

OUR MULTIGENERATIONAL COVENANT FOR A WELCOMING AND SAFE COMMUNITY

This covenant is for ALL of us at First Church. It is just one of the many ways that First Church addresses community behavior and communication. For additional information on church policies, please refer to our Safe Church Policies & Procedures, Sexual Harassment Policy, and Photography Policy.

First Church is home to people of all ages, sizes, backgrounds, and abilities. We are a truly multi-generational community that seeks to be the church together. When we gather, we must find ways to show care and respect to each other, while maintaining a safe environment for all.

This covenant is written to address the following:

1. How we greet and treat each other
2. How we care for each other
3. How we behave in different spaces in and around our building

We believe the suggestions and guidelines described in our covenant allow us to live more fully into our mission to be “Grounded in God, Growing in Community, Acting in Love.”

HOW WE GREET AND TREAT EACH OTHER

It’s wonderful to see First Church folks greet old friends and new acquaintances every Sunday. The obvious joy and love found in these connections is a huge part of why we keep coming back week after week.

Sometimes, kids don’t always remember that responding to grown-ups who greet them is a polite way to be together. Caregivers can help kids find comfortable ways to talk with people of all ages. Using good manners is a good practice in community!

Sometimes, when grown-ups are seeking ways to connect with littler ones, they fall back on remarking on a child’s appearance or asking questions about school. These comments may not always be the best way to engage a child. In fact, comments on

someone's appearance (other than "You look nice today, or "I like your outfit") can feel intrusive or uncomfortable to persons of any age.

Other options for greeting might be:

"It's nice to see you!"

"What's new with you?" or ***"What are you excited about these days?"***

First Church is a friendly place, and many of us like to greet each other with a hug or other physical contact. But some of us do not prefer this type of greeting, so it's always a good practice to ask if it's okay to hug someone and to respect an answer of "no, thanks." We especially invite you to refrain from tapping heads and touching hair.

Some beloved members of our community have certain challenges when meeting and interacting with others. These could be because of a mental health struggle, because they are having a hard day, or because they haven't slept or are hungry. There are many reasons why someone may have a hard time respecting healthy boundaries. If you notice a behavior that is upsetting to you, please raise it with a staff person who may be able to offer further context or help with a response. If you are wanting to say something directly, please be respectful and try to approach the situation with curiosity instead of judgment.

HOW WE CARE FOR EACH OTHER

Getting to know each other is a big part of sharing our lives together at First Church. In all our time together at church, we learn how to be friends, how to support someone who needs help, and how to receive the care of others when we need it most. This can happen best when we communicate clearly with each other.

Communicating well means both listening and speaking. Sometimes the listening part is more important than the speaking part!

If someone offers you feedback on how your behavior affects them, it is important to listen with an open heart and mind. We can all use some reminding about how to follow our community's guidelines. Some examples of this might be:

- An adult asks a child to slow down or quiet down in particular spaces in our building.
- A parent listens to a church school teacher's concerns and problem-solves with the teacher to help their child succeed in class.
- An adult seeks out support from a staff person to address an interaction with another adult that made them uncomfortable.

- An adult asks another adult to refrain from making comments that cause negative feelings of judgment.
- An adult tells another adult that they are in need of money or housing; after listening respectfully, the listener replies with words such as, “I hear that you are in need. Have you spoken with a member of the church staff?” and the need is then referred to a staff person.

HOW WE BEHAVE IN DIFFERENT SPACES IN & AROUND THE BUILDING

There are different ways we show our enjoyment in being together. Some of us like to laugh loudly, play active games, or chase each other around. Some of us prefer quiet conversation over a cup of coffee or tea. These are all important ways to be together, but we must find a good balance so that everyone feels comfortable and everyone stays safe. Calm voices and walking feet are usually best in our common spaces, while loud voices and high energy are best accommodated outside or in the downstairs play space.

Different spaces in and around the church building have different guidelines for how we act. Here are some specifics to help you:

The Sanctuary

Worship is usually a time to sit quietly, although sometimes we are invited to stand to sing and move around! There are books and activity packets available in the Children’s Worship Book Corner for those who appreciate a quiet distraction. An audio feed from the sound system can be heard in Hastings Common, which can be a lovely spot to hear the service while caring for a fussy baby or toddler. Audio can also be heard in the Narthex. A few noises from little ones during worship are to be expected and are a welcome sign of our congregation’s vitality. Caregivers are encouraged to use their judgment for when their children’s behavior might be too distracting for others. Babies and toddlers are also most welcome to spend the worship hour in the Nursery.

Hastings Common

Gatherings in Hastings Common can become crowded, so moving slowly and being mindful of others is important.

Margaret Jewett Hall

While MJH affords a bit more space, we should all take care in moving in and around the crowds at Coffee Hour or a shared meal. Also, we ask that people refrain from playing the piano in MJH during large events and Coffee Hours.

The Library

The Library is a kid-friendly space during all-church events in MJH! Feel free to pull out the beanbag chairs and board games from the under-cabinet closet spaces. No one should climb the circular stairs, however, unless invited up by Kate Layzer or Friday Café volunteers.

The Chapel

The Chapel is an acoustically “live” space that can become very loud with only a small amount of sound. While it’s great for making a joyful noise at the Church School’s Chapel Sing, it is best to use quieter voices in here during other activities.

The Harter Room

This is a nice meeting room for groups that need chairs and tables. It’s also a good place for watching a movie.

Sage Hall and the Playground

These spaces are designed to accommodate more energetic play. We often have Nursery staff working to supervise children in these spaces during formation and fellowship programs, but caregivers are invited to supervise their kids anytime on the playground (if it’s nice out) or in Sage Hall in the basement. Please, no climbing the Playground fence. And if you pull out lots of toys in either Sage Hall or the Playground, make sure to put them back where you found them. Thanks!

IN ALL SPACES, we are all encouraged to check in with each other to make sure everyone feels welcome and relatively comfortable with the activity level around them. Everyone is invited to communicate their needs for less (or more!) activity by talking with kids and their grownups, or seeking out staff or lay leaders who may be able to help guide us in living out our covenant together.

YES! I have read this covenant and will share it with my family members. We agree to follow the guidelines it offers.

This covenant was revised in early 2019 by the Christian Formation Committee with input from First Church staff, and it was endorsed by the First Church Executive Council on June 3, 2019.