

Safe Church Policy

Faith Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

In a society increasingly aware of the possibility of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, Faith Christian Reformed Church seeks to provide a nurturing and secure environment for all people in our fellowship. This policy protects especially the children, youth, and vulnerable adults among us.

In this policy:

- “Children” refers to people from birth through Grade 8.
- “Youth” refers to persons under the age of 18 years.
- “Vulnerable adults” refers to the frail elderly and developmentally disabled people over 18 years of age.
- “Leaders” refers to paid staff and volunteers who assist, coordinate, or teach any of the above groups.

Safe Church Personnel

1. All persons selected to lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be approved by the Administrative Board, after appropriate screening process is completed.
2. All persons selected to lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will sign the Faith CRC Leadership Covenant (Appendix A).

Safe Church Policies and Procedures

1. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse will not be tolerated.
2. A leader’s first priority in teaching, supervising, and leading a group is to seek their welfare spiritually, physically, socially, and educationally.
 - a. Leaders will model Christian behavior.
 - b. Leaders will encourage and correct in a way that shows Christian love.
 - c. Leaders will answer questions openly and honestly.
 - d. Leaders will undergo a background check before being placed or hired in a leadership position. Faith CRC reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason including a prior criminal record. These records include, but are not limited to, criminal record, sex offender registry, child abuse registry and other available resources.
3. Leaders will work to earn and keep the trust of the group members. They will not abuse them physically, sexually, or emotionally. They will not use corporal punishment, hurtful language, or public humiliation as tools for discipline. Leaders will try to protect individuals under their leadership from all forms of abuse.

4. In situations when leaders counsel persons privately, they will use sound judgment. If they meet with a member of the group alone, it will be in a public place, within sight and sound of others.
5. When leaders provide transportation, they will include another non related leader or group member when possible.
6. Volunteers, staff, adults and teens who transport relatives or parents and guardians who give permission for their child or youth to be transported by a non related minor with a valid drivers license are not subject to this policy.
7. Volunteers and/or leaders must have a valid drivers license and proof of insurance before transporting children and youth.
8. Volunteers and or leaders must abide by state laws for car seat use, seatbelt use, and air bag safety
9. Two or more non related adult members of Faith CRC will be present at church activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

In regards to very young children:

- a. If a second adult is not available when toileting assistance is required, the assistance should be provided with open doors.
 - b. When possible, diapers will be changed in the presence of another adult.
10. If leaders become aware of abuse or suspect that a group member is being hurt by abusive attitudes, bullying or actions of another person, they will inform a member of the Safe Church Team.
 11. Leaders will work with the group members to set up agreed guidelines for acceptable behavior. They will expect members to act according to the guidelines. If the group member is a minor and consistently breaks the rules, leaders will seek help from parents and others to assist them in responding to and correcting this behavior.
 12. Leaders will hold group functions with appropriate and adequate supervision. When possible, functions will have more than one group leader present.
 13. Leaders will keep relationships between themselves and the group members appropriate. They will not accept gifts, phone calls, electronic communication or letters of an inappropriate nature, nor will leaders initiate them.
 14. Leaders of youth and children will provide group program schedules, including beginning and ending times for activities.
 15. Leaders will let group members know that they care about them, offering positive encouragement and comfort. Leaders' ministry of touch will always be appropriate, in the presence of other people, and respectful of the personal boundaries of the group member.
 16. Leaders will pray for all group members regularly, lifting each of them up to our Father in heaven.

Administration of Safe Church Policies

1. The Education Team is responsible for administering the Faith CRC Safe Church Policy.
 - a. The Safe Church Team will be composed of five members of the congregation, appointed by the Administrative Board. The team will be composed of members of both sexes. The Safe Church Team will elect its chair and secretary. Members will include:
 - i. One member of the Administrative Board
 - ii. Two members with a leadership role in a youth ministry of the church
 - iii. One member with a leadership role in the children's ministry of the church
 - iv. Kids Hope USA Director

- b. Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team are:
 - i. Annually review the Safe Church Policy, and adjust the list of included groups as needed. The date of the last review will be noted at the end of the policy.
 - ii. Serve as members of the Abuse Response Team to handle all allegations of abuse.
 - c. Responsibilities of the Education Team are:
 - i. At or near the beginning of the church's Fall activity season, the Education Team will distribute the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Covenant to all members of the congregation who lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults. (These groups include: Cadets, GEMS, Sunday School and Kids of the Kingdom, Youth Group, Friendship Bible Study, Project Serve, Coffee Break Nursery and Little Lambs, Vacation Bible School, and Church Nursery.) This distribution includes both leaders who are members of Faith CRC and leaders who are not members. It includes adult nursery attendants, but not nursery attendants who are minors.
 - ii. Collect signed covenants from leaders and store them.
 - iii. Make available a copy of the Safe Church Policy to all parents or guardians of minor children who participate in church relations functions.
 - iv. Educate the congregation on Safe Church issues as the Education Team judges necessary and appropriate.
2. An Abuse Response Team is responsible for handling all allegations of abuse.
- a. The Abuse Response Team will consist of:
 - i. All members of the Safe Church Team. (If one of the Safe Church team members is involved in the allegation, he or she will not participate in the team.)
 - ii. The pastor of worship and administration.
 - iii. The president of the church consistory. (If the pastor is president of the church consistory, the vice president of consistory will fill this position.)
 - b. Responsibilities of the Abuse Response Team are:
 - i. Respond to or investigate allegations of abuse.
 - ii. Determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred.
 - iii. If there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been harmed, or threatened with physical harm, or that sexual abuse or exploitation may have occurred, notify the appropriate civil authorities within 24 hours.
 - iv. If there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, make a full report to the church consistory. At this point the work of the Abuse Response Team is complete, unless additional responsibilities are delegated to them by the church consistory.

Reporting Policies and Procedures for Alleged or Suspected Abuse

1. All paid staff and volunteer group leaders for children, youth, or vulnerable adults are required to report any allegations of abuse or any suspected abuse to a member of the Abuse Response Team. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged or suspected abuse, but only to report the incident.

All parents or guardians of minor children or vulnerable adults are asked to immediately report concerns about the treatment of their child to the Abuse Response Team, whether they think it is abuse or not.

2. The chair of the Abuse Response Team does the following:
 - a. Immediately informs the parents or guardians of the abuse allegation.
 - b. Convenes the Abuse Response Team to make an initial determination whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred. Parents or guardians of the person involved will be given opportunity to provide input. All information regarding the alleged incident will remain confidential within the confines of those needing to know. Records of the reported allegations will be maintained and kept secure and confidential by the Abuse Response Team Secretary.
3. If the Abuse Response Team concludes there is reasonable cause, the following steps will be taken:
 - a. A report to the appropriate outside agency:
 - i. If the alleged victim is a child under the age of 18, a member of the team will report the suspected abuse to Children's Protective Services.
 - ii. If the alleged victim is an adult, the victim will be referred to an appropriate community services agency (Adult Protective Services, Domestic Violence Services, Police, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Center, etc.).
 - iii. Notification of authorities by the Abuse Response Team will normally take place within 24 hours of receiving the report of an allegation of abuse or as soon thereafter as a determination of reasonable cause can be made.
 - iv. Faith Church will cooperate fully with Children's Protective Services and/or the appropriate law enforcement officials.
 - b. A report to the church consistory (elders and pastors): The pastor of worship and administration or president of the consistory may, at his or her discretion, convene a special meeting to address the issue. If the consistory determines there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, consistory will:
 - i. Suspend the alleged abuser from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties.
 1. If the alleged abuser is the pastor, he or she will be suspended according to synodical rules with full pay and without prejudice pending a hearing.
 2. If the alleged abuser is a staff member or volunteer, he or she will be suspended from the church position (with full pay for staff) without prejudice pending a hearing.
 - ii. Notify the parents or guardians of the results of the investigation.
 - iii. Notify the congregation, at the appropriate time and on advice from legal counsel, of the allegation and the reason for the suspension, along with other information it deems appropriate.
 - iv. If the event attracts media attention, appoint one official spokesperson to communicate with the media.
 - v. If allegations are found to be unsubstantiated and/or charges are dropped, decide if the church leader may be reinstated into his or her previous position or duty.

- vi. If paid staff or volunteer leaders are removed or dismissed from office, they will not be considered for re-entry or reinstated without advice of legal counsel.
 - vii. Deal appropriately with individuals found to have made false accusations.
4. All individuals and their families involved in the case will be supported with Christian compassion by the Abuse Response Team and the church consistory as appropriate, throughout the hearing, investigation, and/or legal processes.

Safe Church Policy and Parents or Guardians of Minor Children or Vulnerable Adults

1. Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be made available to all members of Faith Christian Reformed Church. Annually announcements will be placed in the church bulletin for three consecutive weeks, informing the congregation of the availability and location of copies of the policy.
2. Parents, guardians, or any member of the congregation are welcome to submit suggestions for improving the Safe Church Policy to the Safe Church Team.
3. All Faith Church activities for minor children and vulnerable adults have an open door policy. Parents and guardians are free to drop in at any time without notice as long as their presence does not disrupt an activity.

Revised January 2017

Approved by Council, May, 2007.

Appendix A: Leadership Covenant for Faith Christian Reformed Church

Believing that God has called me to serve _____ [insert name of group to be served] in this congregation, I will be his servant in the following ways:

1. My first priority in teaching, supervising, and leading this group is to seek their welfare spiritually, physically, socially, and educationally.
 - a. I will model Christian behavior.
 - b. I will encourage and correct in a way that shows Christian love.
 - c. I will answer questions openly and honestly.
2. I will work to earn and keep the trust of the group members. I will not abuse them physically, sexually, or emotionally. I will not use corporal punishment, hurtful language, or public humiliation as tools for discipline. I will try to protect individuals under my leadership from all forms of abuse.
3. In situations when I counsel persons privately, I will use sound judgment. If I meet with a member of the group alone, it will be in a public place, within sight and sound of others. When I provide transportation, I will include another non related leader or group member when possible.
4. I will be present with one or more non related adult members of Faith CRC at church activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
 If I am working with children requiring diapering or toileting assistance:
 - a. If a second non related adult is not available when toileting assistance is required, I will provide this assistance with open doors.
 - b. When possible, I will change diapers in the presence of another non related adult.
5. If I become aware of abuse or suspect that a group member is being hurt by abusive attitudes, bullying or actions of another person, I will inform a member of the Abuse Response Team.
6. I will work with the group members to set up agreed guidelines for acceptable behavior. I will expect members to act according to the guidelines. If the group member is a minor and consistently breaks the rules, I will seek help from parents and others to assist me in responding to and correcting this behavior.
7. I will hold group functions with appropriate and adequate supervision. When possible, functions will have more than one group leader present.
8. I will keep relationships between myself and the group members appropriate. I will not accept gifts, phone calls, electronic communication or letters of an inappropriate nature, nor will I initiate them.
9. I will provide group program schedules, including beginning and ending times for activities.
10. I will let group members know that I care about them, offering positive encouragement and comfort. My ministry of touch will always be appropriate, in the presence of other people, and respectful of the personal boundaries of the group member.
11. I will pray for all group members regularly, lifting each of them up to our Father in heaven.
12. If I'm an employee, I understand my employment is at will and can be terminated at any time with or without cause. If I'm a volunteer, I realize that my role can be terminated at any time.

I have received a copy of the Safe Church Policy for Faith Church. I have read it, and I understand it.

Signature

Signature

Date
Parent/Leader/Teacher

Date
Parent/Leader/Teacher

Date