

1. Introduction

This policy aims to establish clear guidelines regarding the employment of church members other than the pastor by the First Congregational Church of Woodstock (the church). Its primary objectives are to:

- Promote healthy boundaries between pastoral/leadership roles and congregational relationships.
- Minimize potential conflicts of interest and dual relationships that could arise from employer-employee dynamics within the church community.
- Ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in all employment practices.
- Protect the integrity of the church's mission and its relationships with all members.
- Reduce anxiety and risk of adverse negative impacts, e.g., rational, financial, etc. when the employment relationship ends, especially when such endings may not have been the preference of either party.

2. Guiding Principles

- a. **Separation of Roles:** While recognizing the church as a spiritual family, it's crucial to maintain distinct professional boundaries in employment contexts.
- b. **Conflict of Interest:** The church is committed to avoiding situations where personal loyalties or relationships could compromise objective decision-making, particularly in matters of employment, supervision, and compensation.
- c. **Fairness and Equity:** All employment decisions should be based solely on qualifications, merit, and the needs of the church, free from any perception of favoritism or undue influence.
- d. **Stewardship:** The church has a responsibility to be a good steward of its resources, including its human resources, and to ensure that all employment contributes effectively to its mission.

3. Policy Statement

As a general principle, the First Congregational Church of Woodstock prohibits the employment of individuals who are active, voting members of the church congregation. This prohibition extends to all paid positions, whether full-time, part-time, or contract, with the exception of the Minister.

The church believes that employing members can create inherent challenges regarding boundaries, conflicts of interest, and the perception of favoritism and that ending employment of a member can result in significant reputational and financial harm to the church.

. While recognizing the dedication and gifts of our members, maintaining a clear separation in employment relationships helps preserve the integrity of our spiritual relationships and ensures objective decision-making in all professional matters.

Exceptions to this policy will be rare and will only be considered when deemed absolutely necessary and demonstrably in the best interest of the church, subject to the rigorous review and approval process outlined below.

4. Exceptions and Approval Process

For any proposed employment of a church member, the following rigorous process must be followed:

- a. **Demonstrated Need:** The hiring department or leader must clearly articulate why a church

member is the only or exceptionally best candidate for the position. This requires a thorough and documented search for external candidates that has been conducted and failed to yield suitable options.

- b. Disclosure of Relationship: The candidate must fully disclose their membership status and any existing relationships (e.g., family, close friends) within the church leadership or staff.
- c. Conflict of Interest Review Committee: A specially appointed committee consisting of at least one Governing Board member, one deacon, and one member of the congregation must review the proposed employment. The members of the committee will exclude individuals with a personal relationship with the candidate

This committee will assess:

- The potential for actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- The ability to maintain appropriate supervisor-employee boundaries.
- The potential impact on church unity and member relationships.
- The fairness of the hiring process.

Any individuals involved in the hiring process or the review committee who have a personal relationship with the candidate that could present a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from all discussions and decisions related to that candidate.

If an exception is approved, a written agreement will be put in place outlining:

- The specific terms of employment.
- Clear expectations regarding professional boundaries.
- A statement acknowledging the church's policy and the exceptional nature of the employment.
- A dispute resolution process separate from regular church disciplinary procedures for employment-related issues.

Any employment of a church member approved as an exception will be subject to a 30 day, 90 day, and 6 month review by the Conflict of Interest Review Committee to ensure that boundaries are being maintained and no unforeseen conflicts have arisen. This is in addition to the annual performance review outlined in the Employee Manual.

5. Definitions

- Congregant: For the purpose of this policy, an individual who is formally recognized as a member of the First Congregational Church of Woodstock as described in out by-laws.
- Employee: Any individual receiving compensation from the First Congregational Church of Woodstock for services rendered, including full-time, part-time, temporary, and contract positions.
- Conflict of Interest: A situation in which a person's personal interests (e.g., relationships, financial interests) could potentially influence their professional judgment or actions in a way that is detrimental to the interests of the church.
- Dual Relationship: A situation in which an individual holds two or more distinct roles with another person (e.g., pastor and employer, friend and supervisor) which may create ethical challenges or impair objectivity.

6. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically (e.g., every 2-3 years) by the Governing Board and updated as necessary to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance.

