Trinitarian Congregational Church
Safe Church Procedures

I. SAFE CHURCH COMMITTEE (The Committee)

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

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

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

II. DOCUMENTS

The Committee shall maintain current copies of the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Procedures available for inspection in the church library, administrative office and the office of the Director of Children and Families.

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

III. REVIEW AND UPDATE

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

IV. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

The congregation shall be made aware of the Safe Church Policy and Procedures annually through the newsletter and they will be available on the web-site.

V. APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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

VI. SCREENING AND TRAINING PROCEUDRES

A. Employees

All applicants for employment over the age of 18 shall go through a regular application procedure that will include a personal interview and submission of at least two references, ideally from organizations where they have worked with children or vulnerable individuals.

All applicants for employment shall complete a disclosure form (Attachment A) as well as a criminal record check request form. Criminal record checks for applicants for employment will only be

conducted after a candidate has been interviewed and determined otherwise appropriate for employment.

B. Volunteers

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

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

C. Criminal Offender Record Information Check (CORI)

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

All employees and volunteers are also screened through a national background check.

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

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

New CORI request forms and national background checks will be required every three years.

VII. TRAINING

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

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

VIII. CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A. Supervision of Children

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

B. Classroom

Under normal conditions, two adults (18yrs or older) will be present to care for and supervise children and youth in each classroom. In some circumstances, when only one teacher can be present in an individual classroom or supervision is being provided by a teen or teens, a door will be left open door to an area where an adult or adults are present. Snacks are discouraged due to allergies. Adult Leaders should familiarize themselves with the evacuation procedures and the first aid kits.

C. Bathroom

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

Whenever possible, persons who accompany a child to the bathroom should remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside. If a child needs assistance with zipping, buttoning, buckling, cleanup, wiping, etc., two adults will be present, whenever possible.

- Diapering will only be done by the child's parent.

D. Behavior and Discipline

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

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

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

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

E. Health and Safety

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

All children in grades 5 and under will be picked up promptly at the conclusion of the service at their classrooms, by a parent unless other arrangements have been made with the teachers.

F. Emergency Procedures

Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each classroom. In the case of an emergency evacuation, teachers will escort students to the nearest exit and proceed directly to the designated spot where

they will take attendance. Parents should not go to their child's classroom but should exit through the closest exit and pick up their children outside on the Walden Street lawn.

G. Youth (including Grades 6-12) Activities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

H. Parental Consent

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

I. Overnight Activities

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

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

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

J. Transportation

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

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

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

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

There will be two adults in each car carrying children or youth.

K. Activity dismissal for all children and youth related activities

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

IX. CONCERNS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Director of Children and Families for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.

2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.

3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.

4. The insurance company will be notified, and the church will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

5. The Associate Minister will be the designated spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. In the event, the Associate Minster has any involvement or conflict with the alleged incident, the Senior Minister shall designate an alternative spokesperson. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the church will be instructed to refrain from speaking to the media.

X. CONCERNS ABOUT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND HARASSMENT OF ADULTS

A. Reporting

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

Informal Response: The person reporting a concern may attempt to resolve the matter directly with the person accused or informally with the assistance of a complainant's supervisor, a member of the Safe Church Committee or a member of the clergy.

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

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

B. Response

Formal proceedings shall include the following steps:

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

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

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

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

Such action may include one or more of the following:

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

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

Probation, with terms of the probation clearly defined;

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

C. Documentation

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

D. Appeal

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

XI. BUILDING SAFETY, SECURITY AND USE

A. Building Security

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

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

Key Receipt Form: All key holders shall complete a key receipt form (attachment J).
Reasons for requesting that a key be returned include:

- Failure to comply with the policies and procedures for a safe church
- Loaning a key to another person
- Duplicating the key
- Other reasons and conditions the Property Committee may deem necessary.

B. Building Safety

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

First aid supplies and fire extinguishers
Fire extinguishers, first aid kits and fire pull stations are located around the building.

Periodic safety review of facilities
Establish an evacuation plan and communicate the plan periodically to the congregation.

Maintenance of safe diapering stations.

Insurance

The Finance Committee shall periodically review insurance policies.

C. Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups

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