

FOLLEN CHURCH SOCIETY POLICY ON SAFETY

*Passed by the Parish Board - June 1, 2011
Revised by unanimous vote of Parish Board—June 8, 2015
Revised by unanimous vote of Parish Board—March 8, 2021*

I. Covenant

We, the congregation of Follen Community Church, wish to be a welcoming and inclusive congregation that is a safe and life-affirming place for the people who trust Follen to be their spiritual home. We respect the worth and dignity of every individual. It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership positions, or formally signed Members, but all community participants, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of everyone in the congregation.

Consistent with this spirit, we covenant to work to develop policies and practices that promote safety in congregational life and to provide training and guidelines for handling unsafe situations. We strive to take steps to promote a safe environment and covenant to address whatever problems arise with courage, equity, compassion and the thoughtful application of our Unitarian Universalist values and principles.

II. Safety policy making, implementation, and leadership

- A. The Parish Board is responsible for developing policies regarding safety and updating those policies as appropriate.
- B. The Program Council is responsible for implementing and managing safety policy through the Action Teams and the staff. This responsibility includes periodic training for staff and Action Teams regarding safety policy and procedures.
- C. Parish Board and Program Council jointly will generate a feedback loop between policy and practice that (1) strives to ensure that policies are being implemented, and (2) identifies problems with implementation that may need to be reconciled through new or revised policies. This policy will be reviewed at least every 5 years by Parish Board, but may be reviewed as frequently as the need arises.
- D. The Coordinating Team (the Minister, Administrator, Board Chair and Vice Chair, and

Program Council President and Vice President) is responsible for working to ensure that policies and operations regarding safety are and continue to be in accord.

- E. A Safe Congregation Group (sometimes called “Safety Committee”) consisting of the Minister, the Director or Minister of Religious Education, the Program Council President and Vice President, and the Chair or Co-Chairs of the Lay Ministers, will review and act on any and all incidents and situations that arise under this policy. People with expertise germane to a particular incident—e.g. a psychologist, attorney, psychiatrist, sociologist, ethicist or architect—from within or beyond the congregation may be consulted or asked to participate in the SCG’s review process.

III. Safety concerns

There are many aspects of safety that might be addressed in policy and in practice. These concerns of the Congregation and relevant aspects of safety may change over time with evolving knowledge and experience.

In general, the Follen Safe Congregation Group proactively responds to incidents or situations that pose safety concerns (e.g., actions or threats of violence, abuse, harassment, etc.), that could cause harm to or inappropriate infringement on: i) Follen members, family, renters, visitors, or staff, ii) church property, or iii) the church as an institution, and to any other unforeseen circumstances that lead to a safety concern.

Listed below and detailed in subsequent sections are the concerns covered in this statement of safety policy:

- A. Incident Management: Response to incidents or situations that pose safety concerns.
- B. Background Check Policy: Safety in relation to Follen Members and Friends who may have criminal histories of concern. This safety issue is addressed in policies for conducting, reviewing, and acting on record checks through the Trusted Employee background check process.
- C. Safety of Children and Youth.
- D. Physical safety.
- E. The Special Relationship between Ministers and Congregants.
- F. The Relationship between Staff Members and Congregants.
- G. Allegations Against Ministers or Staff Members.

A. Incident Management

Safe Congregation Group: The Safe Congregation Group (SCG) will review and act on any and all incidents or situations that arise under this policy and/or may be reported by, Follen staff, Members, Friends, youth, or others who participate in our events or use our space. If the SCG believes that it needs additional expertise, it may use consultants from within or outside the congregation, as it has to good effect in the past. An SCG member is allowed and encouraged to decline involvement in a particular case if his or her objectivity could plausibly be called into question, whether because of personal involvement with the incident or for other reasons. In such cases, the SCG may choose a suitable alternate if one is needed.

Although most teams at Follen make their decisions by majority vote, it is strongly desired that decisions by the SCG be by consensus. If further discussion and compromise within the group is

necessary to reach agreement, that approach is recommended. If, after every effort has been made but agreement cannot be reached, the issue should be brought to Parish Board for resolution.

How to bring issues to the SCG: Members, Friends, and staff who have a concern about safety or who know of an unsafe situation should contact a member of the SCG as soon as possible. The person reporting the situation or incident, or a member of the SCG, will enter appropriate information on the Incident Report form or equivalent, which will serve as a record of the incident and how it was addressed. Other paths for conveying concerns about abuse or harassment issues or incidents include the other lay ministers and staff members, who should make efforts to notify a member of the SCG in a timely fashion.

Range of issues and actions: With one exception, the SCG should be informed of, and consider the need to be involved with, all incidents and situations concerning safety under this policy. This includes safety in the building and on the grounds, and safety for children, youth and other vulnerable individuals from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The one exception is reviewing and acting on Trusted Employee reports, a responsibility covered by other procedures.

The SCG will normally not attempt to take responsibility for resolving incidents or situations that involve relationships between or among individuals that do not appear to pose significant danger to any of those involved. Mindful of the fact that Follen is a spiritual community, not a therapeutic one, the SCG will generally work with the people concerned to help them find resources outside of the SCG or even outside of the church to resolve their problems.

For situations involving physical dangers in the building or on the grounds, the SCG may involve and delegate to appropriate staff and Action Teams to address problems.

For situations that involve driving of children or youth, unrelated adults may not drive children or youth to or from church (even with parental permission) if it is just the two of them in the car. Further description is in section III C: Safety of Children and Youth.

For situations involving individuals who may pose, or be subject to, risk of abuse or danger, the SCG may respond confidentially to protect all members of the community while it clarifies and defines a potentially abusive relationship or dangerous situation, while possible charges are investigated, or a legal complaint is being considered or made.

Confidentiality: The SCG, as well as outside consultants if they are used, will conscientiously maintain the confidentiality of those approaching the SCG with a concern or complaint, as well as the confidentiality of those being asked to change their behavior or to respond to a concern or complaint, unless—as with certain mandatory reporting duties—state or federal law requires them to do otherwise. Confidentiality means that access to any and all information related to any concern or complaint will be restricted to the SCG and to those beyond the SCG (such as consulted experts) requiring such information to fulfill their responsibilities under this policy. Confidentiality here means neither strict secrecy nor simple privacy, but rather that those (and only those) who have a need or right to know will be informed appropriately. The SCG may or may not, as the specifics of the incident require, divulge to others information they receive in the course of fulfilling their duties.

Training, preparation, operations, and communication: Members of the SCG will make efforts to be

well informed about the Follen policies on safety and knowledgeable about available resources for adults and children, as well as mandated reporting procedures. To ensure a safe and just process for all concerned, the SCG will take appropriate steps to take responsibility for:

1. Developing and implementing procedures that are consistent with this policy and training new SCG members in those procedures.
2. Arranging that new SCG members who have not yet been trained do not participate in any incident response. If the incident response cannot be handled by the remaining members who *have* been trained, or cannot wait until all members have received training, a prior-year SCG member will be asked to take the place of the untrained member.
3. Overseeing a process in which all parties, including the reporter, are treated with dignity and respect.
4. Designating a single individual to respond to questions from the public media as may be appropriate or necessary.
5. If appropriate, facilitating a healing process for the congregation.
6. Regularly informing the congregation about the existence, purposes, and procedures of the SCG.

Appeal Policy: An SCG decision may be appealed upon the request of any signed member of the church. The request for appeal may be made to any member of Parish Board, and will be heard and decided upon by a subcommittee of Parish Board appointed and led by the Board Chair. The subcommittee will follow the same rules of confidentiality and avoidance of conflicts of interest as the SCG itself.

B. Background Check Policy

Overview: Follen will make efforts to develop, implement, and maintain a process for requesting, receiving, reviewing, archiving, and acting on the results for background checks. Since 2018, we have been using Trusted Employee, a background check recommended by our insurer, Church Mutual, which includes a check of the national sex offender registry, criminal offender registry, and identity theft.

Communications: Follen leadership will make efforts to inform Members, Friends, and staff about Trusted Employee background policy and procedures. Communication efforts may include but are not limited to: (1) periodic notice to the Follen community that background checks are required for staff and selected volunteer positions; (2) written material to accompany the individual request for a release that explains why a background check is being requested, how the information will be handled, and that the Follen policy on background reports are available on request; and (3) administrative systems for notifying managers of activities that staff and volunteers have been checked and approved.

The Trusted Employee Officer: The Trusted Employee Officer (TEO) will be a trusted and respected member of the staff or the Membership who commits to performing this function on a long-term basis. The TEO will be named by the President after consultation with the Parish Board and Program Council through the Coordinating Team. The TEO will authorize a check on his/her own record. The TEO's background check will be reviewed by the President of the Program Council. If no items of concern are found, the TEO will be formally designated by the President. The TEO will take steps to acquire and maintain relevant training and may also provide or recommend outside training for others involved in the Trusted Employee review process.

Trusted Employee background checks on employees and job applicants: Background checks will be performed on all existing Follen employees and on candidates for paid staff positions who receive an offer of employment. Hiring will be conditional on a satisfactory Trusted Employee review, as per the review process below. These checks will be updated as recommended (every three years as of November 2010). Additionally, during the hiring process, the relevant search committee, task force or Action Team will take measures that are prudent under the circumstances, and which may include but not be limited to contacting references. The results will be documented in the employment record.

Trusted Employee checks on volunteers: We will use Trusted Employee background checks with all volunteers who work closely with vulnerable Members and Friends in settings and situations where other adults are not routinely present. Vulnerable Members and Friends include children and youth under 21, as well as adults seeking emotional or spiritual support. The specific categories of individuals to have checks will be established by the Action Teams and their affiliated staff in a manner that is consistent with this policy. In addition, because the President may be involved in background check reviews, they will agree to a Trusted Employee check prior to assuming office as President.

Review of other Trusted Employee checks: When a background check results in a concern, the TEO will first check to ensure that the Trusted Employee record is that of the individual involved. If it does match the individual, the TEO will consult with the Parish Minister and the Director or Minister of Religious Education (if the TEO is a parishioner) or the President (if the TEO is a staff member). Together, the TEO and the consultant will determine whether the Trusted Employee finding may limit the individual's participation in the activity for which the check was requested, using guidance that includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Relevance of the crime to the position sought.
2. The nature of the work to be performed.
3. Time since the conviction.
4. Age of the candidate at the time of the offense.
5. Seriousness and specific circumstances of the offense.
6. The number of offenses.
7. Whether the individual has pending charges.
8. Any relevant evidence of rehabilitation or lack thereof.
9. Any other relevant information, including information submitted by the individual or requested by the church.

If a limitation appears to be in order, the TEO will inform the individual, who will be given a copy of the Trusted Employee record and a copy of the Follen Safety Policy and advised what part of the record is relevant to limiting involvement. The individual will have an opportunity to dispute the accuracy and relevance of the Trusted Employee record, including steps to check the accuracy of the record. If after these checks, the TEO and consultant reasonably believe the record belongs to the applicant and is accurate, they will make a determination whether or not the individual can be involved in the activity or activities under consideration, and whether any restrictions will be placed on involvement. The TEO or consultant may bring in the Safe Congregation Group as they see fit to help in the deliberations. If there is a decision that the individual may participate in the activities under consideration, other Members, Friends, and staff involved in those activities may be informed of the agreement and the terms as appropriate. If there is a decision that the individual may not participate in the activities under consideration, the staff member or lay leader in charge of the

activities will be notified. Beyond these deliberations, the background check finding, the decisions, and the agreement will be kept confidential.

Storage of Trusted Employee reports: Trusted Employee is entirely digital. It cannot be shared beyond the TEO and anyone they may choose to confidentially consult.

Renewal of Trusted Employee reports: The TEO will establish a system to ensure that Trusted Employee reports are kept up to date and renewed when they expire for active volunteers and staff.

C. Safety of Children and Youth

The safety of our children and youth is a paramount concern to Follen families, Members, and Friends. Follen provides many activities for children and youth and other activities in which children and youth are involved. It is our responsibility to make efforts to see that participating children and youth are safe from harm and abuse of any kind.

Two-Adult Policy: Program leaders and managers should make efforts to ensure that two adults are present at and supervise all Follen-sponsored activities for children and youth. Adults are defined as those 21 year or older. Exceptions to this policy may be considered only when one-to one contacts are inherent in the nature of the activity, e.g., mentoring in the Coming of Age Program (and even then only with the explicit written permission of parents or guardians) or in the case of transporting youth on Follen-sponsored activities, in which case there must always be more than two people in the vehicle. The two-adult policy must be strictly followed for all overnight trips.

Transportation of Youth: An adult transporting unrelated youth must have more than one youth in the car. Youth drivers may transport only members of their own family, and must have written parental permission to do so. Examples of prohibited situations include: a Youth Advisor driving a teen home after youth group, or a Nursery Coordinator driving a youth assistant home after a church service or event.

Children with Special Needs: Leaders of children's events and activities will make efforts to inform parents or caretakers of children with special needs that parents/caretakers should share any information necessary to ensure the emotional and physical safety of their children, or to facilitate any needed accommodations, or to handle emergency situations.

Attendance Policy for RE classes and other events: In order to ensure that the responsible adults are able to account for each child or youth, leaders should make efforts to take attendance for events for children and youth. The attendance records should be kept in a manner that will facilitate accounting for children in the event of an emergency. Children and youth should be advised that they should not leave a class/group meeting without telling teachers or advisors, even in cases of a youth who is near the age of 21.

Events and activities away from Follen: Specific procedures will be developed to promote safety for children and youth for these Follen activities and/or venues:

1. Cape Cod Weekend
2. Cardigan Lodge Weekend
3. East Village Fair
4. FUUY Youth Retreat

5. Operetta
6. Other “events” and/or “activities” and/or venues of similar nature and scope as the above

Field Trip Policies: When children and youth are transported to activities not in Follen buildings, on Follen grounds, in the Waldorf School, or on the Waldorf grounds, the policies enumerated below should be followed:

1. A field trip is any planned activity not in the neighborhood of the church, and that may require transportation.
2. Children and youth must be registered for the RE program and/or youth group before going on a field trip.
3. Permission slips signed by a parent or guardian are required for all field trips.
4. Drivers on field trips will be licensed, insured and at least 21 years of age unless there is explicit, signed, prior approval by parents or guardians to allow transportation by a licensed youth driver.
5. Drivers on field trips will be subject to the Follen Trusted Employee check, which requires a review and approval for driving children and youth.
6. Appropriate car seat/booster seat must be used based on a child’s size/age. 7. All children under the age of 11 will ride in the back seat.
7. The total number of drivers and passengers in a vehicle will not exceed the number of seats.
8. All vehicles used must have passed inspection and must be legally drivable. 10. Seat belts must be engaged (no double belting allowed).
9. There will be communication with the parents of children/youth about the purpose, length, time and destination of the field trip. The Professional Religious Educator’s approval is required for all field trips.
10. Transportation to and from Sunday evening youth group is not considered to be under the auspices of the church’s authority, and an individual youth’s safety at that time is to be arranged by the youth’s family.
11. All advisors for overnight field trips will be subject to a Trusted Employee check.

Policy on alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use:

1. Tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use is prohibited at all youth events at Follen and off-site by both adult chaperones and the youth.
2. No sexual activity is permitted at youth events, either on-site or off-site.
3. Any youth who arrives at any youth activity with or under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs, or is suspected to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, will be sent home immediately with parental notification and the Professional Religious Educator will be notified. When feasible, the child/youth will return home with his/her parent or guardian.

D. Physical Safety

Overview: Follen Community Church owns the land and the church building located at 755 Massachusetts Avenue; the land and building known as the Marshman Center with an address at 763 Massachusetts Avenue; and the unimproved land across from the aforementioned Marshman Center and with an unnumbered address of Massachusetts Avenue, all in Lexington, MA. These properties are herein collectively referred to the Follen Church properties.

We recognize that we must attempt to provide a physically safe environment for all who participate in activities on Follen Church grounds and in our buildings, as well as activities that occur elsewhere which are sanctioned or sponsored by Follen Church or any of its officially organized groups. It is also the responsibility of those who participate in Follen Church-related events or in events on Follen Church properties to be vigilant and aware of physical safety and security for themselves and each other.

We will always strive to remain in compliance with federal, state and local building and life safety codes and guidelines that apply to the Follen Church properties. We will also work to maintain the physical conditions and appearances of these properties because of their congregational and community history and heritage.

Physical safety guidelines and procedures will be developed and implemented for the activities, venues and third parties listed herein, as well as for others that may be added from time to time:

1. Worship Services.
2. Religious Education classes, including youth programs and activities.
3. Music and Choir programs, including the Operetta and Concerts for a Cause.
4. Traditional congregational activities such as the East Village Fair, Christmas Tree sale, Cape Cod and Cardigan Mountain weekends, and the Follen Angels.
5. Public and private events that are held at the Follen Church properties involving outside organizations and groups.
6. Rental and lease agreements.
7. Contractors and others who are hired or asked by Follen to perform services.
8. Other events, activities and venues as they occur.

Responsible Parties: Those primarily but not solely responsible for establishing safety and security procedures as they may pertain to activities at or around the Follen Church Properties or elsewhere at church-sanctioned events include:

1. Church Administrator.
2. Director (or Minister) of Religious Education.
3. Director (or Minister) of Music.
4. Head Usher.
5. Chairperson of the East Village Fair.
6. Chairperson of the Buildings & Grounds Action Team, in conjunction with the Church Sexton.
7. Chairperson of the Community & Hospitality Action Team.

Physical Safety and Security Procedures: The Responsible Parties listed will attempt to put into place procedures and guidelines that address the importance of creating and maintaining a safe physical environment. To the extent possible, the responsible parties will establish these procedures and guidelines in accord with the rights and privacy of those participating in activities in and on the Follen Church properties, as well as the sanctity and history of those properties. All written procedures must be kept in an easily accessible location. These procedures may include, but are not limited to:

1. Guidelines and annual training for all Ushers and others participating in Worship Services.

These guidelines may be updated annually as needed and include fire safety and other emergency evacuation plans, as well as responses to medical emergencies and situations that may pose a threat to the safety of participants, and accessibility paths.

2. Annual training for teachers and mentors in evacuation and emergency response procedures for all Religious Education classes, and Music and Choir events (including practices and rehearsals). This includes holding periodic announced fire drills and communicating with local emergency response officials to insure that up to date contact information is available at all times.
3. Semi-annual inspections of all first-aid stations in Follen Church, with restocking and replacement as necessary.
4. Annual inspections of all fire extinguishers and alarm systems in Follen Church buildings pursuant to local and state building codes.
5. Annual inspection of any cardiac defibrillators as needed.
6. Annual inspections of any lifts, elevators and ramps in Follen Church buildings.
7. Monitoring and maintaining all entrance and exit points on Follen Church properties.
8. Limiting and controlling access to Follen Church properties.
9. Promptly making repairs to the Follen Church buildings and properties that are needed to ensure the physical safety of everyone using them.
10. Ensuring that there is written communication with all potential Renters and Tenants explaining their responsibilities to ensure safety at their events and in their spaces.
11. Establishing a chain of command to report about and respond to incidents, and establishing a communication tree to issue warnings as needed.
12. Establishing a procedure for reporting incidents and detrimental conditions to the SCG.
13. Instituting other procedures as needed to ensure physical safety and security.

E. The Special Relationship between Ministers and Congregants

We as a community expect all our ministers, including called, hired, intern, interim, emerita or emeritus, and affiliate, to abide by the most current Code of the UU Ministers' Association. The following excerpt from the code includes the portion about the relationship between the minister and any congregant he or she serves in a ministerial role. The code acknowledges that ministers are the recipients of automatic trust from congregants and others to whom they minister. It prohibits abuse of the trust congregations place in their ministers, defining such abuse as misconduct. In subscribing to this code, ministers essentially agree not to exploit the power inherent in their roles.

This portion of the code of practice is as follows:

1. *Within the limitations of law, I will respect the confidentiality of private communications from those to whom I minister.*
2. *I will demonstrate respect and compassion without regard to race, color, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, physical or mental ability or ethnicity. Such equitable treatment shall be extended to all to whom I minister regardless of position in the organization, including to those who may disagree with me.*
3. *I will not engage in sexual contact, sexualized behavior or a sexual relationship with any person I serve as a minister.*

F. The Relationship between Staff Members and Congregants

Other staff members besides ministers are also in positions of authority or automatic trust, especially with regard to children and youth. Such key staff members include but are not limited to the Director of Religious Education, the Music Director, and the FUUY Coordinator. Therefore, we expect all non-ministerial staff members to abide by the same code of practice, as amended below only for consistency of language:

- 1. Within the limitations of law, I will respect the confidentiality of private communications from those with whom I work.*
- 2. I will demonstrate respect and compassion without regard to race, color, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, physical or mental ability or ethnicity. Such equitable treatment shall be extended to all to whom I minister regardless of position in the organization, including to those who may disagree with me.*
- 3. I will not engage in sexual contact, sexualized behavior or a sexual relationship with any person in the congregation I serve or manage in a professional capacity.*

In addition, those staff for whom a professional organization exists with the Unitarian Universalist Association, i.e. for the DRE the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) are expected to abide by the current Code of Practice adopted by that organization whether or not they are dues paying members of that organization.

G. Allegations Against Ministers or Staff Members

In the case of an alleged violation of these obligations by a minister, the accused minister must be immediately removed from the Coordinating Team either at the accused minister's initiative or by majority vote of the membership of the Coordinating Team other than the accused minister himself or herself. The Coordinating Team may choose an alternate member to replace the accused minister.

In the case of an alleged violation of the relevant obligations by a minister or a staff member, the Coordinating Team will immediately determine whether or not to recommend to Parish Board that the accused minister or staff member be placed on leave pending the resolution of the allegation. The Coordinating Team will thereafter determine an appropriate course of action. Such course of action may include contacting local or national resources of the UUA, and/or contacting local law enforcement.

The Coordinating Team will then work with Follen lay leadership in general to identify and establish the most appropriate methods of communicating with and responding to the congregation and the broader community. Such methods may include informational gatherings, counseling resources, or educational opportunities.

