

# Communication Policies and Covenants First United Methodist Church Cheyenne, Wyoming

*May the Lord bless you and keep you as you pass through these church portals! At First United Methodist Church of Cheyenne, we believe in and desire to practice healthy communication with each other. Join us in implementing these spiritual and relational principles in all we say and do.*

Resources: Healthy Disclosure by Kibbie Simmons Ruth and Karen L. McClintock  
and Safe Sanctuaries by Joy Thornberg Melton

These guidelines should be reviewed every two years or sooner if deemed necessary.

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## **Communication Goals and Values**

- To hold sacred confidential information and to openly communicate appropriate information so that we protect confidentiality while maintaining healthy and transparent communication within the church.
- To speak the truth lovingly and speak well of others for the building up of the body of Christ.
- To openly confront wrongdoing in a caring manner that demonstrates our faith in the principles and transformative power of Jesus Christ.
- To address any issues that might compromise effective ministry with supervision or remediation before they escalate.
- To direct our communication to the appropriate person.
- To always remain cognizant of the purpose of the church and its mission.

## **Leadership Covenant for Clergy, Staff, Lay Leaders, Committee Chairs and Members**

Clergy, paid employees, staff and lay leaders of a local congregation are in a privileged position. We are granted entrance into people's lives that gives us personal information that we must regard with care. It is a sacred responsibility that requires intentional consideration and awareness with every information exchange in which we engage.

If we are not intentional and aware of this sacred responsibility, the potential for misunderstanding and conflict is great. The more conscious of what we are doing with the information we have and pass along to others, the better off our congregation will be.

Clergy, paid employees and staff are in a position of power, not only because of their role, but because of the knowledge to which they have access. That power can be distorted when secrets abound and crucial information is withheld. To avoid this distortion of power, transparency must be achieved. Transparency does not mean disclosing everything, but being clear and explicit as to what you communicate and why, and what you don't communicate and why. These communication policies will be shared with the congregation through newsletter articles, available brochures, and new member orientation.

This covenant attempts to honor that sacred responsibility and the power of the role.

- I enter into this covenant with intentionality, knowing that I must learn appropriate and healthy communication practices.
- I will guard any personal information shared with me with care. Personal information includes contact information, health issues, personal struggles, and confessions. If I do share any information without permission, trust is eroded. Therefore I will ask for permission before sharing any personal information I receive. (See Care & Prayer Guidelines)
- When personal safety may be jeopardized, I will not rely on my own resources. I will seek others who can give advice or intervene. National websites and hotline numbers make it relatively easy for clergy and victims to reach specialized prevention services in their area.
- Whenever there is question, doubt, or concern regarding the safety of our children or the interaction between a child and a suspicious adult, I will contact the Director of Child Care Ministries and request a check of the postings on the National Sex Offender Registry. (See "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" and "Second Chance Boundary Covenant")
- I will speak directly to the person or committee that an issue concerns. I will direct concerned people to speak directly with the person with whom they have concerns.

- If two people talk with me about each other, I will refer them to resolve the issue directly with the people involved, or offer to meet with both of them together or to find them a mediator.
- If a person complains to me about someone else but refuses to directly talk with the persons to resolve the problem, I will ask him or her to stop talking to me or others about it.
- I will reduce venting by first listening and then asking what action the person will undertake to resolve the problem.
- I refuse to carry a message from one person or group to another. I will not be part of “pass-through” communication.
- I refuse to take nonspecific or anonymous feedback seriously.
- I will function as a rumor control person. I will not perpetuate rumors. I will insist on an accuracy check on all rumors, by myself or the source of the rumor, by speaking directly with the people involved in the rumor.
- I will consult and honor the “Who Needs to Know What Information” chart. (See attached)
- I will follow and inform others of the appropriate communication process, outlined in the Communications Road Map (pages 14-17)

“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

~ Matthew 18:15-17

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

~ Ephesians 4:15

## Care & Prayer Ministries Guidelines

While we are interested in offering our prayers for people in need, many times people are uncomfortable in having “the world” know what their needs are. Most are happy to have prayers, but may not want all of the particulars known to others. One can still offer prayers of healing without all of the facts, for God already knows what the problems are and how best to take care of them.

All of the Care & Prayer Ministries are ministries of the church, not of an individual. While an individual may make the calls or send the cards, it is a relationship to the church and God that we are nurturing, not a relationship to an individual.

Given these values, the following guidelines are offered:

- When making a call or visit, state that you are part of the Care & Prayer Ministry of the First United Methodist Church.
- Although we do use lists, please let the care receiver know you are there for them, not because they are on a list.
- Directly ask the following:
  - May I share this information with the Care & Prayer Ministry?
  - May I share the information with our staff?
  - May I share the information with the United Methodist Women’s caring ministry?
  - May I share the information with the congregation through the bulletin and newsletter?
- Unless permission is obtained regarding the above, everything in Care & Prayer meetings is kept confidential to the highest level. This will build trust with our congregation members.
- Set good boundaries by not taking care of things that are out of your league. Be sensitive to whether a problem might need the attention of one of our pastors such as a terminal diagnosis or death of a family member. If so, please make sure the pastors have information available to them.
- Remember to let us take care of you, too. Let the Care & Prayer Ministry know if you are in need of special prayers or help.

## Predecessor Clergy Policy

It is the long held standard of The United Methodist Church that when a pastor retires from a local church, he or she truly retires. Church involvement, beyond attending worship at the invitation of the pastor, shall be by the invitation or with the knowledge and consent of the current pastor-in-charge. The current Senior Pastor is the person who has the right and responsibility of leading the local church. Predecessor clergy who choose to live in the community where they have served a local church should offer pastoral services only after communication with and consent and comfort of the pastor-in-charge. This includes but is not limited to preaching, teaching, weddings, funerals, memorial services and baptisms.

In light of guiding counsel in Healthy Disclosure, by Kibbie Ruth and Karen McClintock, the principles of healthy communication in church and community are affirmed. The authors assert that transparency within a congregation regarding *any* information affecting its governance, health, and integrity is the goal for which we strive. By healthy communication is meant that predecessor clergy will avoid offering personal opinions on subjects of personnel, programs, administrative styles, or in divulging content that is to be considered confidential.

When current church matters enter the conversation, predecessor clergy will be open to hearing facts, but when inappropriate comments enter the conversation those comments will be redirected to appropriate communication or dead-ended, ceased.

When initiated by the current appointed clergy, predecessor clergy are free to share their own perspectives on historical matters, but not personnel issues. They are free to provide helpful clarifying information while avoiding breeches in confidentiality.

United Methodist Clergy are members of an Annual Conference and accountable to the Conference and the Church to which they are appointed or in which they hold their Charge Conference. They also have the privilege of submitting personal concerns to their current District Superintendent and/or Bishop. To this end all clergy are called to serve as role models for being healthy communicators.

*~ written by Rev. Lonnie Johnston with the help of Rev. Richard Gilbert and Rev. Gene Rowbotham.*

### **Guidelines for Appropriate Conduct by Current and Former Pastors**

In the Rocky Mountain Conference we serve as colleagues in a covenant community. We all wrestle with the complexity of pastoral relationships and friendships with parishioners that require us to be sensitive and clear, especially after we have ended an appointment.

When you receive a request from a former parishioner you will always refer them, without comment to their current pastor. You will only agree to any involvement after the appointed pastor invites you to participate.

The currently appointed pastor is also expected to be sensitive, gracious and appropriately including of former pastors.

*~ offered by our District Superintendent, Rev. Deb Olenyik*

## GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE CONDUCT BY CURRENT AND FORMER PASTORS

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Rocky Mt. Conference, United Methodist Church*

In the Rocky Mountain Conference we serve as colleagues in a covenant community. We all wrestle with the complexity of pastoral relationships and friendships with parishioners that require us to be sensitive and clear, especially after we have ended an appointment. These are some behavior guidelines so that our covenant community is honored.

1. Make no disparaging remarks about the work or life style of a predecessor, successor or other ministers.
2. Practice the same ministerial code of ethics with pastors and congregations of other denominations as would be expected in the United Methodist Church.
3. Perform no pastoral functions in any church or charge to which the minister is not appointed, except at the request and under the direction of the pastor in charge.
4. Upon leaving the appointment, including retirement, sever pastoral relationships with parish, recognizing that all future weddings, baptisms, communions, counseling, visitations, and funerals should be fulfilled by the successor pastor, unless an unusual situation exists and is approved by the successor pastor. **To be clear:** When you receive a request from a former parishioner you will always refer them, without comment to their current pastor. You will only agree to any involvement after the appointed pastor invites you to participate.
5. For the health and welfare of the church, it is important that the former pastor and family, when they will be residing in the same community following serving as pastor, find another church to attend. The former pastor's continued presence in the life of the church almost always hinders the congregation and the incoming pastor in developing the necessary relationship for successful ministry. This can be a difficult and painful event for the former pastor and family. However, considering the needs of the church, the best interests of all involved are better served by the former pastor and family participating in another church. Reconsideration of this may happen after a minimum of one year absence in consultation with the District Superintendent and current pastor.
6. The former pastor shall avoid all conversation and communication with church members about the new pastor, as well as problems and issues regarding the former church. If approached, the former pastor needs to tactfully explain that ethics do not permit such a discussion.
7. Continued personal relationships with congregants do not assist in the health and welfare of the local church, and is therefore discouraged. Exceptions to any ongoing relationships and regular contact with former parishioners need to be openly shared and negotiated with the current pastor and District Superintendent.
8. Before leaving, the exiting pastor will clearly communicate from the pulpit and in writing that you will no longer be able to function in any pastoral way with the congregation.
9. An exiting pastor shall not be present or participate in worship, events, or church groups for a minimum of one year. Immediate family members are discouraged from this as well. In

the case of any exceptions, a written agreement will be reached by the District Superintendent and both clergy. In longer appointments, the District Superintendent can require a longer period of absence.

10. The currently appointed pastor is also expected to be sensitive, gracious and appropriately inclusive of former pastors.

Church \_\_\_\_\_

Exiting Pastor Signature & Date \_\_\_\_\_

Entering Pastor Signature & Date \_\_\_\_\_

District Superintendent Signature & Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Consequences, even in retirement, in regard to this policy are based on the 2008 UMC Discipline, Par. 2702.1 (g) where clergy may be charged and tried for "relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor."*

## Safe Sanctuaries Policy

The congregation of First United Methodist Church in Cheyenne Wyoming is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, workers, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church.

- All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been attending for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the “Two person Rule” at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth on a routine basis.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
- All incidents need to be reported and actions taken to be put on file.
- Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisors any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.
- All children activities need to be calendared so that appropriate supervision can be provided.
- All children need to be picked up by their parent/guardian or someone that has been properly designated by the parent/guardian.
- All employees and volunteers who work with children and youth for any reason will have background checks.
- Sex offender list will be periodically checked for any offenders in the surrounding counties and communities.
- Any known sex offender will be required to sign and follow a covenant with the church prior to participation in church activities.
- No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, or ritual abuse) will be allowed to volunteer to work with the children or youth in any church sponsored activity.

## Second Chance Boundary Covenant for Sex Offenders

The First United Methodist Church of Cheyenne is committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshiping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children, vulnerable adults and youth in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to you and others of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation but your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children, vulnerable adults and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

The ministerial leadership of the church will be responsible for the following duties.

- Information regarding known sex offenders will be kept on file in the Child Care area of the church, regularly reviewed by staff, and available upon request for all congregation members.
- The leadership of the church will require a signed covenantal agreement limiting the involvement of a known sex offender (see attached).
- Request for leadership within the church in ministries not involving children and youth will be reviewed after one year of regular participation, within the guidelines below, and allowed on a case by case basis.
- When new members and staff join the church, they will be told about this policy and covenant.
- The leadership of the church may seek recommendations outside the church body from professional counsel as deemed necessary.

You are responsible for following the guidelines below:

- You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation sponsored events.
- Do not approach or initiate conversation with children.
- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as Sunday School classes, V.B.S., youth group events, or children events, driving or otherwise transporting children or youth.
- Avoid being in the building unaccompanied when activities involving children and youth are in session such as Moms' Day Out, Parents' Night Out, Sunday school or youth group activities.
- You are not allowed to be in any non-lit area of the church property.
- At no time shall you deliberately place yourself in or remain in any location in or around the church facilities that would cause undue distress to others. (This prohibits you from being in or near the child care, preschool, elementary, junior high or high school area of the church facilities.)
- If you should decide to relocate to another congregation the membership secretary will seek to inform the leadership of that congregation of the condition of these guidelines.

- You may participate in worship in the sanctuary, and the adult Sunday school class of your choice. You will use the most direct route from the parking lot to the main entrance to these facilities, not passing through any other parts of the church buildings so as to avoid loitering.
- At church sponsored functions for families, you may attend with, but at no time leave the immediate proximity of, your family.
- We strongly suggest that you have counseling for life, specifically addressing your abusive behaviors.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property.

I understand this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## WHO NEEDS TO KNOW WHAT?

Public	Denominational polity and governance A congregation's denominational affiliation Names of clergy presently serving the congregation
RMC Office	A congregation's policies, guidelines, standards, codes of ethics The number of members in its congregation Names of elected officers in its congregation Financial information Movement of clergy from one congregation to another
WYNECO District	Major internal conflicts within the congregation Encumbrance of property How membership numbers are determined in that congregation Worship attendance figures
Congregation Members	Roles and responsibilities of pastors, staff and volunteers Individual staff salaries Details of contracts and job descriptions Details of insurance coverage Budget and benevolences Contents of minutes of the congregation's Administrative Council Matters related to the electing and selecting of lay leaders Matters related to the calling of their clergy Some matters related to the pastoral relationship Matters related to buying, mortgaging, or selling real property Names of other members
Administrative Council	Basic reasons for staff departures or changes Basic reasons for volunteer departures or changes Information about particular congregational problems Pledging amounts and patterns
SPRC	Personnel evaluations Goals for employees Employment problems Results of screening of staff and volunteers Reasons for staff departures Reasons for volunteers departures
Finance Director and Chairs	Donor Records
Clergy	All of the above information

