

Safe Space Policy- Adopted January 10, 2026

Sayville Congregational United Church of Christ

131 Middle Rd. Sayville, NY 11782

I. Covenant, Commitment, and UCC Alignment

Sayville Congregational United Church of Christ is a covenantal community within the United Church of Christ. We are bound together not by uniformity, but by shared promises of care, respect, accountability, and responsibility for the well-being of the Body of Christ.

We affirm that every person is created in the image of God and is worthy of dignity, safety, and belonging. As a congregation that proclaims, *“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here,”* we recognize that welcome must be embodied through clear boundaries, faithful communication, and courageous accountability.

Alignment with UCC Safe Church Resources

This policy is grounded in and aligned with **United Church of Christ Safe Church and Abuse Prevention resources**, including guidance from the national setting and our Conference. It functions as a **local expression and operationalization** of those commitments.

In keeping with UCC Safe Church principles, we affirm that:

- Welcome without safety is not true hospitality
- Abuse, harassment, and misuse of power are contrary to the Gospel
- Children, youth, and vulnerable adults require heightened protection
- Grace and accountability are partners, not opposites
- Safety takes precedence over institutional reputation

Where UCC Safe Church resources provide standards or best practices, this congregation commits to honoring and implementing them. Where local context requires greater specificity, this policy establishes enforceable expectations and procedures appropriate to this congregation.

This policy exists to protect individuals, strengthen trust, guide faithful responses to harm, and support the health and integrity of the congregation.

II. Scope of This Policy

This policy applies to all persons participating in the life and ministry of Sayville Congregational UCC, including members, friends, clergy, staff, contractors, volunteers, lay leaders, program participants, visitors, and guests.

It applies to conduct that occurs:

- On church property or at church-sponsored events or programs
 - Within pastoral, leadership, or supervisory relationships
 - Through verbal, written, digital, or online communication
 - Off-site when behavior impacts safety, trust, or community integrity
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III. Expectations for Conduct and Communication

All persons are expected to engage with one another in ways that reflect respect, honesty, compassion, appropriate boundaries, and accountability for words and actions.

Conflict and disagreement are part of communal life.

Harassment, abuse, intimidation, manipulation, gossip, retaliation, and misuse of power are not.

Disagreement itself is not a violation of covenant.

How disagreement is expressed and handled matters.

IV. Power, Boundaries, and Accountability

Power dynamics exist within church life, particularly involving clergy, staff, leaders, volunteers, children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Accordingly:

- Those in positions of authority carry heightened responsibility
 - Abuse of power—emotional, psychological, spiritual, relational, or physical—is a covenant violation
 - Harmful impact is taken seriously regardless of intent
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Good intentions do not negate harm.

V. Faithful Communication and Community Integrity

Covenantal life calls us to speak the truth in love and to address concerns directly and responsibly whenever it is safe to do so.

Community expectations include:

- Speaking directly with one another when appropriate
- Seeking understanding rather than assuming intent
- Using established leadership and governance channels
- Avoiding rumor, triangulation, speculation, and harmful narratives

These practices strengthen trust and protect community integrity.

VI. Respect for the Pastor and Church Leadership

Within UCC polity, the Pastor serves in a position of trust, pastoral responsibility, and spiritual leadership in covenant with the congregation and the wider church.

Therefore:

- Concerns about the Pastor should be raised directly when appropriate
- When direct conversation is not possible, concerns should be brought to the Moderator or Board leadership
- Anonymous accusations, gossip, triangulation, or coordinated efforts to undermine leadership violate covenant

The Pastor is accountable—but not subject to informal discipline, rumor, or behind-the-back accusation.

VII. Prohibited Conduct

The following behaviors violate this policy whether they occur once or repeatedly, in person or digitally, and regardless of intent. **Impact matters.**

A. Harassment

Unwelcome conduct that demeans, intimidates, pressures, or causes distress, including insults, slurs, belittling language, intimidation, repeated unwanted criticism, or persistent contact after boundaries are stated.

B. Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Behavior intended to control, manipulate, confuse, isolate, or diminish, including gaslighting, coercion, threats (explicit or implied), or repeated pressure to change beliefs or behavior.

C. Spiritual Abuse

Use of religious language or authority to shame, silence, control, or avoid accountability, including misuse of scripture or pressuring forgiveness to dismiss harm.

D. Physical Abuse or Intimidation

Any unwanted physical contact or behavior that creates fear of harm. Immediate action will be taken in cases of physical harm or credible threat.

E. Written, Digital, and Online Abuse

Harassing or threatening messages; repeated contact after boundaries; anonymous or pseudonymous communications; copying others to shame or pressure; or sharing private information without consent.

F. Gossip, Triangulation, and Anonymous Accusations

Sharing complaints with uninvolved parties, repeating unverified information, recruiting others to “take sides,” or sending anonymous communications. These behaviors may constitute harassment or psychological abuse.

G. Retaliation

Any action taken against a person for raising concerns, reporting harm, or participating in a review process is strictly prohibited.

VIII. Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

The protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is non-negotiable.

- **Children & Youth:** under 18
- **Vulnerable Adults:** individuals at increased risk due to disability, illness, age, mental health, dependency, or situational vulnerability

Additional prohibitions include boundary violations, secrecy, inappropriate one-on-one contact, manipulative communication, excessive or private digital contact, and undermining parents or caregivers.

IX. Mandatory Reporting

Sayville Congregational UCC complies fully with **New York State mandatory reporting laws** and UCC Safe Church requirements.

- Clergy and designated leaders are mandated reporters
- Reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect will be reported
- Internal church processes do not replace legal obligations

Safety takes precedence over institutional reputation.

X. Reporting and Response Protocol

When a concern is raised, the church will:

1. Receive and document the concern
 2. Assess immediate risk and legal obligations
 3. Notify appropriate leadership
 4. Implement interim safety measures as needed
 5. Review behavior, patterns, and impact
 6. Determine response and consequences
 7. Provide care, monitoring, and follow-up
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Responses may include boundaries, removal from roles, required training, supervision, suspension of participation, or other measures necessary to protect safety and restore trust.

XI. When Our Covenant Is Breached

A covenant breach occurs when behavior violates this policy or undermines trust and safety.

Guiding principles:

- Safety comes first
- Those harmed are centered
- Truth is named honestly
- Accountability is required
- Restoration is possible but not guaranteed

Grace does not eliminate consequences.

Forgiveness does not require continued access.

XII. Review and Accountability

This policy will be reviewed at least every **three (3) years**, or sooner if required by changes to **United Church of Christ Safe Church standards**, Conference guidance, or applicable law.