct is not:
Respectful treatment of all	Fair treatment regardless of race, gender identity, age, ethnicity, or religion	Discrimination, cruelty, intimidation, or exploitation.
Adherence to uniform standards of displaying affection	Side hugs, handshakes, high fives, checking in to see if touch is welcome. Affection is shared openly, never secretly.	Touching without permission or in private, physical restraint, sitting on laps, etc.
Appropriate verbal interactions	Language that includes, encourages, nurtures, gives allowance for making mistakes, and promotes growth and success. Language and gestures that affirm the experiences of others and their need to be heard without judgment.	Language that is dismissive of ideas and contributions or that makes anyone feel hurt or shamed, regardless of intent.
No bullying	Treatment of each other as described above.	Using physical force against another person. Using words to belittle, to intimidate, or to create an imbalance of power. Social exclusion and gossip.
Individual responsibility to fulfill these standards	People who are thoughtful about their behavior and listen if someone is unhappy with them, then modify how they act.	People who laugh off their behavior, “I didn’t mean it that way, you misinterpreted.”
Group responsibility to lead those needing guidance and to protect those needing protection.	Redirection if necessary. Nurturing and modeling good conduct.	Avoidance of hard topics or ignoring the hurtful actions of others.

A full size version of this table can be found in appendix A.

#### **IV. Policies for Working with Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

**This section is an addendum to section III and therefore assumes all policies in section III along with the following which refers to policies specific to youth and vulnerable adults.**

**A. Physical Contact**

Any inappropriate physical contact by clergy, employees, and volunteers towards youths in the organization’s programs will result in disciplinary action.

Somesville Union Meeting House’s policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Side hugs</li> <li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs</li> <li>• Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>• Handshakes</li> <li>• High-fives and hand slapping</li> <li>• Verbal praise</li> <li>• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li> <li>• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms</li> <li>• Arms around shoulders</li> <li>• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-frontal hugs</li> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>• Lap sitting</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Piggyback rides</li> <li>• Tickling</li> <li>• Any type of massage given by or to a youth</li> <li>• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer</li> <li>• Compliments relating to physique or body development</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> <li>• Staring</li> </ul>

**B. Verbal Interactions**

Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youths in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youths. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youths.

Somesville Union Meeting House’s policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Appropriate jokes</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name-calling</li> <li>• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving youths in the personal problems or issues of clergy, employees, and volunteers</li> <li>• Secrets</li> <li>• Cursing</li> <li>• Off-color or sexual jokes</li> <li>• Shaming</li> <li>• Belittling</li> <li>• Derogatory remarks</li> <li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youths</li> <li>• Derogatory remarks about the youth or his/her family</li> </ul>

**C. One-on-One Interactions**

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. Somesville Union Meeting House aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by the organization administration.

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved, clergy, employees, and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

- When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform another employee or volunteer that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly drop in.
- Document and immediately report to the pastor or any member of the Safe Church Response Team, any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

**D. Off-site Contact**

Somesville Union Meeting House strongly recommends that staff and volunteers not have outside contact with youths from SUMH outside of regularly scheduled activities or special events. However, if off-site contacts are unavoidable (such as during mentoring programs), SUMH has determined that the following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<i>Appropriate Outside Contact</i>	<i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking groups of youths on an outing</li> <li>• Attending sporting activities with groups of youths</li> <li>• Attending functions at a youth’s home, with parents/guardians present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents’ written permission</li> <li>• Visiting one youth in the youth’s home, without a parent present</li> <li>• Entertaining one youth in the home of staff or volunteers</li> <li>• A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers</li> </ul>

Additionally, staff or volunteers must have the parents/guardian’s permission to engage in outside contact with the youth. Parents/guardians must sign a permission slip for trips and outings sponsored by Somesville Union Meeting House. Any trips or outings outside this description will be expected to set their own parameters that may be in addition to what is already described.

**E. Electronic Communication**



Any private electronic communication between staff and youths, including the use of social media networking is prohibited. All communication between staff and youths must be transparent.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication:

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youths ONLY when copying in a supervisor or the youth’s parent/guardian</li> <li>• Communicating through “organization group pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums</li> <li>• “Private” profiles for clergy, employees, and volunteers which youths cannot access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments</li> <li>• Sexually oriented conversations</li> <li>• Private messages between clergy, employees, and volunteers with youths</li> <li>• Posting pictures of organization participants on social media sites without written permission of parents/guardians</li> <li>• Posting inappropriate comments on pictures</li> <li>• “Friending” youth participants on personal social networking sites</li> </ul>

The above information is to be provided to parents/guardians so that they know what is appropriate and inappropriate from your church staff and volunteers.

## **F. Gift Giving**

Clergy, employees, and volunteers should only give gifts to groups of youths. Gifts to individuals are only allowed under the following circumstances:

1. Church administration must be made aware of and approve the gift.
2. Parents must be notified.

## **V. Screening and Selection for all Employees, excluding the pastor, and those**

**volunteers who work with youth and vulnerable adults. Volunteers with SUMH who do not work with youth or vulnerable adults are not included in this screening and selection process.**

The process of screening and selecting employees and volunteers is an essential element of management diligence.

**Standing of Pastor:** The United Church of Christ denomination has a process of granting professional standing to clergy, including required background checks conducted less than one year previously.

Somesville Union Meeting House will adhere to the following screening and selection procedures for employees, and volunteers. Examples of exceptions to this are one week pulpit supply, visiting musicians, and contracted workers such as our cleaning agency.

*Note: Each employee or volunteer now serving and regardless of length of service must be willing to set an example for all others who follow in their ministry. Therefore, at the time this policy is first adopted, all employees and volunteers who work with youth shall execute the following procedures.*

**A. Application Procedure**

All applicants for paid or volunteer work shall be expected to complete an application prior to working at Somesville Union Meeting House. The application will be reviewed for completeness, high risks and fit with position requirements. If the application is not 100% complete, the applicant may be screened out, asked to complete the application, or the missing information may be obtained during an interview. Somesville Union Meeting House will endeavor to follow a consistent approach to applications missing information.

Volunteers must be members or friends of Somesville Union Meeting House for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in programs oriented towards youth.

**B. Interviews**

All applicants shall be interviewed during the selection process and prior to employment or start of volunteer position. The interview shall also provide the applicant with information about job responsibilities and expectations.

At least two persons: the Pastor, Council Moderator, and/or appropriate Committee Chair, shall interview each candidate. Each shall specifically discuss the church's commitment to protect youth and vulnerable adults from abuse.

**C. Reference Checks**

Reference checks shall be conducted for all applicants prior to employment. A minimum of two references are required, both professional and personal. The person responsible for the screening should inform the reference that the applicant is applying for a position within our church which has a Safe Church Policy. Offers of employment shall not be made until the required number of references is contacted.

**D. Background Checks**

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks will be conducted for all paid employees and volunteers in a supervisory position with youth and vulnerable populations. Generally, the information should be obtained prior to employment of the applicant; however, if the length of time needed to receive the results of these checks is unduly long, Somesville Union Meeting House may have the applicant start the position and remain in the position until the criminal background results are obtained and reviewed. New employees and volunteers shall not be left unsupervised with youths until the criminal history results are returned.

Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each applicant prior to executing the check.

Applicants responsible for transportation should have a driver's license check performed to identify past driving concerns.

Each background check shall be reviewed and determined that the applicant is eligible to be an employee or volunteer.

Where a criminal record exists, consideration shall be given to:

- Seriousness of the crime;
- Statutes that may legally disqualify the person;
- Length of time since the last offense;
- Pattern of criminal activity; and
- Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.

Conviction for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to employment or volunteer work:

- Violent crimes;
- Sexual assault;
- Sexual abuse or neglect.

Arrest data are not grounds for disqualification, only convictions. The status or relevance of other crimes will be considered individually.

Following the review, each committee member shall sign and date one of two statements that should the person be hired or accepted as a volunteer, becomes part of their permanent personnel file:

*“We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant would be **acceptable** for the position.”*

OR

*“We have reviewed the criminal history of Applicant X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is **not acceptable** for the position.”*

## E. Employment Decisions

Before an offer of employment or volunteer position is made, those involved in the screening process must review all information obtained. The interview process should last a sufficient length of time to carefully collect and evaluate information about applicants and to allow the applicant time to self-select out of the process if they have concerns about the position.

Employment offers shall not be made until an application is 100% complete, references reviewed, applicant interviewed, and then vetted before the Safe Church Response Team. Applications and supporting materials should be kept in the personnel file.

## VI. Training

A component of our commitment to this code of conduct at Somesville Union Meeting House is to lead and to guide through adequate training.

To fulfill our leadership obligation, every new employee and those new volunteers who work with youth, shall complete a probationary period with orientation and training. It is recommended that other volunteers in leadership positions also participate in the training. Fulfillment of training requirements shall be documented by the supervisor.

Training/continuing education shall be renewed annually. The Safe Church Response Team shall hold the supervisor responsible for this.

*NOTE: The Insurance Board, a not-for-profit ministry of the UCC, believes so strongly in training that it provides FREE training services to all churches and camps of the denominations it serves. Somesville Union Meeting House is a participant in the Insurance Board insurance program.*

*The **Armatus** training suite by **Praesidium, Inc.** is a robust on-line training program that can be administered by individual churches. It is completely paperless and provides a perpetual record of training. Information about the training program can be found in the **Administrators Guide** at this website: [www.InsuranceBoard.org](http://www.InsuranceBoard.org) Click on **Safety Solutions**, then **SafeConduct™ Workbench**.*

## VII. Monitoring and Supervision

When clergy, employees, and volunteers are adequately supervised, potential offenders are less likely to act on their impulses because they face detection. When youths are adequately supervised, they too are less likely to engage in inappropriate interactions with others. Similarly, the facility must be monitored, particularly out-of-the-way locations or locations that might permit an offender undue access or privacy. Whenever possible, meetings should be hosted in open and observable areas. Effective supervision and monitoring is not only the responsibility of the supervisor, but also any person in a position to make an observation, at both scheduled and random times.

Local licensing requirements and general best practice guidelines will establish adult-to-youth ratios.\* The employee or volunteer-to-youth ratio will be adjusted for programs that serve youths with special needs.

Additionally, because in most incidents involving one youth abusing another youth, when the youths are from different age groups, each program is responsible for establishing specific guidelines for monitoring and supervision of activities that involve youths from different age groups. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must be aware that close line of sight supervision is required when monitoring programs that mix age groups. Youth programs that are ongoing, require travel, or an overnight, shall require that the youths and their parent(s) and/or legal guardian sign an agreement which may or may not be part of a permission slip that outlines the program's behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. All youth must be supervised at all times, regardless of age.

Bathrooms are particularly high risk areas. Only one person shall enter a single stall bathroom except in the case of a young child needing assistance, where the door shall be left open. Should youth need to leave the group to use a bathroom as may occur on a joint church gathering, staff will take them there in groups of at least two or more youths at a time, following the 'rule of three.'

\*Age Range Child:Staff Ratio/ Max Group Size

6 weeks - 9 months (4:1) 8

18 months (5:1) (4:1) 10/12

27 months (7:1) 21

3 years - 4 years (10:1) (8:1) 20/24

5 years and older (13:1) NR

## VIII. Procedures for Responding to Complaints of Disruptive Behavior, Sexual Abuse or Harassment or violations of our code of conduct with each other and the role of the Safe Church Response Team.

Everyone participating in the life of the church at SUMH is entitled to a safe atmosphere free from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or harassment. Everyone is under a duty to report any acts of harassment they may observe whether in the workplace, life of the church, or in any of the church's ministries. Anyone who believes they are a victim of, witnesses, or becomes aware of an occurrence of sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and/or harassment at SUMH should immediately report the behavior as indicated below. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

The Safe Church Response Team, composed of no less than three members with an eye toward diversity, that includes the pastor, and a member of both the operations and spiritual ministries, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy.

The Safe Church Response Team will meet at least quarterly for the purposes of training, reviewing policy and existing covenants, vetting new hires other than the pastor, and responding to issues as they arise.

Members of the congregation will be advised of the members of the Safe Church Response Team annually and invited to approach the Safe Church Response Team, or the pastor about any concerns regarding misconduct or harassment.

- A. **General Infraction Response:** Depending on the level of interaction, several different approaches/options may be taken. It will always be hoped that people honor our covenant to each other and work to solve issues at the lowest level if appropriate.

Examples:

Infraction	lowest level	mid level	highest level
bullying	resolve directly with other person	ask team for advocate and then resolve directly	Response team and member will adopt a plan for resolution
lack of respect or fairness	resolve directly with other person	ask team for advocate and then resolve directly	Response team and member will adopt a plan for resolution
demonstration of affection outside accepted practices	resolve directly with other person	request guidance from team	Response team and member will adopt a plan for resolution
sexual abuse	n/a	n/a	Interrupt and protect if witness to abuse. Then immediate notification to pastor and police
Any infraction involving a youth or vulnerable adult	redirection and notification to team or supervisor  e.g. staring, teasing	removal from situation pending notification of parent/guardian and guidance from team and supervisor e.g. meeting with youth in isolation	removal from situation and immediate notification to pastor, supervisor, team, and parent/guardian e.g. making derogatory remarks, kissing

1. If the pastor or any member of the response team is the subject of the complaint, they shall recuse themselves from the resolution.
2. A written summary of the Safe Church Response Team determinations will be maintained and stored in a confidential manner.
3. Organizational responses may include: review of files, increased supervision, additional training, and review of policies.
4. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. At any time, SUMH may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
5. Any person bringing a sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or harassment complaint or assisting in investigating such a complaint will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment or church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged in retaliation.
6. Inappropriate behaviors do not always involve an adult. Youth-to-youth sexual behaviors can include inappropriate touching, exposing body parts, using sexualized language, making threats of sexual activity, engaging in sexual activity, and similar types of interactions. If employees or volunteers witness youth-to-youth sexual behaviors, they are instructed to intervene and notify their supervisor.
7. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Safe Church Response Team, that person has the right to appeal to the Moderator, or to a member at large if the Moderator is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the officers of SUMH. The subject of any such appeal to the moderator and or officers shall be limited solely to whether the procedures of this policy were followed. The matter will not be reconsidered on the merits of the appeal and the decision of the Safe Church Response Team will be the final resolution of the matter. If the moderator or officers determine that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Safe Church Response Team to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.
8. Apart from any disposition of the matter by SUMH, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any pastor will promptly be forwarded to the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ. A Maine Conference minister may be reached at: (207) 622-3100 A full directory can be found at: <https://www.maineucc.org/contact/directory/>

## **B. Child Abuse: Reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of a youth**

SUMH will adhere to all legal requirements regarding the reporting of child abuse. Any SUMH leader or person who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the pastor and Moderator and then proceed in compliance with Maine law as required of a mandated reporter according to Chapter 1071.

*The state of Maine requires that the following adult persons shall immediately report or cause a report to be made when the person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or is likely to be abused or that a suspicious child death has occurred:*

- A. When acting in a professional capacity,*
- B. Any person who has assumed full, intermittent or occasional responsibility for the care or custody of the child, regardless of whether the person receives compensation; and*
- C. Any person affiliated with a church or religious institution who serves in an administrative capacity or has otherwise assumed a position of trust or responsibility to the members of that church or religious institution, while acting in that capacity, regardless of whether the person receives compensation.*

*If a person notifies another in charge of the institution, the notifying person shall acknowledge in writing that the institution has provided confirmation to the notifying person that a report has been made. The confirmation must include the name of the individual making the report to the department, the date and time of the report and a summary of the information conveyed. If the notifying person does not receive the confirmation from the institution within 24 hours of the notification, the notifying person immediately shall make a report directly to this department:*

*The Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) operates the statewide hotline for child abuse and neglect. The number is 1-800-452-1999.*

## **C. Policy on Excluding Behaviors Harmful to the Life of the Church**

SUMH reserves the right to require a Behavioral Covenant of any individual who has exhibited behavior that is not welcome in the life of our church. SUMH also reserves the right to exclude any person from the property or events of SUMH, or membership at SUMH, who has exhibited behavior that is harmful to the life of SUMH. The Safe Church Response Team is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.



## **D. Responding to Victims**

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of SUMH is to be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, we will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

*As Insurance Board clients:* 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 pastor. The latter 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.

## **E. Responding to Media**

Contact with the media must be managed and conducted only by the moderator or other designee as made by the church officers.

Prior to speaking to the media, the moderator shall contact and consult with Maine Conference (UCC) Legal Counsel, to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

## **IX. Policy on Sex Offenders in the Life of SUMH**

As a community of faith, serving by the example of Jesus Christ, we also seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption and fellowship among us. We shall be prepared to accept in our midst both those who have violated the most sacred mores of our society at large, and those who have been violated, in order to provide them both refuge, peace, example and support in their recovery. We commit to doing so with utmost care for the welfare of our congregation, collectively and individually, and the community we serve. We agree to have reasonable assurance that a sex offender in our care will not have an opportunity to re-offend as a result of lapses in our management of the offender.

Sex offenders who wish to participate in the life of SUMH must identify themselves to the pastor prior to participating. Individuals in our church family with awareness of an offense have the responsibility to share that with either the pastor or a member of the Safe Church Response Team.

The conditions of participation by an offender shall be defined by a behavioral covenant executed by the offender and church. The agreement shall be reviewed semi-annually by the Safe Church Response Team to validate ongoing eligibility. Violation of the agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the agreement.

A behavioral covenant will consider:

- the character of the offense, the passage of time, and the risk of re-offending
- understanding of the State of Maine statutory limitations on registered sex offenders

### **Approval & Supervision –**

With the advice and prior approval of the Safe Church Response Team, a Behavioral Covenant with a sex offender must be signed by the pastor.

The Pastor, in association with parish associates, who shall be named in the Behavioral Covenant, shall be responsible for the general supervision of the Petitioner in all of the latter's activity in relation to SUMH. Elements of supervision shall include the following:

Knowledge of the terms of the Behavioral Covenant, including activity limitations placed upon the Petitioner.

Knowledge of the Petitioners offense history sufficient to understand the risks of association with SUMH and its ministries.

Willingness to assert activity limitations and to report any violation of restrictions placed upon the Petitioner.

Willingness to intervene in any onset of a risky or problem behavior.

Willingness to report all cases of non-compliance to the pastor.

The pastor shall assess, prior to selection, whether a proposed parish associate is willing to fulfill the above elements of supervision.

**Youth**– While the criminal record of a juvenile is ordinarily concealed by the courts, the church may come to know the juvenile's history by other means. Honest disclosure by a juvenile and parents in the volunteer application and screening process may reveal that a record exists without knowing the specifics. While a behavioral covenant may be required for the juvenile, as for others, every precaution will be taken to preserve the privacy and confidentiality which the law affords a juvenile.

See Appendix B. for a sample behavioral covenant.

# Somesville Union Meeting House supports the principles of SafeConduct

What SafeConduct means:	What SafeConduct looks like:	What SafeConduct is not:
Respectful treatment of all	Fair treatment regardless of race, gender identity, age, ethnicity, or religion	Discrimination, cruelty, intimidation, or exploitation.
Adherence to uniform standards of displaying affection	Side hugs, handshakes, high fives, checking in to see if touch is welcome. Affection is shared openly, never secretly.	Touching without permission or in private, physical restraint, sitting on laps, etc.
Appropriate verbal interactions	Language that includes, encourages, nurtures, gives allowance for making mistakes, and promotes growth and success. Language and gestures that affirm the experiences of others and their need to be heard without judgment.	Language that is dismissive of ideas and contributions or that makes anyone feel hurt or shamed, regardless of intent.
No bullying	Treatment of each other as described above.	Using physical force against another person. Using words to belittle, to intimidate, or to create an imbalance of power. Social exclusion and gossip.
Individual responsibility to fulfill these standards	People who are thoughtful about their behavior and listen if someone is unhappy with them, then modify how they act.	People who laugh off their behavior, "I didn't mean it that way, you misinterpreted."
Group responsibility to lead those needing guidance and to protect those needing protection.	Redirection if necessary. Nurturing and modeling good conduct.	Avoidance of hard topics or ignoring the hurtful actions of others.

If you witness or learn of actions that need attention, please report them to the pastor, the moderator, or a member of the safe church response team. Thank you. This document can be found in full at [sumhucc.org](http://sumhucc.org)

BEHAVIORAL COVENANT AGREEMENT –This template would be revised to address particular circumstances.

Covenant between Somesville Union Meeting House UCC and \_\_\_\_\_

Somesville Union Meeting House UCC is an “open and affirming” congregation as well as a “just peace” congregation. As such, we affirm the dignity and worth of all persons as expressed in our joint mission statements. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshipping with us, at any point in their journey, but especially in times of distress and personal challenges. However, in line with our Safe Church Policy, certain behaviors are neither welcomed nor affirmed in the faith community and may need to be limited. By offering these covenant guidelines in writing, our hope is to reduce any confusion about what we agree to be acceptable behaviors within these necessary boundaries in this community of Faith. The covenant is designed to reduce the risks and consequences of unsafe behavior for all concerned.

For its part in the covenant of acceptable behaviors, Somesville Union Meeting House UCC (SUMH UCC) offers to:

- Welcome your presence in worship as a Church friend/member. We ask that you remain in the company of several persons and not seek private, one-on-one conversations, or ask for any form of personal contact information from anyone without the permission of the pastor.
- Welcome you because, as disciples of Christ, we believe that first, last and always, worship is a place for soul renewal. Often transformational thoughts and actions are initiated through the sacraments, the word, and community presence. We realize, and hope that you realize as well, that by inviting you into worship, we all risk retraumatizing old wounds which only serves to prolong a soul’s journey toward healing and forgiveness.
- Welcome your participation in coffee hours and adult social events. We can also put your name on the email list that goes out to all friends. This e-mail list is sent so as to provide the written worship service in electronic form for anyone who is not able to attend in person. It will come as a blind copy.

Our Safe Church Policy declares that both friends and members of the Congregation will strive to remain vigilant so that our actions and speech fall within the guidelines as listed. As a friend/member we trust you will do the same as you participate in our worship services and other church activities and gatherings.

You may not send out public material in your name on behalf of SUMH UCC or any church committee or activity since that may be mistaken as representing yourself as an official representative of SUMH UCC.

Finally, we offer two members of the congregation, approved by the pastor, who know your history and are willing to serve as your Parish Associates. Since SUMH UCC intends to offer regular training to any Parish Associate who agrees to act in this role, you may trust that they will be well-resourced. You are invited to identify one of these two SUMH UCC members to serve as your associate.

Within these guidelines SUMH UCC also asks that you agree to demonstrate the following behaviors:

\*That you do not put yourself in any situation where you are alone with a child or youth while on church property or at congregation sponsored events. If a child or youth approaches you during worship or coffee hour, you immediately and politely excuse yourself from such an encounter. This includes avoiding leadership of any kind with youth or children, chaperoning or driving for events, and being present at religious education classes.

\*That you avoid prohibited sexual harassment which includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, such as suggestive or obscene letters, etc; suggestive verbal communication; and unwanted physical contact.

\*That, when you plan to attend an event, such as a church supper or church fair, and believe from advertisements that children will be present, we ask that you let one of your Parish Associates know you are coming and remain with that person, arriving and leaving with him/her.

\* That you avoid being in the church or church-owned buildings, including rented space, without contacting one of your Parish Associates and outlining who your anticipated audience will be and your role. This information is also required of any outside group who wishes to make use of the church space. We simply ask you to consult your Associate before seeking an application from the Trustees as an additional step.

\*That you will be open to meet with the pastor, the moderator of the parish, and a member of the Safe Church Response Team at least twice per year to review any issues of mutual concern regarding the on-going implementation of this covenant. Conversations about changes in the covenant would be based on refusal to comply with the covenant boundaries agreed to; any new policies provided by the active Safe Church Response Team that would supersede this covenant; or any new incident(s) of misconduct on the part of SUMH UCC as a covenant keeper. Also considered would be input from your perspective as a covenant keeper. For any such semi-annual meeting, a Parish Associate can act as a support person for you, since all of us are helped by a second set of ears for important conversations.

Having discussed and reviewed the terms of the above limited access covenant, I/we agree to abide by its provisions. We do so because our United Church of Christ polity cherishes covenant as the vessel for holy relationships, for relationships of growth, and for the holy practice of promise-making and promise-keeping. We use the language of covenant knowing it is also the vessel that has the power to bring us back to repentance, renewal and repair of any and all relationships for the sake of love. God has shown us through scripture that such covenantal relationships are not only transforming but freeing for both parties.

Name of Individual Covenant participant:

Signature

Date

Name & Title of Witness for the Church (Pastor or Moderator):

Signature

Date

Name of Member of the Safe Church Response Team (named in document as Parish Associate):

Signature

Date

## Appendix C: Resources

[Maine reporting of abuse](#)

[Maine Mandated Reporter Training](#)

[UCC Safety and Protection of Children in Church](#)

The **Armatus** training suite by **Praesidium, Inc.** Information about the training program can be found in the **Administrators Guide** at: [www.InsuranceBoard.org](http://www.InsuranceBoard.org) Click on **Safety Solutions**, then **SafeConduct™ Workbench**

[Brotherhood Mutual](#) offers training in resolving conflict.

**The United Church of Christ Insurance Board (UCCIB)**

[Good Group Decisions](#) out of Brunswick - lots of free resources