SAFE CHURCH POLICY

FAITH COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these."
Matthew 19:14

Introduction

This policy is intended to serve as a general framework to help create a safe and secure environment for Faith Community's ministries by establishing policies and providing guidelines for the screening of staff and volunteers involved in the church's child and youth ministries, for preventing harmful behavior, and for properly reporting and responding to such incidents. We pray that functioning within these guidelines will reasonably safeguard our fellowship from abuse and liability and will allow us to remain a pure and wholesome witness to God's loving nurture.

Some Helpful Definitions

Abused Child—means [pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 9:6-8.9] a child under the age of 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, or other person having custody and control of the minor child allows or commits the following:

a. Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon a child physical injury by other than accidental means which causes or creates a substantial risk of death, or serious or protracted disfigurement, or protracted impairment of physical or emotional health or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ;

b. Creates or allows to be created a substantial or ongoing risk of physical injury to such child by other than accidental means which would be likely to cause death or serious or protracted disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ; or

c. Commits or allows to be committed an act of sexual abuse against the child;

Abused Child can also refer to:

d. A child whose physical, mental or emotional condition has been impaired or is in imminent danger of becoming impaired as a result of the failure of his/her parent or guardian, or such other person having custody and control, to exercise a minimum degree of care (1) in supplying the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical or surgical care though financially able to do so, or (2) in providing the child with proper supervision or guardianship, by unreasonably inflicting or allowing to be inflicted harm, or substantial risk thereof, including the infliction of excessive corporal punishment or using excessive physical restraint under circumstances which do not indicate that the

child's behavior is harmful to him/herself, or others or property; or by any other act of a similarly serious nature requiring the aid of the court; or

e. A child who has been willfully abandoned by his/her parent or guardian, or such other person having custody and control of the child.

Child, Youth or Minor—means a person under the age of 18.

Emotional Abuse—means [pursuant to *Act of Synod, 1992* or *1995*] attempting to control a child's life through words, threats and fear. It also includes destroying a child's self-worth through harassment, threats and deprivation.

Ministry Leader—means a volunteer or staff member who is designated to head a ministry.

Paid Staff—or "staff member" means any worker who is compensated for ministry activities at Faith Community. All references in this policy to staff members shall be construed as also referring to or including volunteers.

Physical Abuse—means [pursuant to *Act of Synod, 1992* or *1995*] any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a child—whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.

Physical Neglect—means [pursuant to *Act of Synod, 1992* or *1995*] not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a child's normal development.

Public Place—means a place within sight and sound of others.

Sexual Abuse—means [pursuant to *Act of Synod, 1992* or *1995*] the exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, voyeurism, and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact include fondling of body parts or intercourse of any type.

Volunteer—means a person who is not compensated for ministry activities at Faith Community, but assists in some capacity with such ministries. All references in this policy to volunteers shall be construed as also referring to or including staff members.

General Framework for Administering the Safe Church Policy

The sound administration of Faith Community's Safe Church Policy shall be based on the screening of paid staff and volunteers, the prevention of abuse or claims of abuse through periodic training, and the institution of a reporting and response protocol.

Screening—As part of its Safe Church Policy, Faith Community has adopted a procedure for screening volunteers and paid staff members. This procedure is described below in this policy and includes, at a minimum, the completion of a Safe Church Profile application and a criminal background check. In certain instances, an interview may be additionally required prior to a volunteer or paid staff member's participation in the church's child or youth ministries.

Prevention—All volunteers and paid staff shall agree to comply with these Safe Church policies and, in the context of same, agree to attend periodic abuse prevention training.

Reporting and Responding—It is critical that individuals who have reasonable cause to believe a child has been subjected to child abuse report that information to the appropriate governmental authorities and the church's Safe Church Team ("SCT") in accordance with the Procedures for Reporting Allegations of Abuse included below.

Screening Policy

Faith Community has adopted the following screening procedures for several reasons, including the following:

> The policy communicates to church members that the church is serious about protecting our children and youth from abuse by requesting information that may enable church leaders to screen an individual out of a program or position in which the individual may pose a risk to the participating children or youth.

> The policy may reduce incidents of abuse by deterring an individual who poses a threat to children or youth and does not want to risk exposure from volunteering for a position.

> The policy helps to ensure that volunteer and paid staff members are persons of integrity.

For all of these reasons, the following screening procedures are to be followed for all adults (age 18 or older) seeking to volunteer and/or become a paid staff member in the children or youth ministries of Faith Community Christian Reformed Church.

1. **Safe Church Profile:** All members, nonmembers, and staff, age 18 and above that wish to serve or are currently serving in children or youth ministries of Faith Community CRC must complete the Safe Church Profile included in this Policy and submit the completed Profile to the Church office for consideration and action.

2. **Criminal Record Checks:** Every member, nonmember, and staff person, age 18 and above, that wishes to serve or is currently serving in the children or youth ministries of Faith Community CRC must provide his or her consent on the form included in this policy for the SCT to obtain a criminal record check prior to the person's involvement in children or youth ministries. If anyone is determined to (i) have been convicted of child abuse or (ii) to be listed on the national sex offender registry, then that person shall not be eligible to serve in Faith Community's children and youth ministries.

3. **Interview:** The ministry leader, Pastor or Safe Church Team—in his/her/its sole discretion—may also require any member, nonmember, and staff person, age 18 and above, that wishes to serve or is currently serving in the children or youth ministries of Faith Community CRC to attend an interview if additional information would be helpful in determining whether or not that person will be an appropriate volunteer or staff member in the church's children or youth ministries.

Any applicant for a position—whether as a volunteer or paid staff member—may withdraw without prejudice from the screening process at any time. Anyone with a previous conviction of child abuse will be denied a paid staff or volunteer position working with Faith Community's children or youth. In addition, the church reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason that is permitted by law.

All screening information will be kept confidential with the understanding that access shall be limited to only those individuals who make decisions concerning the approval and/or placement of volunteers and staff members in child and youth ministry positions.

Training Policy

Following their screening, all adult staff members and volunteers approved for involvement in the church's children and youth ministries are to:

1. Be provided access to this Safe Church Policy and advised to review it prior to taking part in the ministries; and

2. Attend annual Safe Church Training Classes

Ministries Serving Infants and Toddlers—Ages 0 through 4

The following guidelines are to be followed in all ministries of Faith Community that either serve or are attended by infants and/or toddlers, ages 0 through 4.

General Guidelines—Ages 0 through 4

1. The volunteers serving any particular ministry at one particular time or at a particular ministry event may not be exclusively from a single household.

2. Children ages 11-17 may serve as volunteers in these ministries, but only when under direct adult supervision.

3. Except in extraordinary circumstances, only scheduled volunteers or substitutes may serve in these ministries.

4. No volunteer or staff member is permitted to take a child from the scheduled room, except when restroom assistance is needed.

5. Volunteers and staff members should arrive ten minutes before the ministry begins to provide care and supervision for the infants and toddlers. Parents are to remain with their children until adult supervision arrives.

6. If a child needs medical attention, the parent or guardian should be notified as soon as possible.

7. Anyone refusing to adhere to these Safe Church Policies or anyone violating these policies may be required to relinquish his or her responsibilities in the ministry they serve.

Arrival and Dismissal Guidelines—Ages 0 through 4

1. A parent or guardian must sign their child into nursery on each visit on the Nursery Sign-In Sheet in the Nursery area. Special care instructions, e.g., identifying food or like allergies, should be included on the sign-in sheet.

2. A parent or guardian will be permitted to remain in the ministry area, including Nursery or KidsChurch, for calming or assimilating their child to the new environment or for care and support, if and when needed.

3. A nametag is to be completed and placed on each child attending Nursery by the parent or guardian. Carry bags left in the Nursery should also be labeled by the parent with the name of the child.

4. An adult volunteer will remain in these ministries until all children have been picked up by a parent or guardian.

5. A parent or guardian of infants and/or toddlers attending either Nursery, KidsChurch or other like ministries must remain on the church campus during the scheduled ministry time or be attending an off-campus Faith Community ministry.

Restroom Assistance Guidelines—Ages 0 through 4

1. Only an adult volunteer or staff member may change diapers or clothes and only in sight of another volunteer or staff member.

2. *Except in the case of emergencies,* volunteers and staff members will not change diapers or assist with toilet needs if a parent has requested to be contacted and wishes to assist their child with such needs.

3. Children should be escorted to the closest restroom to their ministry area. If occupied, an adult volunteer or staff member may escort the child to a different restroom.

4. For children who do not require assistance in the restroom, the adult volunteer must remain outside the restroom or stall door.

5. For children who require assistance, the adult volunteer must assist the child with the restroom stall door ajar or restroom door ajar (as appropriate).

Policy for Obtaining Parent or Guardian—Ages 0 through 4

1. The parent or guardian should be notified as soon as possible when a child has been crying for 10 minutes, is ill or injured.

2. In such cases, a volunteer will go to the parent or guardian and return with them rather than bring the child to them.

Ministries Serving Children and Teens—Ages 5 through 18

The following guidelines are to be followed in all ministries of Faith Community that either serve or are attended by children and teens, ages 5 through 18.

General Guidelines—Ages 5 through 18

1. Except in extraordinary circumstances, one adult must remain in a classroom or activity room with the children or youth at all times.

2. Children ages 11-17 may serve as volunteers in these ministries, but only when under direct adult supervision.

3. If a child or teen needs medical attention, the parent or guardian should be notified as soon as possible.

4. When only one child is present for either a KidSpace or Hayloft class, then the instructor shall arrange for the child to attend either the class immediately above or below in grade level.

5. A permission and release form must be signed by a parent or guardian for each child or teen participant attending an overnight event or trip that takes place somewhere other than Faith Community's campus. The ministry leader may also, in his/her discretion, require permission/release forms for other off-campus events that do not involve an overnight stay.

6. All volunteers and paid staff should seek to be within sight and sound of other people when interacting with children or teens. Classroom door windows are to allow for an unobstructed view of the room.

7. Volunteers and staff members working with high school youth must be adults and at least two (2) years older than the oldest participant.

8. Anyone refusing to adhere to these Safe Church Policies or anyone violating these policies may be required to relinquish his or her responsibilities in the ministry they serve.

9. To the extent that these policies are to be applied to inter-congregational ministries, e.g., GEMS, they are to be *directly applicable* to only volunteers and paid staff that are members of or worshipping at Faith Community Christian Reformed Church. Nevertheless, Faith Community urges the broadest general application of these policies to any and all inter-congregational ministries to ensure a safe environment for the participants, as well as the volunteers and staff.

Arrival and Dismissal Guidelines—Ages 5 through 18

1. Volunteers are to arrive 10 minutes before the ministry begins to provide supervision for children and youth. Leaders are not responsible for children or youth who arrive more than 10 minutes prior to the scheduled starting time and, therefore, parents and/or guardians are to remain with such children or youth until the arrival of a staff member or adult volunteer.

2. At least one adult is to remain until all children or youth have been dismissed or picked up (as appropriate) by a parent or guardian.

3. Parents or guardians of children second grade and under must escort their children to the ministry or activity area unless other arrangements have been made with the volunteer(s) or staff. Children in Second Grade and under must only be dismissed to a parent or guardian.

3. Children with special needs are to be assisted as pre-arranged with the parent or guardian.

Restroom Assistance Guidelines—Ages 5 through 18

1. Children and youth in kindergarten and above do not need assistance *in the restroom*, except in *extraordinary* circumstances.

2. Children and youth are encouraged to take care of their personal needs to the best of their ability.

3. In the case of 2nd Graders and under, the volunteer will only escort him/her to the restroom *if warranted* and will wait outside the restroom door.

4. Children or youth with special needs will be assisted as pre-arranged with the parent or guardian.

General Policies of Behavior Applicable to All Ages and Programs

General Guidelines

1. Appropriate behavioral guidelines are to be communicated regularly with all children and youth.

    a. Children and youth are to refrain from pushing, hitting, kicking or injuring anyone in the classroom or ministry.
    b. Children and youth are expected to be considerate of others when talking and use an appropriate voice level.
    c. Children are expected to follow the instructions of the volunteers or staff.

2. Volunteers and staff are encouraged to engage in physical contact only with care and in a manner so as to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Displays of affection between participants must also be monitored so as to similarly avoid the appearance of impropriety.

3. Corporal punishment and/or threats of such punishment are not permitted.

4. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted.

5. Expectations of the behavior of children or youth must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must be in accordance with this policy and reflect the child or youth's age and level of comprehension.

6. Children and youth are to be reminded as needed of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations provided in written form.

7. If and when a participant's misbehavior continues, volunteers should request assistance from their ministry leader. A parent or guardian is to be notified of persistent inappropriate behavior.

8. Any suspected use or possession of alcohol or drugs during an event or ministry must be reported to the ministry leader.

9. It is never appropriate for a volunteer or ministry staff member to either pursue or carry on a romantic relationship with a participant.

One-to-One Guidelines

When a child or youth meets with a volunteer or staff member, the meeting should take place in a public area, which includes rooms in which the door has a window that provides an unobstructed view, and only when other volunteers or staff members are present (though not participating in the meeting).

Overnight Outing Guidelines

1. A completed and signed permission and release form shall be required from each participant for each overnight outing. The form may be obtained from the Church Office or the Church website for use.

2. When activities are held away from the Church campus, the off-site leaders shall maintain authority over the participants and both the leaders and the participants shall be responsible for following the rules and guidelines.

3. Separate and designated sleeping areas shall be assigned for boys and girls and shall be off limits to members of the opposite sex.

4. Boy/girl contact shall not be allowed after the designated lights out time/bedtime.

Transportation Policy

This policy applies to adults while serving in ministry to children or youth and who may transport non-family related children or youth in church-sponsored ministries.

1. The following procedures must be in place when transporting children or youth:

    a. When transporting only one child or youth in a vehicle, two non-related adults are required. When transporting two or more children or youth in a vehicle, only one adult is required.
    b. Children 12 and under are to be seated only in the back seats of the vehicle.

2. Adults must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance before transporting children or youth.

3. Drivers are to adhere to legal requirements concerning seat belt use, air bag safety and car seat use.

   a. Passengers are to wear seat belts whenever the vehicle is in use. Therefore, drivers may not transport more passengers than available seatbelts.
   b. Children under the age of 12 may not sit in a vehicle's front seat.
   c. As required by law, car seats must be used for younger children.

Note: The foregoing policy does not apply to the transportation of children or youth to or from church-sponsored ministries or events by family members, non-family members or in carpooling arrangements.

Procedure for Reporting Abuse or Allegations of Abuse

Pursuant to New Jersey law [*see N.J.S.A.* 9:6-8.10] "Any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the [State of New Jersey's] Division of Child Protection and Permanency by telephone or otherwise." Within this legal framework, the policy of Faith Community with respect to the reporting of abuse or suspicion of abuse is as follows:

1. An individual who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse—either within the context of a ministry or otherwise—is required to report their concern to the local office of the **State's Division of Child Protection and Permanency ("CPP") at 201-291-0579.** The reporting individual shall additionally report their concerns to the ministry leader and/or the Pastor.

2. In the event that an individual suspects an instance or pattern of child abuse but is uncertain as to whether he or she has "reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse," that individual is strongly urged to consult with either the ministry leader or the Pastor as soon as possible to assist with the assessment and the appropriate response, if any.

3. In the case of a report to the CPP regarding an abuse concern, the person having made the report shall notify the Pastor or another member of the Safe Church Team as soon as possible.

4. It is the responsibility of the CPP and law enforcement agencies that CPP may call upon in their discretion to address the concern. Neither the individual that reports the concern nor the Safe Church Team should communicate with the potential offender until either CPP officials or law enforcement officers have had contact with the individual regarding the concerns or advised otherwise.

5. State law protects persons from liability when they report actual or suspected abuse in good faith and not maliciously or with an intention to harass.

Procedure for Responding to Allegations of Abuse

1. If the Safe Church Team learns that allegations of child abuse against a volunteer or staff member merit investigation or that there is a possibility of formal charges against a volunteer or staff member, then:

   a. The SCT shall seek written documentation concerning the nature of the allegations;
   b. The SCT shall give the alleged offender an opportunity to address the allegations; and/or
   c. The SCT may recommend to the Consistory that the alleged offender be removed/suspended from any child or youth volunteer or staff position (with or without pay when applicable and in the Council's discretion) and without prejudice pending the outcome of the investigation and/or proceedings.

2. If the SCT learns that formal charges of child abuse have been filed by the State against a volunteer or staff member, the alleged offender shall be removed/suspended from any volunteer or staff position (without pay when applicable) and without prejudice pending the outcome of the investigation and/or proceedings.

3. If a volunteer or staff member admits sexual, physical or emotional abuse against a child or youth, the admission should be reported to the CPP as required by law and also reported to the SCT. The volunteer or staff member shall be removed/suspended from his/her position.

4. If a volunteer or staff member confesses or is found or pleads guilty to charges of child abuse, he/she shall be removed from church office or position.

5. If the SCT learns that criminal proceedings have concluded, the matter should be revisited as follows:

   a. If criminal charges are dropped, or the result is either no conviction or acquittal, the SCT should decide whether to rescind its earlier action and/or take additional action.
   b. If prosecution results in conviction, the offender's employment or volunteer status is to be terminated.

6. The church will adhere to the applicable articles of Church Order in the admonition and discipline of members and office bearers.

7. Pastoral care is to be provided for the individuals and families that are party to the allegations.

Safe Church Team Mandate

The Safe Church Team will assist the church in providing oversight of the administration of safe church policies for children and adults in the ministries of Faith Community Christian Reformed Church. The emphasis will be on: (1) protecting children/youth from abuse; (2) providing guidelines for all adults in the supervision of children/youth; (3) providing a response system for dealing with alleged incidents of child abuse; and (4) promoting a safe environment for everyone involved in the ministries offered by Faith Community.

The Safe Church Team will consist of the Pastor, a member-volunteer, and the Church Administrator.

The SCT will be accountable to the Church Council for the following:

1. Recommend policies and procedures for reducing the risk of child abuse for everyone involved in the ministries of Faith Community Christian Reformed Church.

2. Assist the ministry leaders and coordinators in providing information and training to the staff and volunteers on a semi-annual basis.

3. Provide oversight in the event of a reported concern of child abuse involving a volunteer or paid staff member of Faith Community's ministries.

4. Communicate with Classis, media and civil authorities as appropriate.

5. If and when warranted in the SCT's judgment, confer with legal counsel.

6. Notify the church's insurance agent/insurer of any formal charges and/or claims against Faith Community and/or any of its programs and/or its staff or volunteers.

7. Ensure that pastoral care is provided for the individuals and families who are party to the allegations.

8. Maintain records on history of abuse and claims or allegations of abuse reported at Faith Community and inform the Consistory as necessary. Perform other duties as requested by the church council.

FAITH COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
Safe Church Profile

All adults (age eighteen or older) seeking a volunteer or paid position with children or youth must complete this Safe Church Profile. In addition, a criminal background check shall be required to serve in these ministries. This profile as well as the result of the criminal background check shall be kept confidential with access limited to only those individuals who make decisions about placing applicants in ministry positions. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we seek to promote a safe environment for everyone involved in the Children and Youth programs and ministries offered by Faith Community Christian Reformed Church.

Name_____
Last First M.I.

Address_____

City_____State_____Zip_____

Home Phone_____ Work Phone_____

How long have you attended Faith Community?_____
Are you a member at Faith Community? Yes_____No_____

What other churches, if any, have you attended regularly during the past five years?

Briefly describe your last five years of church and/or non-church work involving youth, if any.

Have you ever been convicted of, or plead guilty or no contest to charges of child abuse or neglect, sexual misconduct, or other crimes against children? Yes_____No_____

Have you ever been dismissed or terminated from a volunteer or paid position as a result of charges of child abuse or neglect? Yes_____No_____

Is there any circumstance or pattern in your life, which would make it inappropriate for you to serve with minors or would compromise the integrity of Faith Community Christian Reformed Church? Yes_____No_____
(You may contact your pastor or elder if you need assistance with this question.)

The information contained in this profile is correct to the best of my knowledge I additionally give my permission to obtain a criminal background check history from the appropriate authorities. I also hereby release Faith Community, its employees, church officers, volunteers, and agents from any and all liability of whatever kind or nature arising out of or related to the gathering of information in connection with this Profile. I understand that this is a legally binding agreement.

Signature_____Date_____

CONSENT TO CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

NAME:_____ DATE:_____
PLEASE PRINT

In connection with my application to volunteer at **FAITH COMMUNITY CHURCH (**hereafter referred to as **FAITH COMMUNITY)**, I hereby understand and acknowledge that **FAITH COMMUNITY** utilizes the services of an investigative reporting agency, **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.** to obtain a criminal background report and I hereby authorize **FAITH COMMUNITY** to do so in connection with my volunteer/staff application. I understand that the report will contain information about my background, including but not limited to criminal history, as well as information contained in governmental and address databases. This authorization shall remain valid during the course of my volunteer service. I certify that the information provided herein is accurate and complete and understand that **FAITH COMMUNITY** will rely on same in considering my application. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of the report, if I request it. I also understand that I will be advised if adverse action is being considered concerning my application as a result of information contained in the report and that I will be provided a copy of the report in that case in order to have an opportunity to dispute the accuracy of the report by contacting the reporting agency, **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.,** at the address and telephone number listed below. I understand that I may have additional rights under State law. I hereby release **FAITH COMMUNITY** and **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.,** their officers, agents, employees, and servants from any liability arising from **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.'S** report or investigations relating thereto. I understand that any offers to volunteer at **FAITH COMMUNITY** will be contingent upon the results of a number of factors including **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.'S** background investigation.

I hereby authorize all persons, organizations, law enforcement agencies, state agencies and courts for the purpose of criminal record research to release such information without restriction or qualification to **PROTECT MY MINISTRY, INC.** and any of its officers, agents, employees and servants.

SIGNATURE:_____

OTHER NAME(S) USED:_____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

SOCIAL SECURITY NO.:_____ DATE BIRTH: _____

PRESENT ADDRESS & DATES LIVED THERE: _____

_____

FORMER ADDRESSES & DATES LIVED THERE (PAST 15 YEARS):

_____

_____

_____

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