

**Plymouth Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ**

**Safe Church Policy**

Plymouth Church is intended to be a loving and safe place for all. At times, children are entrusted to our care. Our children must be nurtured in a place that is safe, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We would like to provide each adult and each child who attends our worship services or other church programs with a safe environment where they can be free from physical harm, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and from harassment of any nature.

In our effort to provide such an environment, we have established this Safe Church Policy, a Safe Church Code of Conduct, a Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct for Plymouth Nursery School, and related procedures, and will seek to follow them. It is the responsibility of each individual member of our community to comply with this policy and with the Safe Church Code of Conduct and the Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct, as applicable. It is our intent that our policies, our guidelines for conduct and our procedures for dealing with any allegations be clear in order to discourage and, to the best of our ability, prevent any abuse within our church community.

**We hereby affirm that we have no tolerance for misconduct (including child abuse or neglect, physical or emotional abuse, sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct, financial misconduct, or similar misconduct) by pastors, employees, or volunteer lay leaders of the church.**

Any allegation of misconduct may be brought to the Pastor, the Moderator, the Safe Church Coordinator, or any member of the Safe Church Committee. Any allegation of misconduct with respect to Plymouth Nursery School may instead be brought to the Director, any staff member, or the Chair or any member of the Executive Committee of Plymouth Nursery School. We will take any allegation of misconduct seriously, will investigate such allegation, and will seek to respond appropriately to any misconduct.

It is also our intent that the application of these policies, guidelines and procedures should reflect our compassionate response to both the alleged victim(s) and the alleged offender(s). Very special care will be taken with those in our community who are the most vulnerable. It is our intent always to seek the truth in the spirit of God's love.

Approved by Church Council: April 30, 2013  
Adopted by Congregation: May 19, 2013

# **Plymouth Congregational Church United Church of Christ**

## **Safe Church Code of Conduct**

The Plymouth Church Safe Church Policy provides for a Safe Church Code of Conduct, a Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct for Plymouth Nursery School, and related procedures. This Safe Church Code of Conduct provides guidelines for Plymouth Church with respect to its staff and volunteers, others in the church community, and church programs, particularly those programs for children (up to age 18) and youth (older children, also up to age 18), other than Plymouth Nursery School. The Plymouth Nursery School Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct provides guidelines for Plymouth Nursery School and its staff, volunteers, and others in its community, and its program.

The Plymouth Church Safe Church Policy, the Safe Church Code of Conduct, and the Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct, are not directly applicable to others who use the church building for their own purposes (i.e. non-church programs), such as Erebuni, the Chinese School, AA, the Scottish Fiddlers, etc. However, organizations and groups that use the church building for programs that include children and youth are encouraged to adopt a similar policy and guidelines that comply at a minimum with all legal requirements applicable to such organization, and to enforce compliance with such policy and guidelines.

### **Qualification of staff; qualification of volunteers who work with children or youth**

**All paid staff**, including pastors, seminarians and part-time personnel (“**staff**”), **plus any volunteers planning to be directly involved in the church’s programs for children or youth**, must receive training on the Safe Church Policy and this Code of Conduct (“**Safe Church training**”), must undergo a Criminal Offender Record Information check (“**CORI check**”), and must sign a certificate acknowledging receipt of and agreeing to comply with the Safe Church Policy and the Safe Church Code of Conduct (“**Safe Church Certificate**”). All new staff, and any volunteer who has not taken an active part in the life of our congregation for at least six months who intends to become involved with our programs for children or youth (“**Outside Volunteer**”), will also be asked to complete the “**Employment/Outside Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**”, and a Safe Church reference check will be performed. Any staff member or volunteer who may be involved with driving children or youth from the church to or from another location for any church-sponsored child or youth activity must also complete a Safe Church Driver Qualification Form and submit it to the church office or the person or group organizing the activity.

The **Chair of Trustees** is responsible for ascertaining that the “**Employment/Outside Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**” is completed by and a Safe Church reference check performed for each new staff member; that all staff, including our current staff, undergo CORI checks and Safe Church training; and that the Safe Church Certificate and, to the extent applicable to the position, the Safe Church Driver Qualification Form are on file. The “**Employment/Outside Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**” and Safe Church reference check shall be completed before any new hire is complete. The CORI check, Safe Church training, Safe Church Certificate and Safe Church Driver Qualification Form may be completed before hire, where practicable, and in any event shall be completed before the end of the first month and shall be repeated as often as required by the Safe Church Coordinator.

The **Chair of the Christian Education Committee** (“**CE Chair**”) is responsible for ascertaining that all volunteers who are expected to work directly with our children or youth, including Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, nursery or childcare volunteers and substitutes, are approved by the CE Chair or the Sunday School Coordinator, undergo a CORI check, and complete Safe Church training, a Safe Church Certificate, and to the extent expected to be applicable, the Safe Church Driver Qualification Form. It may not be possible to complete these requirements in every instance before a person volunteers or substitutes for the first time, but in any event, each of these requirements shall be completed before one month of continuing participation has passed, and shall be repeated as often as required by the Safe Church Coordinator.

The **CE Chair** is also responsible for ascertaining that any Outside Volunteer (a volunteer who has not been an active part of our church community for at least six months and who intends to work directly with our children or youth) has completed the “Employment/Outside Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form”, that Safe Church reference checks have been done on all such persons, and that all of the other requirements applicable to such volunteers as stated above have been met. In general, we prefer that a lay person be an active participant in the life of our congregation for at least six months before becoming involved in our programs for children or youth (the “**Six Month Rule**”), but this rule can be waived by the CE Chair in unusual circumstances as long as the requirements set out above are complied with.

**Both the CE Chair and the Chair of Trustees** must use extra caution to be sure that all of the above requirements are met with respect to any part-time paid nursery workers, childcare staff or youth group leaders. There may be instances where only CE and the Treasurer or Financial Secretary know of the hiring of such staff, but the Chair of Trustees is the individual responsible for seeing that the requirements above are completed. In such cases, either the CE Chair or the Chair of Trustees may take the steps to complete the process, but it is the responsibility of both individuals to ensure that the steps are completed.

At the present time, any member of the Safe Church Committee is authorized to perform a CORI check, and completed checks shall be returned to an authorized member of the Safe Church Committee. Once reviewed by an authorized member of the Safe Church Committee, completed CORI checks shall be kept by the Safe Church Committee in a confidential and locked file in the church office or in a password protected computer file, and will be used by the Safe Church Committee in the administration of the Safe Church program. A list of Safe Church qualified staff and volunteers shall be maintained in the church office and a second copy shall be available outside the office so that decisions can be made about volunteers and substitutes when the office is locked.

CORI checks and Safe Church Certificates as described above shall be repeated periodically as often as determined by the Safe Church Coordinator, but at least every three years.

#### **Exception - Assistant Teachers**

An **Assistant Teacher** is an individual who is at least 15 and under 18 years of age who has been approved by the CE Chair or Sunday School Coordinator to work with our children or youth in a church-sponsored program or activity. Assistant Teachers are not required to undergo CORI checks. Assistant Teachers should, however, undergo Safe Church training and execute a Safe Church Certificate, and will be considered an adult under our behavioral standards for interacting with children under their care, although they are considered a child or youth for other purposes under this Code.

## Two Adult Rule

It is our rule that **no adult should be alone in the church building or the parsonage with a single child**, who is not his or her own child. In general, we prefer for there to be two adults (or Assistant Teachers) with a child or group of children whenever possible. However, the intent of the “Two Adult Rule” can be met where one adult or Assistant Teacher meets alone with a group of children, as long as there is more than one adult in the building at the time, preferably within seeing or hearing distance of the children’s activities.

The Sunday School generally operates with a single adult teacher in each class and another adult “**floater**” (the CE Chair, Sunday School Coordinator or a designee) who periodically checks on the various classrooms and is available for emergencies. On occasion, two Assistant Teachers may be assigned to teach a class of children age 3 or older. Assistant Teachers will not be given independent responsibility for children under the age of 3 or within 5 years of the age of the Assistant Teacher(s). In the nursery, we seek to provide two adults or an adult and an Assistant Teacher, and in any event there will always be an adult teacher (18 or older) when there are children under the age of 3 in the nursery. On occasion, in the discretion of the CE Chair, Sunday School Coordinator or “floater”, depending on the experience of the teacher and the size and ages of the class, a single adult or Assistant Teacher may be permitted to staff the nursery alone or a single Assistant Teacher may teach a class alone. In such an instance, the “floater” will check on the class more frequently and will be available to help out if needed.

Because visual access is permitted to each classroom, because of the number of people present in the church building on Sunday mornings, and because the “floater” system allows periodic unscheduled observation of each classroom, we believe the intent of the “Two Adult Rule” is met on Sunday mornings. **However, any staff member, teacher, Assistant Teacher or anyone else working with our children or youth should try to avoid placing himself or herself in a compromising situation by being alone with an individual child when no one else is within viewing or hearing distance.** For instance, if only one child comes to a Sunday School class on a given morning, that teacher should endeavor to combine the class with another class that morning, leave the classroom door open, request repeated visits from the “floater”, or otherwise seek to be supervised. Teachers are encouraged to seek the assistance or advice of the CE Chair, Sunday School Coordinator or “floater” when unsure what to do in a given situation.

**The children in our Youth Group program will be under the care and supervision of two adults when meeting outside of our usual Sunday morning hours.** At the end of any type of activity involving youth or children outside of our usual Sunday morning hours, such as Youth Group, at least two adults should remain until a parent or guardian has picked up all participants. No youth should be left alone in the building, and we should try to avoid situations where one adult and one youth are left at the door waiting for a ride. Staff should not be asked to give your child a ride home at a time when there will be no other passengers in the car. All parents are encouraged to respect concluding times.

## Bathroom Supervision of Children; Diapering

Normally teachers or Assistant Teachers who accompany a child to the bathroom should remain outside the bathroom stall while the child is inside. If a child needs assistance with zipping, buttoning, buckling, cleanup, wiping, etc., the door should be left open or another person should be present or within viewing or hearing distance. If anything unusual occurs during such assistance, a note describing the help given and persons present should be written and handed to the Sunday

School Coordinator or “floater”. If for any reason children are left alone in the classroom, the teacher in the nearest or neighboring classroom should be informed.

Because the bathrooms near our pre-school classrooms are built so that an adult in a neighboring classroom can maintain visual and/or auditory access, we are comfortable with one adult or Assistant Teacher in these bathrooms with a child when it is necessary. **An adult or Assistant Teacher should avoid being alone in the bathroom with a child not his or her own with the door closed or without another person in viewing or hearing distance, even for purposes of hand washing or first aid.**

Diapering of infants and toddlers may be done in the nursery. A second adult or Assistant Teacher should be present or within viewing or hearing distance, even if this requires the teacher to wait until the “floater” or another person can be available.

### **Discipline**

The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of responsible behavior, kindness, respect and cooperation. No child will be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping or any form of physical punishment. Verbal reprimands will not include destructive criticism or insults. No child will be disciplined for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet. Teachers, Assistant Teachers and others working with children or youth are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs or offer alternate choices. If a child is disruptive or upset, a teacher or Assistant Teacher from the class or a neighboring class may be sent to locate the “floater” or a parent. At any time, a child may be brought to a parent or a parent may be contacted and brought to the child and/or asked to remove their child for the duration of the class. Longer term consequences may be imposed after a discussion between the teacher, the Sunday School Coordinator and a parent.

### **Behavioral Standards**

For the sake of clarity, the following interactions between adult staff or volunteers, and children or youth not their own, are **prohibited** at all times:

1. Display affection towards a child or youth in private
2. Use profanity or tell off-color jokes
3. Discuss adult sexual encounters with or around children or youth or in any way involve children or youth in adult personal problems or issues
4. Date or become romantically involved with children or youth
5. Use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while responsible for our children or youth
6. Possess sexually oriented materials, including printed or on-line pornography, on church-owned premises, or expose our children or youth to such materials (other than CE approved sex education curriculum)
7. Have secrets with children or youth
8. Stare at or comment on children or young people’s bodies in a suggestive manner
9. Engage in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communications with children or youth
10. Work one-on-one with children or youth in a private setting
11. Have inappropriate out-of-church contact with a child or youth from the church
12. Abuse children or youth in any way including:
  - a. Physical abuse - hit, spank, slap, shake, unnecessarily restrain

- b. Verbal abuse – degrade, threaten, curse
- c. Sexual abuse – inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented activity or conversation
- d. Mental abuse – shame, humiliate, act cruelly
- e. Neglect – withhold food, water, shelter

Many of the above activities are also inappropriate when engaged in with an adult member of the congregation (for instance, pastor-parishioner, or when interacting with a vulnerable adult).

**Demonstrating approval or affection**

Appropriate ways of showing approval or affection or interacting physically with children or young people may be different from appropriate interactions for adults. The following sets out our expectations for physical interactions between adult staff or volunteers, and children or youth not their own, at Plymouth Church:

<b>Appropriate Physical Interactions</b>	<b>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</b>
<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 (where 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> <p>Any of these may be inappropriate if unwanted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extended hugs</li> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in private</li> <li>• Lap sitting (over the age of 5)</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Piggyback rides</li> <li>• Excessive tickling</li> <li>• Any type of massage given between a child/youth and an adult</li> <li>• Any form of affection that is unwanted</li> <li>• Compliments relating to physical development</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest or genital area</li> </ul>

If a child or young person initiates inappropriate contact, gently disengage; if necessary, try to get another adult to help intervene. If you are uncomfortable with what has happened, please speak to parent or to CE Chair, Sunday School Coordinator, Safe Church Coordinator or a member of the Safe Church Committee so that we have a record of what has happened and of your concerns.

**Verbal Interactions**

It is always our goal in verbal interaction to demonstrate respect and compassion. The following outlines appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions with children or youth, or other vulnerable individuals:

<b>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</b>	<b>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Appropriate, non-hurtful jokes</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Praise</li> <li>• Reminders of rules and standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name-calling</li> <li>• Secrets</li> <li>• Cursing</li> <li>• Off-color, hurtful or sexual jokes</li> <li>• Shaming</li> <li>• Belittling</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derogatory or discriminatory remarks about child or child’s family or background</li> <li>• Threats</li> <li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate child or young person</li> </ul>
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**Parental Consent Forms**

Before any child may attend a church-sponsored activity for children or youth away from our facilities, the staff member, Sunday School Coordinator, teacher, youth group leader or other adult organizing the trip should obtain a signed, written consent form from each child’s parent or guardian. Leaders should be especially careful to obtain written consent for overnight trips or programs. Written parental consent forms are also required for overnight events held at the church.

**Safe Church Driver Qualification Forms**

Any member of our staff, and any church volunteer, who expects to become involved in driving children or youth not their own from the church to or from any church-sponsored activity for children or youth, should complete a Safe Church Driver Qualification Form and Agreement. While not ensuring the safety of our children or guaranteeing that no accidents will occur, this form is intended to assure that those driving our children as part of a church-sponsored activity are licensed and insured and have agreed to avoid use of cell phones and other electronic devices and to abide by all motor vehicle laws and by the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct. The adult organizing the activity (staff member, Sunday School Coordinator, teacher, youth group leader, etc) is responsible for ensuring that Safe Church Driver Qualification Forms are collected, approved and up to date, as well as the parental consent forms described above. Each driver is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Safe Church Driver Qualification Form and Agreement.

We will make every effort to avoid situations where one adult is responsible for transporting one child or youth not their own, to or from such an activity. If such a situation is unavoidable, careful note will be taken of departure and arrival times and unscheduled stops are to be avoided. Vehicles will be driven in tandem and stops arranged for in groups, if necessary, to help manage the risks inherent in such a situation.

Even though a young person becomes legally able to drive at an earlier age, it is our policy that no driver under the age of 21 may transport others under age 18 from the church to or from another location for a church-sponsored activity, other than a sibling, without specific permission from a parent or guardian of each young person.

**Overnight Rules**

Overnight event organizers will arrange for an appropriate number of responsible adult chaperones (each of whom shall have undergone a CORI check and Safe Church training and signed a Safe Church Certificate, and each of whom shall be at least five years older than the oldest youth participant) to supervise overnight stays at the church’s facilities and overnight youth events sponsored by the church which are held off-site. Overnight event organizers are also responsible for obtaining parental consent forms as specified above. For ten or fewer children or youth participants,

there must be at least two adult chaperones present. If there are more than ten children or youth participants, one additional chaperone is advisable for each additional group of ten or fewer participants. At least one adult female chaperone, one adult male chaperone, and, if the adult female and adult male chaperones are married, engaged or living together as a couple, a third adult (unrelated and not living together as a couple with either chaperone) should be present for these events. If all children are sleeping in the same room, all required adult chaperones should remain with the group. If the boys and girls are in separate sleeping areas, the chaperones may remain outside the sleeping areas but should retain visual and/or auditory access to the groups.

**Youth Group Activities**

Physical contact such as wrestling, horseplay, or other high contact games is not appropriate recreational activity. No adult leader, staff or volunteer, will engage in or encourage inappropriate physical contact with children or youth. Hazing, bullying, derogatory comments, name-calling, threats, acts of violence, possession of weapons, games of Truth or Dare, ridicule, humiliation, or sexual activity are not permitted, whether between adults and youth or among our youth. Setting boundaries is the responsibility of adults; complying with limits is the responsibility of all. Anyone found in violation of these rules may be separated from the group and asked to leave. Parents may be contacted and asked to pick up their child early.

The Youth Group is a group ministry. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the duration of the activity as communicated by adult leaders. No pairing or otherwise separating off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds is permitted, other than as part of an activity for which the leaders have set out appropriate parameters.

**Drugs, Tobacco, Alcohol**

The use of any drugs, tobacco or alcohol products, by anyone of any age, is not permitted at church-sponsored activities for children or youth. Anyone found in violation of this rule or otherwise being disruptive or behaving inappropriately at such an event may be separated from the group and asked to leave. If such person is a minor, his or her parents may be contacted and asked to pick up their child early.

**Out-of-church contact with child or youth**

In general, out-of-church contact between an adult staff member or volunteer and a child or youth from the church should be supervised, and should only be undertaken with the knowledge and consent of the child’s parent or guardian.

<b>Appropriate Outside Contact</b>	<b>Inappropriate Outside Contact</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking groups of children on an outing (with specific consent of parents and, if children are not all from the same family, notice to CE Chair)</li> <li>• Attending functions at a child’s home with parents present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking one child/youth on an outing without specific permission of parent or guardian</li> <li>• Visiting one child or group of siblings in the home without parents present (unless parents have separately engaged you to baby-sit)</li> <li>• Entertaining one child in the home of a church employee or volunteer (unless parents have separately engaged you to</li> </ul>

	baby-sit at your home, or agreed to a play-date between their child(ren) and your child(ren) at your home) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lone child spending the night with a church employee or volunteer</li> <li>• Inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with child or youth</li> </ul>
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**Guidelines for one-on-one interaction**

Because most child abuse happens when an adult is alone with a child or young person, private one-on-one meetings and interactions are highly discouraged. When such a meeting is unavoidable, the following guidelines shall apply:

<b>One-on-one Interaction Guidelines</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When meeting one-on-one with a child or youth, be sure that you are not alone in the church building or parsonage with a child not your own (the Two Adult Rule)</li> <li>• Always meet in a public place in full view of others</li> <li>• Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted</li> <li>• If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or be in an area that can be easily observed by others passing by</li> <li>• Inform others that you will be alone with a child/youth, and ask them to randomly drop in</li> <li>• Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, any disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, any behavior problems and how they were handled, any injuries, or any interactions or conversations that might be subject to misinterpretation</li> </ul>

To the extent any of these guidelines may appear to be in conflict, the spirit of them is that when meeting one-on-one with a child or young person is unavoidable, one should seek to be under the supervision of others. Please be sure that either the CE Chair or the Safe Church Coordinator is informed of your meeting so that we can try to minimize any need for such a meeting to happen on a repeated basis.

**Electronic Communication and Social Media**

Similar to our guidelines about avoiding one-on-one interactions with children and youth, adult staff and volunteers should also seek to avoid one-on-one electronic communications with children and youth. Such communications could easily be used by a predator to build a private relationship with a child, or to set up a private meeting with a child. The following are our guidelines for electronic communication between adult staff and volunteers in our congregation (this includes staff, Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders and all other adults that have a position of responsibility in the Plymouth Church community) and any child or youth that is part of the Plymouth Church community. However, this section does not restrict communication among family members, or among Youth Group members, even if some are under 18 and some are 18 or older.

**Guidelines for one-on-one communication**

- Telephone calls between an adult and a child or youth may be used to make or change arrangements (time, date, place) for a church-sponsored or church-sanctioned activity

but should not be used to set up a one-on-one out-of-church meeting or activity, without specific consent from a parent.

- Instant messaging and one-on-one text messages or e-mails from an adult to a child or youth are prohibited.
- Group e-mails or group texts that include an adult and a child or youth may be exchanged if a group is addressed or copied on the message, or to make arrangements permitted as above. If no other adult is copied on the message, the adult sending such a message should copy an adult (seek to be supervised) such as a parent, the CE Chair, Pastor, etc. If a child or youth initiates the exchange, the adult should copy another adult on his or her response. In general, we would prefer that electronic exchanges between adults and children or youth be limited to making permitted arrangements as described above, but we recognize that in certain circumstances (planning youth group activities, confirmation classes, church committee business that older youth may be involved in), this may not always be possible. In any event, it is the responsibility of the adult involved to be sure that another adult is copied on the interaction.
- Adults are prohibited from communicating with children or youth on Facebook or other social media sites other than any official Plymouth Church Facebook site (which may be the general church site or a specific site set up for interactions among our Youth Group, etc.) In all cases where adults and children or youth may interact on such a site, the settings must be public and parents and/or the CE Chair or Pastor must be informed that such communication is taking place).
- Staff and volunteers with profiles on social networking sites may not request to be friends with children or youth from the church and may not approve friend requests from children or youth from the church.
- Unsolicited, impermissible approaches from children or youth using any form of electronic communication or social media should not be responded to, except to indicate that such communication is not permitted by church policy, or when another adult is copied on your response as permitted above. Parents and/or CE Chair should be informed that such an approach was made.

### **Electronic communication behavioral standards**

Electronic and social media communications between adults and children, youth and/or vulnerable adults in the congregation, and communications on any Plymouth Church social media site, shall adhere to the following standards:

- Prohibit communications that are or could be construed as offensive, discriminatory, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating
- Prohibit sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities
- Prohibit private messages between adults and children or youth
- Prohibit inappropriate pictures or inappropriate comments on pictures
- Deny participation by individuals who repeatedly violate these standards

Parents are encouraged to play a role in monitoring their children's electronic activities and their communications with adult members of the church community.

### **Close Family Relationships**

The sections of this Code entitled "Out-of-church contact with child or youth", "Guidelines for one-on-one interaction", and "Electronic Communication and Social Media" (including

“Guidelines for one-on-one communication” and “Electronic communication behavioral standards”), are intended to provide guidance for relationships between adult staff members or volunteers, and children or youth, initiated through the church. They are not intended to restrict interaction between close family members, or close family friendships that originated outside the church (i.e., school, scouting, neighborhood, etc.). In addition, in instances where close family friendships have been initiated in the church but continued outside of church, parents may grant specific consent to additional outside, one-on-one or electronic interactions. Caution is urged, but the church relies on the parents’ judgment for determining appropriate interactions in these cases. Staff members must exercise a high level of caution for all out-of-church, one-on-one and electronic contact with children or youth, and no additional interaction with a child or youth may be undertaken without written permission of both the parent/guardian and the CE Chair or Safe Church Coordinator.

### **Parental Guidelines**

We **strongly** encourage parents, when on the premises with their children, to know at all times where their children are, whom they are with, and what they are doing. Children under the age of ten years should not be in unsupervised areas of the church, and parents, volunteers and staff should make a serious effort to avoid this situation and correct it if it occurs. There are a number of unsupervised areas of the church where abuse or other injuries could potentially occur while children are not in class and their parents are occupied elsewhere.

Parents are required to register each child who may be attending Sunday School or other church-sponsored activities during the course of the year. If you missed registration in the fall, please contact the CE Chair or Sunday School Coordinator or ask in the church office for assistance.

As part of the registration process, we seek detailed knowledge from parents of food allergies or special needs children may have and will endeavor to ensure that such information is transmitted to the adults caring for such child. **However, when potentially life-threatening matters such as food or bee sting allergies are involved, and especially when trips away from church or overnight activities are planned, parents are requested to take special care to ensure that the adults caring for their child have been informed and are reminded on a regular basis.**

Parents are required to pick up their children in Grade 1 or below promptly at the end of Sunday School unless other arrangements have been made directly with your child’s teacher. Older children may be released by their teacher when class is over, and are requested to go directly to coffee hour unless they have made other arrangements with their parents.

Parents are requested and encouraged to be respectful of the health and safety of others by refraining from bringing babies or young children to church when they have a contagious, easily communicable illness. We encourage you to use the Belmont Public School Guidelines as a guide in making these decisions. Copies are available from the Sunday School Coordinator.

### **Reporting Responsibilities – All those associated with Plymouth Church**

Both complying with the Safe Church Policy and this Code of Conduct, and observing the behavior of others and helping them to comply, are required of all those associated with Plymouth Church. The protection of the most vulnerable members of our community, including children, youth and vulnerable adults, is the most important goal of this policy. Complying with the guidelines and procedures set out in the Code of Conduct is a means of discouraging and reducing

the potential for any abuse or misconduct to occur. These guidelines and policies are also intended to help protect the adults caring for our youth and children, and to help protect not only our vulnerable members and their families, but also the church community, from the consequences of any violations.

### **Suspected abuse or other misconduct**

**If you witness any incident involving misconduct, including child abuse or neglect, if you receive a verbal or written report of such an incident, or if you suspect such an incident has occurred**, within the church community or at a church-related function or program, you should immediately **contact the Pastor or Moderator or the Safe Church Coordinator**. We would prefer that you not share such information more generally but instead discuss your concerns and the appropriate level of confidentiality with the Pastor, Moderator, or Safe Church Coordinator. In the event that none of the above persons can be reached, then contact a member of the Safe Church Committee. If at any time there is no Safe Church Coordinator or Committee, their responsibilities shall be carried out by the Chair of Trustees and by the Trustees, respectively. Any of the persons named above who receives such a report should contact the Safe Church Coordinator or a member of the Safe Church Committee to begin a review. If one of the persons named above is the individual suspected of misconduct, you should contact a different individual to report the incident.

If the matter involves **suspected child abuse or neglect**, if you are a “mandated reporter” under Massachusetts law, you should of course feel free to notify the Department of Children and Families directly. Whether or not you are a “mandated reporter”, we consider **the Pastor, the Moderator and the Safe Church Coordinator** to be “**mandated reporters**” for the church and to be our “designated agents”, and they will make a determination whether they believe reasonable cause exists and will file a report with the Department of Children and Families if they believe one is required. Any other person is also permitted under state law to file a report if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering from (or has died as a result of) abuse or neglect.

If the matter involves the Pastor and is urgent, and you cannot reach the Moderator or the Safe Church Coordinator, then you may contact the Area Minister of the Metropolitan Boston Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ (currently Rev. Wendy Vander Hart, tel. 781-890-1444). If you do not feel the matter is urgent, the persons above (Moderator, Safe Church Coordinator, etc.) will take care of notifying the Area Minister once you have contacted them.

**For purposes of clarity, misconduct includes, but is not limited to, child abuse or neglect, physical or emotional abuse, sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct, and financial misconduct.** Misconduct could potentially occur between adult and child, between two adults, or even between two children. When in doubt, we strongly prefer that you bring a situation or suspicion to our attention. A review will be conducted, and no disciplinary action will be taken unless the group or individuals responsible for responding believes that action is warranted.

### **Suspected Violation of Code of Conduct; Other Concerns**

If you observe or become aware of **any other violation, or potential violation, of the Safe Church Policy or Code of Conduct, which may not rise to the level of misconduct**, we also urge you to report your concerns. We all have an obligation to comply and to encourage each other to

comply. A distinction will be made between Code or guideline violations, and actual misconduct, and any investigation or steps taken in response will take into account this distinction.

In particular, you are strongly encouraged to report any concerns about inappropriate conduct or an overly close relationship developing between an adult staff member, youth group leader, teacher or volunteer and a child or youth in the church. Inappropriate contact between an adult and a child or youth may include one-on-one contact or socialization outside the church setting, and includes any “sexualized” behavior, as well as any sexual activity. Any such concerns should be reported to the Pastor, the Moderator, the Safe Church Coordinator, or any member of the Safe Church Committee. Once notified, the Pastor or Moderator should promptly notify the Safe Church Coordinator or a member of the Safe Church Committee. As with any other allegation, a review will be conducted before any action is taken.

If at any time you are unsure whether a concern should be reported under the Safe Church Policy or this Code of Conduct, please discuss your concerns with one of the persons named above or err on the side of reporting. We would always rather see a concern “see the light of day”, and have the benefit of another person’s perspective, than have any concerns buried until it is too late. The Safe Church Coordinator or any member of the Safe Church Committee can help you determine whether something needs to be reported. No disciplinary action will result unless the persons responsible for making such a decision feel it is warranted.

### **Media Contacts**

In the event of an allegation of abuse or other misconduct, or other violation of the Safe Church Policy or Code of Conduct, only **the Moderator** is authorized to speak with the media on behalf of Plymouth Church. It is strongly recommended that the Moderator consult with the Insurance Board and/or legal counsel for the Massachusetts Conference before doing so.

### **Best Judgment Rule**

The Safe Church Policy, this Code, the related procedures and other aspects of Plymouth Church’s Safe Church program are a “work in progress” and changes and refinements may be made from time to time as we gain experience in applying them to various situations. The Safe Church Policy and this Safe Church Code of Conduct represent our aspirations, our goals, and a sense of how the safety of all of our youth and children, and others who are part of our church community, can best be protected. However, at all times common sense and the safety of children should prevail over other goals. For instance, in an emergency or an instance when the above goals cannot be met, you should use your best judgment on behalf of our children. If, as an adult or an Assistant Teacher working with children, you feel you have been placed in a difficult position or a questionable incident may have occurred, you should bring it to the attention of the CE Chair, Sunday School Coordinator or “floater”, the Safe Church Coordinator, or a member of the Safe Church Committee, so that we can document what occurred, if appropriate, and discuss how to avoid such a situation in the future. It is our goal always for any concerns or potential incidents, or potentially compromising situations, to “see the light of day”, or be brought to the attention of another adult, rather than being hidden for fear of embarrassment or overreaction. Any concern or potential violation that is reported will be reviewed or investigated and no action will be taken unless those responsible for the decision determine that a response is appropriate.

## **Adoption**

A Plymouth Congregational Church Safe Church Policy, recommended procedures and Safe Church Code of Behavior (draft of June 16, 2005) were approved on a trial basis and recommended to the congregation by Church Council on June 21, 2005, with a goal of formal adoption by the congregation at the next annual meeting. However, those policies were never formally adopted by the congregation. A revised Safe Church Policy, this Safe Church Code of Conduct and related procedures were approved by Church Council on April 30, 2013 and formally adopted by the congregation on May 19, 2013.

## **Amendments**

The Safe Church Policy, this Safe Church Code of Conduct and related procedures may be amended at any time but should be reviewed by the Safe Church Coordinator and Committee at least every three years for necessary changes or updates. Amendments may be made or provisions waived at any time by the Safe Church Committee with the approval of the Moderator. Amendments may also be made or provisions waived by the congregation at the recommendation of Church Council. The Pastor, all paid staff, Church Council and the congregation shall be informed of all amendments.

## **Plymouth Nursery School**

The activities of Plymouth Nursery School are governed by the Plymouth Church Safe Church Policy, but the Nursery School may have its own policy, guidelines and related procedures, so long as they are designed to provide substantially the same degree of protection of children with a view to the different circumstances and operations of the Nursery School. Currently, the Plymouth Nursery School has its own Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct and is not subject to this Safe Church Code of Conduct.

The Plymouth Nursery School Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct and related procedures have been approved by the Plymouth Nursery School Executive Committee and by the Safe Church Committee, may be amended or provisions waived at any time by such committees with the approval of the Moderator, and shall be reviewed by such committees at least every three years for necessary changes or updates. Amendments may also be made or provisions waived by the congregation at the recommendation of Church Council. All Nursery School staff, parents, volunteers, and Board members, the Pastor, the Safe Church Coordinator and Committee and Church Council shall be informed of all amendments.

**Plymouth Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ**

**Safe Church Procedures for Handling Complaints of Misconduct or Other  
Violations of Safe Church Policy or Code of Conduct**

**Annually, Church Council** shall appoint or the church shall elect a **Safe Church Coordinator** and a **Safe Church Committee**, of which the Safe Church Coordinator may or may not be a member. The Safe Church Committee shall consist of no fewer than four members (preferably at least two female and two male), at least one of whom shall be a member of the Board of Trustees. The Safe Church Coordinator and/or Safe Church Committee shall review the Plymouth Congregational Church Safe Church Policy, Safe Church Code of Conduct, Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct, and related procedures with the **Trustees** and **Church Council** annually. The Moderator, Pastor, Safe Church Coordinator and Safe Church Committee will familiarize themselves with such policies, Codes and procedures in preparation for the possibility of receiving complaints or allegations of misconduct or other violations and will act as a resource to the church as it attempts to carry out its responsibilities under such policies, Codes and procedures.

If at any time there is no Safe Church Coordinator or Safe Church Committee in existence, their responsibilities shall be carried out by the **Chair of Trustees** and by the **Board of Trustees**, respectively.

Any complaint or allegation of misconduct or of a Safe Church Policy or Code violation received by **the Pastor, the Moderator, the Safe Church Coordinator, or any member of the Safe Church Committee** will be referred to the Safe Church Coordinator or if that person is not available, any member of the Safe Church Committee for review. A complaint or allegation of misconduct involving **Plymouth Nursery School**, or of a Safe School Policy or Code violation, may instead be referred to the Director or Chair of the Executive Committee of Plymouth Nursery School to be handled under the nursery school Safe School Procedures. However, at any time, the Director, Chair or any Member of the Executive Committee of Plymouth Nursery School may request that such a matter be handled under these procedures instead.

If the matter relates to the church rather than the nursery school, or if the matter relates to the nursery school but is to be handled under these procedures, a Response Team of no fewer than 2 members of the Safe Church Committee (preferably one male, one female) will be formed to review the complaint or allegation. The Response Team will meet with the person making the complaint and, after an interview, ask the person to put their complaint in writing (or assist them in putting it in writing) for the Response Team. The Response Team will then interview the person against whom a complaint has been made and secure in writing the person's response to the complaint. The Response Team may also interview any other person who may have relevant information and may consult with legal authorities, child welfare workers or otherwise seek advice, in their discretion. If the complaint is against the Safe Church Coordinator or a member of the Safe Church Committee, or a family member, the complaint will be referred to a different person and the alleged offender will not participate in the review.

**In the event there is at any time an indication of potential child abuse and/or neglect, the Pastor, the Moderator and the Safe Church Coordinator shall be notified immediately. If there is reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or neglect has taken place, one of the above individuals or if none is available, a member of the Safe Church Committee shall contact the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families ("DCF") immediately (i.e. no**

**more than 24-48 hours after first being contacted about the incident) (Mon – Fri 9-5 tel. (781)641-8500, fax (781)646-5172; 24 hour hotline 1-800-792-5200). The person against whom the allegation was made may be asked to suspend all activities involving children or youth on behalf of the church until the complaint is resolved.**

Any Plymouth Church review or investigation may be put on hold until the conclusion of any outside investigation, although the church may still choose to conduct its own investigation or to respond in some manner, either during or after the outside investigation. The church and all of its staff, members and volunteers shall cooperate fully with any investigation. Any person not fully cooperating in any such investigation may be disciplined, up to and including termination.

Every effort shall be made to distinguish between allegations of misconduct (including child abuse or neglect, physical or emotional abuse, sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct, financial misconduct or similar misconduct) and allegations of other less serious violations of the Safe Church Policy, Safe Church Code of Conduct, or Safe School Policy or Code of Conduct, such as procedural violations or violations of the guidelines for behavior that are designed to lessen the risk of actual misconduct occurring. Allegations of policy or Code violations that are not allegations of misconduct may be resolved by the Response Team in consultation with the Safe Church Coordinator or Safe Church Committee (and/or Director, Chair or Executive Committee of Plymouth Nursery School in the event of an allegation involving the nursery school). Responses may include the informal actions described below, such as verbal or written reminders or warnings, or actions aimed at reconciliation, up to and including the termination of a volunteer's position of responsibility (such as Sunday School teacher, etc). Allegations of actual misconduct, or allegations that the Response Team believes warrant more serious action such as a formal reprimand, probation, suspension or dismissal from employment or, in extreme cases, dismissal of a family from Plymouth Nursery School or termination of affiliation with or membership in the church, may only be resolved by actions of an ad hoc Executive Committee as described below.

In the event of an allegation of misconduct, or an allegation that the Response Team feels should be resolved by a more serious sanction as described above, the written complaint and response and the Response Team's findings shall be presented to an ad hoc Executive Committee, which shall consist of the Moderator, Treasurer (in the event of an allegation of financial misconduct), Chair or Member of the Trustees, Chair or Member of the Diaconate, Chair or Member of the Christian Education Committee (in the event of an allegation of harm to a child or youth), Chair or Member of the Plymouth Nursery School Executive Committee (in the event of an allegation relating to the nursery school), and one other individual from the Church Council representing the congregation. Should one of these persons (or a member of their family) be either the complainant or the individual accused of misbehavior, they would be excused from their role on this Executive Committee. The Executive Committee may further consult with the persons making the complaint and/or being accused of misbehavior and/or any other persons as they see fit. The Executive Committee may also consult with legal authorities, child welfare workers or otherwise seek advice, in their discretion. The Pastor and/or the Safe Church Coordinator may be asked to consult with the Committee but not vote on the action to be taken.

The Executive Committee shall make a determination as to whether or not it believes misconduct or a policy or Code violation has occurred and may take a variety of actions to resolve the matter. Such action may range from informal actions, such as verbal or written reminders or warnings, or actions aimed at reconciliation, up to and including the termination of a volunteer's position of responsibility; to more serious actions such as a formal reprimand; recommending or requiring a program of growth that may include education and/or counseling; probation, with the terms of probation clearly defined; suspension, with or without pay; dismissal from employment; or,

in extreme cases, dismissal of a family from Plymouth Nursery School or a recommendation to the Diaconate of termination of affiliation with or membership in the church, The Executive Committee can also make the finding that no misconduct or violation occurred.

Informal actions aimed at reconciliation may include the person making the complaint attempting to resolve the issue directly with the individual(s) accused of the misconduct (for instance, seeking an apology and promise of amended behavior); or the Pastor or Moderator or other appropriate person being asked to offer assistance with his or her presence in a meeting of the persons involved seeking such a resolution.

If the accused employee or volunteer is an authorized minister (i.e. holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ), then the Executive Committee shall, at the outset of its hearing of a complaint, inform the Area Minister and the Committee on Ministerial Standing of the Metropolitan Boston Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ of the allegation. Consultation with the Area Minister is expected in any case regarding an accusation of misconduct against an ordained minister. Accusations regarding a seminarian in training should be communicated to the Field Work office of the seminary involved. The Executive Committee will cooperate fully in any procedures of the denomination while retaining the right and responsibility to employ or designate leadership within Plymouth Congregational Church as it determines best.

In determining whether misconduct has occurred, consideration shall be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.

A written record of any complaint, the response, the findings of the Response Team and any action taken by the Response Team, and the determination of and any action by the Executive Committee will be maintained in a confidential file in the church office. Every effort will be made to keep complaints and investigations confidential until resolved, other than disclosures thought to be needed for purposes of investigation, resolution, safety of children or vulnerable adults, notification of and cooperation with child welfare workers and other appropriate authorities, etc. However, the Safe Church Coordinator, Pastor, Moderator, and members of the Safe Church Committee and Executive Committee reserve the right to make any additional disclosures they deem appropriate. Once a complaint has been resolved, the Executive Committee and the Safe Church Coordinator shall make a determination whether and to what extent the congregation should be notified of the proceeding or the result.

In the event of an allegation of abuse or other misconduct, or other violation of the Safe Church Policy or Code of Conduct, only the Moderator is authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the church or the nursery school. It is strongly recommended that the Moderator consult with the Insurance Board and/or legal counsel for the Massachusetts Conference before doing so.