

# **Respectful Workplace Policy**

## **Central Okanagan United Church (COUC)**

**(March 25, 2026)**

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### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to set out expectations for how staff and volunteers will work separately and together, to satisfy our individual and collective yearnings to bring God's love to the world.

At Central Okanagan United Church, we the people (volunteers, congregants, ministers and staff) are committed to creating and maintaining a respectful, inclusive, and supportive work environment in order to “seek, experience, and express God's love together in an open community which embraces diversity and demonstrates by faithful actions the love of God through the teachings of Jesus”.

This policy provides a set of principles to achieve such a work environment. This policy is informed by and is an interpretation of the United Church of Canada's policy on “Creating Safe and Respectful Environments Policy” (September 2024) found at <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2024-12/creating-safe-and-respectful-environments-policy.pdf>. Where this document is inconsistent with United Church policy, the United Church policy supersedes this one.

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### **2. Scope**

This policy applies to the following working within and beyond the Bernard and Fitzpatrick sites of Central Okanagan United Church:

- Personnel
- Lay Staff
- Church Board Members
- Volunteers

The term “ministry” in the document applies to everyone.

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### **3. Guiding Principles**

- **Respect for Individuals:** Each person working in our church life (minister, staff member and volunteer) brings unique gifts and perspectives. We respect the **autonomy** of our people to bring those gifts and perspectives, and to develop roles and take actions which enable individual and collective spiritual and secular flourishing
  - **Freedom of Conscience and Expression:** Each person is able to express diverse theological and pastoral perspectives, consistent with the United Church of Canada's commitment to inclusivity, social justice, and open dialogue.
  - **Other Individual and Collective Needs:** In good faith, individuals will remain open to exploring and accommodating other individual and collective needs
  - **Sharing and Action:** While valuing individual autonomy, we also affirm our individual and collective needs to act together to fulfill and amplify COUC and the United Church's call and vision.
  - **Trust and Collaboration:** To achieve both our individual and collective ministries, we encourage individual and collective discernment in good faith, to foster productive communication and coordination throughout our interactions.
  - **Restricted Resources:** All work on behalf of the church must acknowledge and address the restricted availability of staff time and financial resources.
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#### 4. Workplace Conduct Principles

To achieve the above, all individuals (congregants, ministers and staff) are expected to:

- Treat others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
- Honour one another's space, time, and responsibilities.
- Refrain from controlling, undermining, or micromanaging others' work.
- Use inclusive, non-discriminatory, and compassionate language.
- Avoid gossip or passive-aggressive behavior.
- Resolve disagreements privately and constructively, using respectful dialogue.
- Respect confidentiality and personal boundaries.
- Challenge and be challenged by the views and positions of other views to explore and enable greater individual and collective discernment and action.

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## 5. Autonomy and Independence in Ministry

Central Okanagan United Church supports a **non-hierarchical approach** to ministry where:

- People are trusted to discern and lead in accordance with their calling and conscience.
- Individuals should have space to innovate, rest, and pursue their ministry goals.
- Oversight and feedback are offered collegially and constructively.
- Individuals' day-to-day work and assigned responsibility are carried out with **minimal oversight** where that work draws upon assigned or minimal resources.
- Decisions requiring the use of restricted time and church resources require conversations and collective discernment.
- Where resource conversations cannot yield a consensus, majority voting (with respect for minority positions) or decisions by the individuals assigned to a role or task will decide.

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## 6. Coordination and Collegiality

We encourage respectful collaboration where:

- Communication is carried out respectfully, inclusively, and in a supportive way to realize the vision, “to seek, experience, and express God’s love together in an open community which embraces diversity and demonstrates by faithful actions the love of God through the teachings of Jesus”.
- Individuals consult and will be consulted in good faith, and with an intent of informing and being informed by others to discern and produce better transformations for collective good.
- Overall decision-making honours both individuals and broader discernment and input through Church Council and ministry teams.
- Task-related communication will be done as-needed, and will be timely, transparent, and constructive.
- Decisions on schedules, resources, and responsibilities are shared fairly with sensitivity to others’ workloads (avoid burnout).

- Disagreement can be necessary and helpful for individual and collective learning and growth. Where there are differences and disagreements, people should expect to give and receive justifications for positions which lead to the better good. Those justifications should include wherever possible, clear rationales and accurate evidence.
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## **7. Harassment, Discrimination, and Bullying**

Any behavior that undermines good faith communication, especially where it is intended to harm the dignity or safety of another—including verbal abuse, exclusion, intimidation, or harassment—is strictly prohibited. This includes:

- Disrespect of theological or cultural differences
  - Disparagement of someone’s ministry style or autonomy
  - Retaliation for speaking up
  - Insults and disparaging remarks which while may appear to be critiquing and addressing a core issue, are intended to demean a person or group.
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## **8. Conflict Resolution and Reporting**

Concerns should be addressed promptly and respectfully. Individuals are encouraged to:

1. Address the issue directly with the person involved, if possible (safe and appropriate).
2. Seek support from others, including members of the Ministry & Personnel (M&P) Committee or Church Council chair or other members as needed.
3. In more serious or unresolved cases, contact the Pacific Mountain Regional Council or United Church General Council Office as appropriate.

Conflicts will be handled with discretion, compassion, and fairness, seeking restoration over punishment whenever possible.

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## **9. Disciplinary Measures**

Unresolved violations of this policy will result in:

- Mediation or facilitated conversations
- Formal warnings, including censure.
- Referral to the Regional Council for disciplinary review (for ministers)
- Termination of employment or contract (in serious or repeated cases)
- Censure and removal from volunteer work.

All actions will follow due process as guided by **The Manual** of the United Church of Canada.

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## **10. Policy Review and Affirmation**

This policy shall be reviewed bi-**annually** by the M&P Committee and Church Council to ensure it remains aligned with:

- The values of Central Okanagan United Church
  - The policies of the United Church of Canada
  - Applicable legal and employment standards in British Columbia
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## **Conclusion**

This Respectful Workplace Policy is not only about conduct—it is about **creating space for grace**. It affirms our desire to be a community where independence is honoured, collaboration and communication (sometimes difficult but always towards a better world) are encouraged, and all people can explore and realize their developing ministry to the world, through COUC.