

# **Safe Church Policy**

Woodville Community Church  
White Cloud, MI

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## I. Mission of Woodville Community Church

Woodville Community Church exists to serve God through each person growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ, through the expository preaching and teaching of God's Word, reaching out in service to our community with the Good News of salvation in Christ, and engaging in celebrative worship that glorifies our Lord.

## II. Purpose of Safe Church Policy

As a family of believers, we share the responsibility to care for and protect one another. The Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27, Gen. 5:1, Gen. 9:6, James 3:9) Through our creation therefore, God bestowed upon us an inherent special concern for children and the vulnerable members of society. (Matt. 18:6, 10:14)

The purpose of this Safe Church Policy is:

- To prevent harm to children of our church and children in our church programs.
- To prevent harm to vulnerable adults of our church and church programs.
- To prevent any inappropriate content or activities between an adult and child or vulnerable adult that go against scripture.
- To provide an environment for volunteers, Board members, and staff involved in ministering to others that will allow them to do their work without the threat of false accusation or suspicion.
- To respond diligently, caringly and in a supportive manner to all persons involved when an allegation of abuse has been made.

## III. Abuse Defined

Woodville Community Church agrees with the following definition of four recognized types of abuse: The abuse could be in person, by telephone, texting, other electronic method, or through other individuals.

- a) **Physical Abuse** is any non-accidental act that violates the dignity and the image of God in another person, inflicting dehumanization, pain, or injury. It can also include physical neglect, which means not doing what one is supposed

to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care.

- b) **Emotional Abuse** is any attempt to control another person's life through words, threats, fears, and/or deprivation in such a way that it impairs a person's God-given sense of self-worth.
- c) **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual experience forced on one person by another which may or may not involve physical contact between people. Sexual abuse also includes any role-inappropriate sexual encounter, even if such contact was thought to be consensual at the time (e.g. between parent & child, teacher & student, or pastor & church member in a counselling relationship).
- d) **Misconduct** includes any ungodly conduct when dealing with minors or vulnerable adults. 1) sexually explicit comments or degrading sexuality between a man and woman as God designed it such as sexually oriented topics, vocabulary, music, jokes, propositions, recordings, films, games, websites, computer software or entertainment; 2) use or possession of alcohol, cigarettes or controlled substances; 3) use of profanity or vulgarities; or 4) humiliate, ridicule, threaten, harass, or degrade another person.

#### IV. Definitions

- a) Board - Individuals elected by the congregation to serve as elder or deacon.
- b) Elders – Individuals elected by the congregation whose primary role is pastoral care.
- c) Helper - An adult, or youth under age 18, who is a Protestant Christian regular church attendee (including members and non-members), who assists a Leader and does not have primary care duties.
- d) Leader - An adult who is a Protestant Christian regular church attendee (including members and non-members) who is in a position that involves working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. He/she holds primary care duties over a group that meets in a location separate from others. Leaders include teachers, program leaders, directors and lead adult nursery attendants.
- e) Student/child – Anyone under the age of 18.
- f) Vulnerable Adult – An adult, 18 years or older, who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation due to limitations that affect their ability to care for themselves.

- g) Open door policy - Refers to always having visible access to the interactions between volunteers or staff and the children or vulnerable adults in their care. This includes having windows in classroom and nursery and office doors. Where there are no windows, the door is to remain ajar. If necessary for a leader to meet privately with members, such meetings should occur in a public location within view of other people.
- h) Program Director - A member of Woodville Community Church who oversees the activities and supervision of program leaders and helpers.
- i) Staff - Individuals who are compensated for serving in the Woodville Community Church.
- j) Two-adult rule - Refers to two adults who meet all screening expectations. Two adults/helpers must be with child(ren) at all times.
- k) Volunteer - Leaders and helpers who are not paid staff.
- l) Safe Church Screening Committee – Any member of the Safe Church Committee who, as a team of at least two, run and document all background checks.

## **V. General Prevention Policies**

- a) A general over-riding principle for the protection of all parties is that any volunteer or staff member should not be in a situation where he/she is alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. The presence of a third party such as another volunteer or a staff member should be arranged in all circumstances as a key prevention strategy and for protection against an allegation of abuse. If an adult finds themselves in a situation where these requirements are not met, they should immediately move to an area where visibility is available.
- b) New church members or attendees will not be permitted to serve in a leadership position for a minimum period of 6 months, or by Board approval. New leaders may be interviewed by the Safe Church Committee. The Committee will also conduct two reference checks in accordance with Section IX (b).
- c) All volunteers, Board members, and staff will agree to abide by the guidelines set forth in Woodville's Safe Church Policy. Those who refuse to observe these policies or who violate any of them may be required to relinquish his or her responsibility in the program.

- d) All volunteers, Board members, and staff will receive an annual reminder of expectations under the Safe Church Policy via the Safe Church Policy Summary.
- e) The Safe Church Committee will review this policy a minimum of every 3 years and recommend any changes to the Board for adoption.
- f) A Safe Church Policy Agreement will be required in the following scenarios and a background check will be completed upon receipt.
  - a. New board members, employees, and any person new to serving in a capacity with children or vulnerable adults.
  - b. Any person with a gap in serving of greater than 2 years.
  - c. Every 5 years for those continuously serving.
  - d. Upon relevant changes to the Agreement form or the Safe Church Policy.
- g) All programs involving the care of children or vulnerable adults are to follow the Open Door policy as defined in Section IV.
- h) All volunteers, Board members, and staff will be supervised through techniques such as the Open Door policy, the two-adult rule, video surveillance camera, sign-in/-out sheets, designated monitoring by others and bathroom doors remaining ajar when assisting toddlers or changing diapers of infants.
- i) Any electronic communications must 1) have parental approval in the case of a minor, 2) include multiple people in the text/email/social media content, and 3) occur within the customary hours of 8:00am to 9:00pm.

## **VI. Discipline Policy for Volunteers / Board Members / Staff**

- a) Corporal punishment (e.g. slapping, hitting, pushing, aggressively grabbing, and the like) is not permitted.
- b) Verbal and emotional abuse (e.g.: yelling, threatening, name-calling, swearing, etc.) are not acceptable means of discipline, and as such are not permitted.
- c) Volunteers and staff should discourage misbehavior through corrective measures such as:
  - distracting the child with constructive activities.
  - reminding the child about appropriate conduct.

- “time-outs” which involve isolating the child from others **within the room**, but only if another volunteer is available to assist. “Time-outs” should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child (e.g. time-out for a 3-year-old should not exceed 3 minutes).
- d) Volunteers and staff should be encouraged to seek help from program directors if the approaches listed above do not work.
- e) Parents or guardians are to be informed whenever a child misbehaves repeatedly and does not respond to appropriate correction, as listed above.
- f) In some cases, parents/grandparents are invited to or request to stay with their child for at least a portion of the event. In such cases, all volunteers will operate under the ‘See something, say something’ methodology and report any questionable activity to the Program Leader or a Board member. The Program Leader has the discretion of requesting completion of a Safe Church Agreement if a parent’s attendance is of a longer term (such as during VBS).
- g) When misbehavior becomes destructive to the program being offered or to the other participants, the child may be removed from the program for a defined period of time by the program director.
- h) Appropriate forms of discipline should be reviewed by volunteers and staff on an ongoing basis.

## **VII. By-Program Policies**

### ***A. Abuse Prevention Policies for Nursery Attendants:***

1. These guidelines only apply when there are children being attended to by an assigned attendant.
2. When possible, at least two responsible attendants must be present in the nursery whenever it is in use. At least one of these people must be 18 years of age or older.
3. Responsible minors (age 12-17) are permitted to volunteer as attendants in the nursery. Their role is to assist the adult attendant by playing with children, helping with set up and clean-up of toys, and other tasks as may be required under the direction of the adult attendant. Parents may be assisted by their children in the nursery.
4. Children may only be removed from the nursery by the attendant for medical or other such compelling reasons. In the case of illness or injury, a parent or

guardian must be notified immediately. This could be accomplished by having one attendant quickly going to notify someone upstairs that the child's parent is needed immediately. That attendant is to immediately return to the nursery.

5. When attendants are assigned to the nursery, attendants must ask parents/guardians for specific instructions e.g. bathroom/diapering needs/*allergies/other special needs*) when children are left.
6. If a child needs assistance in the bathroom, the nursery attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Diapering will take place in the presence of another attendant with the door open.
7. The Discipline Policy (Section VI) of this document, will apply.
8. NOTE: The nursery restroom door should be locked during worship service for security purposes by a member of the Nursery lead team or Security team.

***B. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Sunday School Teachers:***

1. Children will be encouraged to use the bathroom before class begins. Children who need assistance will be aided with the bathroom door ajar.
2. Children shall not leave the classroom during class except for illness, bathroom needs, or other compelling reason (e.g. injury). In the case of illness or injury, the child's parents/guardians shall be notified immediately.
3. Leaders will not tolerate potentially abusive behavior (e.g. verbal abuse, swearing, bullying, name-calling, put-downs, excessive tickling, physical affection, and the like) among program participants.
4. The Discipline Policy (Section VI) of this document, will apply.
5. Physical affection by leaders as expressions of encouragement and support will be limited to brief hugs, light pats on the back, shoulder or forearm, or clasping another's hand in public places only. Overt expressions of affection, such as prolonged "bear hugs," are deemed inappropriate. The right to refuse any physical expressions of affection will be respected by all participants.
6. Responsible minors (age 12-17) are permitted to volunteer as Sunday School assistants. Their role is to assist adult teachers by helping children with crafts, stories, and other tasks as may be required. Parents may be assisted by their children in a classroom setting.

7. Church education classes will be conducted according to the following: “two-adult rule”, and/or “open door policy”, and/or windows in all classrooms, and/or designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room, for surveillance and to protect workers against false allegations.
8. Teachers must ask parents/guardians about any allergies or other special needs.

**C. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Leaders of Church Clubs (Awana, etc.)**

1. Leaders will not tolerate potentially abusive behavior (e.g. verbal abuse, swearing, bullying, name-calling, put-downs, excessive tickling, *physical affection*, and the like) among club members.
2. Physical affection by leaders as expressions of encouragement and support will be limited to brief hugs, light pats on the back, shoulder or forearm, or clasping another’s hand in public places. Overt expressions of affection, such as prolonged “bear hugs,” are deemed inappropriate. The right to refuse any physical expressions of affection will be respected by all participants.
3. Activities will be cancelled in the event that adequate adult supervision is not available.
4. Best practice is to have known allergy/medical and parent/guardian contact information on file for each program participant.
5. Leaders must be satisfied that parental consent has been given for youth attending any sponsored event.
6. For overnight/out-of-town trips, no less than two responsible adults (not from the same family) shall accompany the group, and a parental/guardian consent form will be required.
7. If medical attention is required, every effort will be made to ensure that a parent/guardian is notified immediately, and a minimum of one leader and another responsible individual will together attend to the club member.
8. Responsible minors, typically age 12-17 are permitted to volunteer as club assistants. Their role is to assist adult teachers by helping children with crafts, stories, and other tasks as may be required.
9. While attending any church-sponsored event, all volunteers must adhere to no public displays of affection with others. This includes, but is not limited to,

holding hands in a romantic manner (not to include adults guiding young children), prolonged hugging, snuggling, or kissing.

10. The Discipline Policy (Section VI) of this document, will apply.
11. Transportation Guidelines (Section VIII) of this document, will be observed.
12. Church clubs will be conducted according to the following: “two-adult rule”, and/or “open door policy”, and/or windows in all classrooms, and/or designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room, for surveillance and to protect workers against false allegations.

#### ***D. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Youth Group Leaders***

1. Youth Group will be conducted according to the following: “two-adult rule”, and/or “open door policy”, and/or windows in all classrooms, and/or designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room, for surveillance and to protect workers against false allegations.
2. Dating and romantic relationships between youth group leaders and youth group members or their friends will not be tolerated. Youth group leaders should not give gifts of a romantic, personal nature to members of the group.
3. Physical affection by leaders as expressions of encouragement and support will be limited to brief hugs, light pats on the back, shoulder or forearm, or clasping another’s hand in public places only. Overt expressions of affection, such as prolonged “bear hugs,” are deemed inappropriate. The right to refuse any physical expressions of affection will be respected by all participants.
4. Leaders will not tolerate potentially abusive behavior (e.g. verbal abuse, swearing, bullying, name-calling, put-downs, excessive tickling, physical affection, and the like among youth group members.
5. Youth group leaders will consider offering an event each year dealing with the subject of abuse as it relates to young people. Suggested topics could include dating violence, signs of abuse, prevention of abuse, and so on.
6. If medical attention is required, every effort will be made to ensure that a parent/guardian is notified immediately, and a minimum of one leader and another responsible individual will together attend to the youth group member.
7. Best practice is to have all known allergy/medical and parent/guardian contact information on file for each program participant.

8. Leaders must be satisfied that parental consent has been given for youth attending any sponsored event.
9. For overnight/out-of-town trips, no less than two responsible adults (not from the same family) shall accompany the group, and a parental/guardian consent form will be required.
10. The Discipline Policy (Section VI) of this document, will apply.
11. Transportation Guidelines (Section VIII) of this document, will be observed.
12. Activities will be cancelled in the event that adequate adult supervision is not available.

***E. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Vacation Bible School***

1. Children will be encouraged to use the bathroom before class begins. Children who need assistance will be aided with the bathroom door ajar.
2. Children shall not leave the classroom during class except for illness, bathroom needs, or other compelling reason (e.g. injury). In the case of illness or injury, the child's parents/guardians shall be notified immediately.
3. Leaders will not tolerate potentially abusive behavior (e.g. verbal abuse, swearing, bullying, name-calling, put-downs, excessive tickling, physical affection, and the like) among program participants.
4. Physical affection by volunteers as expressions of encouragement and support will be limited to brief hugs, light pats on the back, shoulder or forearm, or clasping another's hand in public places only. Overt expressions of affection, such as prolonged "bear hugs," are deemed inappropriate. The right to refuse any physical expressions of affection will be respected by all participants.
5. Activities will be adjusted in the event that adequate adult supervision is not available.
6. Best practice is to have known allergy/medical and parent/guardian contact information on file for each program participant.
7. If medical attention is required, every effort will be made to ensure that a parent/guardian is notified immediately, and a minimum of one leader and another responsible individual will together attend to the program participant.
8. Responsible minors are permitted to volunteer as classroom assistants. Their role is to assist adult teachers by helping children with crafts, stories, and other tasks as may be required.

9. The Discipline Policy (Section VI) of this document, will apply.
10. Transportation Guidelines (Section VIII) of this document, will be observed.
11. Church programs will be conducted according to the following: “two-adult rule”, and/or “open door policy”, and/or windows in all classrooms, and/or designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room, for surveillance and to protect workers against false allegations.
12. Guidelines for releasing children at close of VBS:
  - a. As part of registration, secure a list of individuals allowed to pick up child.
  - b. Assign a minimum of two (2) adult helpers to dismiss children based on allowances noted during registration.
  - c. If person picking up child does not enter building, they are to pick up child at north narthex entrance drive through.
  - d. If person picking up child enters building prior to dismissal, they are to meet their child near sanctuary exit or other pre-determined location.

## **VIII. Transportation Guidelines**

When transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults to and from church meetings or events, the following needs to be adhered to:

- a) Sections I through VI of this policy apply to transportation, whether it is in a church owned vehicle or a personal vehicle.
- b) Those transporting in their own vehicle, must have parent’s verbal approval to do so.
- c) Volunteers, Board members, and staff must possess a valid driver’s license when driving a church vehicle.
- d) Volunteers, Board members, and staff must adhere to schedules regarding arrival and departure times, must travel the most direct route, and must inform parents of any necessary changes.
- e) Volunteers must drive safely and with due care and caution, adhere to posted speed limit signs and road conditions, and ensure that all passengers arrive safely at the destination.

- f) Volunteers, Board members, and staff should avoid situations in which they are alone in the vehicle for a prolonged period of time with one child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- g) Two adults must be present for transportation.
- h) The church vehicle is equipped with surveillance cameras. No one should tamper with them.
- i) Volunteers, Board members, and staff must adhere to the maximum number of passengers as recommended for the vehicle used.
- j) No child under the age of 13 may occupy the front passenger seat for optimal protection.
- k) All passengers who are attendees of the church's youth programs or anyone under the age of 16 must wear seatbelts. The driver and front seat passenger must wear seatbelts.
- l) The driver is responsible for picking up any trash or other items left in van. If any maintenance issues arise, a Board member must be contacted.
- m) When possible, children of the same gender should share a bench seat.

## **IX. Screening**

- a) All volunteers, Board members, and staff will read this policy and sign Woodville's Safe Church Policy Agreement.
- b) By signing the Agreement, all persons age 18 and over will consent to a current State of Michigan (and any other states previously resided or worked in) criminal background check including National Sex Offender Registry check by the Safe Church Screening Committee. All persons are required to provide two references.
- c) All screening will be conducted by the Safe Church Screening Committee. Any information provided by persons, including the police criminal background check, will be kept confidential, placed in a secure, locked file and be accessible only to the Board and Safe Church Screening Committee overseeing this policy.
- d) Screening for volunteers, Board members, and staff will occur a minimum of every five calendar years following an updated Agreement form (consistent with the requirements for new Agreement in section V f). If new information

or suspicion arises, the Safe Church Screening Committee reserves the right to rescreen and investigate.

- e) Volunteers who have a previous criminal history that involves a felony, crimes of a violent or sexual nature, involve children, or have a history that is deemed potentially unsafe will never be allowed to volunteer with children, youth, or vulnerable adults within Woodville Community Church programs.
- f) Anything requiring further review, or any exceptions to IX e, will be referred from the Safe Church Screening Committee to the Safe Church Committee. Any negative background, whether secured through background check or otherwise known, or exceptions to IX e, will be referred to the Board for final decision and communication with said individual.

## **X. Reporting**

- a) Volunteers or staff in youth programs may find themselves observing an abusive incident, noticing the signs or symptoms of abuse, or receiving a child's or youth's report of abuse. When that happens, volunteers or staff members should *not* hesitate to report nor should they conduct their own investigation of the matter for their own protection, but should follow the reporting procedure.
- b) Volunteers or staff will report any suspicion of abuse to their immediate program leader within 24 hours unless that person is the suspected abuser, in which case the situation should be reported directly to a member of the Board. The program leader or Board member will assist in the completion of the Incident Report Form.
- c) Once an incident has been reported, one should not engage the alleged offender regarding accusations. If approached by the accused, one should decline to discuss the matter. Any allegations should only be discussed with the program leader, Board member, or civil authorities, unless otherwise directed.
- d) In all cases where an allegation is made of any violation under the sections of this policy, the Elders will ensure the opportunity for a full, fair, prompt, and confidential hearing. (Note that the procedures to be followed in the event of an actual allegation of abuse against volunteers or church leaders are dealt with under Reporting, Section X, and Responding, Section XI, of this document.)
- e) Although this policy is focused on our youth as the most vulnerable, any church or community member with a concern should feel free to address that concern with any Elder.

- f) Should church members become concerned that those involved in ministry leadership are failing to follow provisions of the Safe Church Policy, they are asked to bring those concerns to the person supervising that ministry, or to the Safe Church Committee, or to an Elder. Should the supervisor of the ministry be the subject of the concern, the issue should be brought directly to the Safe Church Committee or Elder.

## **XI. Responding: Procedure to Follow in Response to an Allegation of Abuse**

According to Michigan Child Protection Law, clergy are mandated to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. (see [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs))

Should an allegation arise, the following procedure should be followed:

- a) As stated under the Reporting Section b), upon becoming aware of an allegation, the program leader must notify, without delay, at a minimum, one Elder. All cases of suspected abuse involving children will be reported by an Elder as follows:
  1. Non-life threatening: Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) at 1-855-444-3911. Available 24/7. (Following simple prompts qualifies as 'contacting the appropriate authorities')
  2. Life threatening: Call 911. (At minimum, call the Newaygo County Sherriff Department non-emergency number at 231-689-7303.)

Make note of date, time, name of person spoken with and any steps to be taken. Document all relevant details, leaving opinions out, so-as to provide an accurate account of the incident(s).

- b) In the event of accusations against a pastoral position, the Board may notify Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals (FIRE) and 9Marks.
- c) If the situation warrants, the parent or legal guardian of the alleged victim will be notified of the incident by an Elder.
- d) If deemed necessary, a spokesperson for media and/or legal purposes will be appointed by the Elders. All actions of the Elders will respect any actions being taken or contemplated by civil authorities.
- e) Using this document's guidelines, and with prayerful discretion, the Elders will decide how to respond to the allegation, and whether to involve legal council, law enforcement or provide pastoral care to victim or abuser.

- f) In the case of an allegation against a church leader or volunteer, suspension of the person from his or her role and responsibility is immediately required. In the case of an allegation against an office-bearer, Church Order will be followed. The implicated volunteer or staff member will not engage in any ministry of the church until the matter is resolved.
- g) Every effort will be made to ensure that both parties are granted a full, fair, prompt, and confidential hearing.
- h) In cases of suspected or alleged abuse, the Elders will give careful and immediate consideration to seeking legal advice, and will report the incident to the Woodville Community Church's insurance company, as well as to the proper civil authorities.

Acknowledgements:

The Safe Church Policy of St. Albert Christian Reformed Church, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, was used as a guide to formulate our original Safe Church Policy, with their permission.

CRC Synod 2010 – Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader

Oregon Synod of ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) – Reporting Misconduct

Baptist Union of Victoria – Complaint Procedure for Allegations of Misconduct by Pastoral Leaders

Archdiocese of Chicago – Standards of Behavior for Church Personnel who have Contact with Minors and Vulnerable Adults

Michigan.gov/MDHHS

Reference:

Preventing Child Abuse: creating a safe place by Beth A Swagman, Faith Alive Resources, Grand Rapids, MI 49508, Copyright 2009, ISBN 978-1-59255-417-1





**Safe Church Incident Report Form**  
**Woodville Community Church**

Date of report: \_\_\_\_\_

**Information about person reporting the incident:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

If under age 18, parent's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer staff position: \_\_\_\_\_

**Description of the incident or circumstances (reported or witnessed):**

When incident occurred/was reported: \_\_\_\_\_

Where incident occurred: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of alleged victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of alleged abuser (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of any witnesses: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of incident (use reverse side if necessary): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that all information regarding this incident is confidential and is only to be discussed with the program leader, members of the Board or the authorities unless otherwise directed.

Signature of person reporting the incident: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person completing report: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*To Be Completed by the Board*

If reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists, date when Children's Protective Services or the Police Department was notified: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Board member: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Other action taken, if any: \_\_\_\_\_