

**First Church of Christ (Congregational) in Mansfield United Church of Christ  
Safe Conduct Policy- Adopted by Executive Council, October 16, 2012**

**Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment**

As a congregation of Christian faith, First Church of Christ is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with First Church of Christ should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

**Definitions**

**Minister:** a person authorized by the church to carry out its ministry. Ministers include elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers, as well as Authorized Ministers.

**Authorized Minister:** a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ or region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). An Authorized Minister is one type of minister within the meaning of this policy.

**Ministerial Relationship:** the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

**Sexual Exploitation:** sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Minister engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior with the Minister.

**Sexual Harassment:** repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity.
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church. It is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

**Child Abuse:** Any child or youth who has a non-accidental physical injury or injuries which are at variance with the history given of such injuries, or is in a condition which is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

**Child Neglect:** Any child or youth who has been abandoned or is being denied proper care and attention, physically, educationally, emotionally or morally, or is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances or association injurious to his well-being.

**Abuse of persons who are developmentally disabled and are 18 years of age through 59 years of age:** The willful infliction of physical pain or injury or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services which are necessary to a developmentally disabled person's health and safety.

**Neglect of persons who are developmentally disabled and are 18 years of age through 59 years of age:** The deprivation of care, services or proper attention to the needs of a developmentally disabled person because of carelessness, failure of oversight, or purposeful negligence to provide.

**Elder Abuse:** Includes, but is not limited to, the willful infliction of physical pain, injury or mental anguish, or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services which are necessary to maintain physical or mental health of a person 60 years of age or older.

**Elder Neglect:** refers to a person aged 60 years or older who is either living alone and not able to provide for oneself the services which are necessary to maintain physical or mental health, or is not receiving the said necessary services from the responsible caretaker .

**Adult:** refers to a person aged 18 years or older.

### **Ministerial Conduct**

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers are Ministers to the congregation.

It is important that every Minister to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others.

It is the policy of First Church of Christ to encourage its Ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of First Church of Christ is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

### **Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry**

- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers working with Children and Youth will submit a disclosure form similar to the sample attached hereto as Exhibit A to the Minister of Faith Formation
- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers working with Children and Youth will be personally interviewed by the Minister of Faith Formation to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.
- The Minister of Faith Formation will conduct a registered sex offender review for each Minister working with Children and Youth by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at [www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov). This registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all Ministers by the Minister of Faith Formation.
- Authorized Ministers of the church will attend all boundary workshops required by Windham Association of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, or will attend at least one workshop on this topic every three years, whichever is more frequent.

### **Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry**

First Church of Christ is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which all people can

learn about and experience God's love.

In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been members of First Church of Christ for at least six months or, if not members, associated with First Church of Christ for at least a year.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit a disclosure document to the Minister of Faith Formation attached hereto as Exhibit B.
- Before beginning their duties, all prospective employees will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification by a third party vendor. A background check will be repeated every three years.
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive orientation regarding safe church policy and procedures and will undergo annual training in sexual abuse prevention and recognition.
- It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for youth activities. Events for children and youth will be supervised by no fewer than two unrelated adults present with children. Youth over the age of 14 may assist an unrelated adult in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirement that at least two unrelated adults be present.
- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities.
- All adults who volunteer to drive First Church children and youth to authorized church events must have a photocopy of their driver's license and of their car insurance policy on file in the church office.

### **Procedures for Handling Complaints of Sexual Exploitation or Harassment, Abuse, or Neglect**

- I. Generally
  - A. A subcommittee of the Executive Council with no less than two members, one male and one female, will be established each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. The subcommittee, hereinafter referred to as "The Response Team," will be familiar with the terms of this policy, as well as the established procedures of the church for dealing with a complaint. The names of the Response Team will be announced each year at the Annual Congregational Meeting.
  - B. Several approaches may be taken in addressing incidents of alleged sexual exploitation or

harassment:

1. The complainant can attempt to resolve the matter directly with the respondent, the individual accused of sexual exploitation or harassment.
2. The complainant can report the incident to an authorized minister, in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
3. If an informal resolution of the complaint does not seem wise, appropriate, possible, or does not succeed, the complainant may request that the Response Team institute formal proceedings which shall include the following steps:
  - The Response Team shall advise the Senior Minister and Chair of Executive Council of the receipt of all complaints and shall keep them apprised of ongoing steps and actions taken. The Senior Minister and Chair of Executive Council shall appoint a subcommittee of Executive Council to receive the Response Team's findings; accept, reject, or modify recommendations; and implement next steps. If either the Senior Minister or Chair of Executive Council is the subject of the complaint, this notice requirement shall not apply to that person.
  - The Response Team shall gather statements or other information from the individuals involved in the alleged exploitation or harassment and from others who may have pertinent information, such as qualified professional consultants, and present such information to the Executive Council or an appropriate subcommittee thereof.
  - The Executive Council, or an appropriate subcommittee thereof, shall make determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter. These may include:
    - a. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment has occurred, and that the appropriate body of the church is called upon to take action accordingly; such action may include one or more of the following:
      - (i) a formal reprimand, with defined expectations for changed behavior;
      - (ii) recommending or requiring psychological or psychiatric assessment, counseling and/or treatment;
      - (iii) probationary standing, with the terms of the probation clearly defined;
      - (iv) dismissal from employment or authorized volunteer position by, affiliation with, or membership in, the church.
    - b. finding that sexual exploitation or harassment did not occur.

- The Response Team may seek the advice of legal counsel, Conference staff, or others to advise it in performing its functions.

- C. A written summary of the Executive Council proceedings written by the Safe Church Response Team will be maintained.
- D. 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 the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
- E. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation, 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.
- F. Any person bringing a sexual harassment or exploitation 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.
- G. If the complainant or respondent is not satisfied with the disposition of the matter by the Executive Council, he or she has the right to appeal to the Chair of Executive Council, or to the Vice Chair of Executive Council if the Chair of Executive Council is the subject of the complaint, who shall refer the matter to the Executive Council. The subject of any such appeal to the Executive Council shall be limited solely to whether the procedures of this policy were followed. The matter will not be reconsidered on the merits and the decision of the Executive Council will be the final resolution of the matter. If the Executive Council determines that the procedures of this policy were not followed, it will refer the matter back to the Response Team to complete the processing of the complaint in accordance with these procedures.

## II. Child Abuse and Neglect

Apart from any legal requirements, the First Church of Christ will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any Minister of the church 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 Senior Pastor and Chair of Executive Council so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Connecticut Child Abuse Hotline is: 1-800-842-2288.

## III. Abuse and Neglect of persons who are developmentally disabled and are 18 years of age through 59 years of age.

Apart from any legal requirements, the First Church of Christ will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to the Office of Protection and Advocacy Intake-Investigation Unit, if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a person with

developmental disabilities may be an abused or neglected person. Any Minister of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that abuse or neglect of a developmentally disabled person may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Senior Pastor and Chair of Executive Council so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Office of Protection and Advocacy Intake-Investigation Unit phone number is 1-800-842-7303.

#### IV. Abuse and Neglect of persons who are 60 years of age and older

Apart from any legal requirements, the First Church of Christ will make a report to appropriate authorities, including but not limited to The Department of Social Services – Elderly Service Division, if at any time the church has reasonable cause to believe that a person may be an abused or neglected elder. Any Minister of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that abuse or neglect of an elder may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Senior Pastor and Chair of Executive Council so that the church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Department of Social Services – Elderly Service Division phone number is 1-800-443-9946.

#### V. Clergy

Apart from any disposition of the matter by the church, all allegations of behavior which call into question the fitness for ministry of any Authorized Minister will promptly be forwarded to the Church & Ministry Committee of the Windham Association of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ.

The Regional Conference Minister of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ serving First Church of Christ is the Rev. Ineke K. Mitchell who may be contacted at 860.693.4473 and/or [inekem@ctuucc.org](mailto:inekem@ctuucc.org).

### **Inviting Individuals into Congregational Life who have been Charged or Convicted of a Felony**

The common life of First Church of Christ in Mansfield United Church of Christ is guided by our congregation's Behavioral Covenant (Exhibit C). When an individual who has been charged and/or convicted of a felony offense wishes to join in the life of the congregation, or if a member or friend of the church is charged and/or convicted of a felony offense, that person must approach the Senior Pastor to discuss the circumstances surrounding the charges and/or conviction so that the Senior Pastor, with the advice of legal counsel, Conference staff, deacons, and others, might create an Individualized Behavioral Covenant for that person. Further participation in the life of the congregation is prohibited until the Individualized Behavioral Covenant has been signed by the individual and witnessed to by the signature of the Senior Pastor and the Chair of Executive Council. This Individualized Behavioral Covenant will be reviewed annually. Signing the Individualized Behavioral Covenant is not an admission of guilt or wrongdoing on the part of the individual but rather seeks to create safe boundaries for both the individual already in a vulnerable position and for the congregation as a whole.

**Exhibit A**

**First Church of Christ  
Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**

<b>Name: Last</b>		<b>First</b>	<b>Middle</b>
<b>Address: Street</b>		<b>City/State</b>	<b>Zipcode</b>
<b>Daytime Phone</b>	<b>Evening Phone</b>	<b>Email</b>	

**References: These references should come from people not related to you.**

<b>Name</b>			
<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zipcode</b>
<b>Telephone</b>		<b>Email</b>	

<b>Name</b>			
<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zipcode</b>
<b>Telephone</b>		<b>Email</b>	

<b>Name</b>			
<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zipcode</b>
<b>Telephone</b>		<b>Email</b>	

**I have been a member of this church since \_\_\_\_\_**

**I have been a friend of this church since \_\_\_\_\_**

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

**True                      Not True**

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



**Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?**

**Yes**

**No**

*If yes, please provide a brief explanation.*

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

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

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

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the First Church of Christ Safe Church Policy.

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**(PRINT NAME & SIGN)**

**DATE**

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**(PRINT NAME & SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN FOR APPLICANTS UNDER 18)**

**DATE**

- Sex Offender Registry ([www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)) review performed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Personal interview conducted by staff on \_\_\_\_\_
- Reference inquiries completed on \_\_\_\_\_

**Exhibit B**

**First Church of Christ  
Children and Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form**

NAME: LAST FIRST MIDDLE

ADDRESS: STREET CITY/STATE ZIPCODE

DAYTIME PHONE EVENING PHONE EMAIL

**References: These references should come from people not related to you.**

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIPCODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIPCODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

NAME

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIPCODE

TELEPHONE EMAIL

I have been a member of this church since \_\_\_\_\_

I have been a friend of this church since \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

**No civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations has expired.**                      **True**                      **Not True**

*If not true, give a short explanation of the lawsuit. (Please indicate the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the lawsuit; where the lawsuit was filed; and the precise disposition of the lawsuit.)*

**I have never terminated my employment, professional credentials, or service in a volunteer position or had my employment, professional credentials, or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct.**                      **True**                      **Not True**

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

**Do you have a valid drivers' license?**    **Yes**                      **No**

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

**Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?**    **Yes**                      **No**

*If yes, please provide a brief explanation.*

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

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

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

I acknowledge my receipt and understanding of the First Church of Christ Safe Church Policy.

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**(PRINT NAME & SIGN)** **DATE**

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**(PRINT NAME & SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN FOR APPLICANTS UNDER 18)** **DATE**

- Sex Offender Registry ([www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)) review performed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Personal interview conducted by staff on \_\_\_\_\_
- Reference inquiries completed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Church membership for 6 mos. or association for 1 year confirmed on \_\_\_\_\_
- Safe church awareness training and policy orientation performed on \_\_\_\_\_

## Exhibit C

### **First Church of Christ in Mansfield Center (Congregational) United Church of Christ** **Our Covenant For Working and Worshipping**

In a spirit of trust and love, promising to treat each other respectfully, we will:

- Listen without judgment
- Value one another's ideas and feelings
- Speak honestly and directly, and
- Foster growth and understanding among us, so that our actions and intentions embody God's vision.

#### **Speaking**

- We will communicate directly to each other using the first person, listening with the same intensity as we speak.
- We will ask questions for clarification in order to confirm that we have understood correctly and will ask others to do the same.
- We will speak the truth, as we perceive it, in love, speaking from factual information.
- We will take responsibility for expressing our concerns.
- We will be aware of our own feelings, and be sensitive to the feelings of others.

#### **the truth**

- We will be active participants in the decision-making processes of our church.
- We will accept that the expression of opposing view is necessary as a step toward honest communication, striving for understanding.
- We will encourage the voice of dissent in our willingness to hear the spectrum of views.
- We will clearly define issues that are within the boundaries of congregational discussion.

#### **in love**

- We will affirm each person's ideas equally before offering them our own opinion.
- We will support each other with presence and participation in the life of our church.
- We will recognize the will of the congregation and support it within the bounds of our individual conscience.

As members of a Christian community, we promise, with the help of God, to live this covenant in order to do God's will in the life of our church.

#### SUGGESTION FOR LIVING OUT THE COVENANT

We will work to create an environment of respect and support, and to foster open communication.

We will be intentional in our decision making process through the following actions:

- We will provide written materials before discussions, being conscientious in studying the written materials before discussion.
- We will give enough time for individuals to absorb the information.
- We will plan ahead so that there are enough meetings/occasions for dialogue to allow for adequate discussion, and so that there is adequate time for dissemination of information through the newsletter and Sunday bulletins.

- We will allow time for “key” decisions to germinate.
- We will ensure that the covenant is followed during the decision making process.
- We will, in cases of individual conscience and/or issues that shape church identity, strive for consensus.
- We will always remain open to reconsideration of congregational decisions at any time.