

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Covenant Christian Reformed Church
Sioux Center, Iowa

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Table of Contents

Introduction and Goals.....	Page 1
General Policy Guidelines.....	Pages 2-4
Pastoral Care-givers	Page 4
Policies for Nursery, Preschool, Elementary and Junior/Senior High Youth.....	Pages 5-6
Transportation & Overnight Activities, Supervision, Training	Page 7
Appendix 1 -Abuse Response and Reporting.....	Pages 8-9
Safe Church Coordinator/Team.....	Page 9
Appendix 2 -Statement of Individual Responsibility	Page 10

Safe Church Policy
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“Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Phil. 4:8 NIV

Through the greatest commandment, Jesus instructs his followers to love God with all your heart, your soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Covenant Christian Reformed Church strives to be obedient to this command by valuing its family of believers as God’s beloved. Covenant recognizes that, because of an imperfect, sinful world, sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect do occur in church families. The Christian Reformed Church Synod’s “Committee on Sexual Abuse Within the Church” has verified this. It is Covenant’s responsibility to address the issue of abuse so as to ensure that all members can develop spiritually in an environment that is caring, supportive and loving. Because of these findings and our commitment to care for our members, Covenant Christian Reformed Church is instituting a policy on abuse prevention and protection to ensure that Covenant Christian Reformed Church is a safe church.

Policy Goals

The goals of this policy are to:

1. Make the church and its programs a safe place for everyone.
2. Protect church workers from allegations of abuse.
3. Reduce the church’s legal risk by meeting the test of reasonable care.

General Policy Guidelines

The following general guidelines are intended to promote safety, well-being, security, discretion, and appropriateness of interactions between church members. It is the responsibility of each committee, program, etc. to work out the details of how such guidelines will be implemented and monitored for specific contexts and activities.

1. **Commitment of leaders and volunteers:** Leaders and volunteers are expected to commit to the “Statement of Individual Responsibility” attached to this policy (see Appendix 2).

2. **Visibility/transparency:** Interactions between church leaders and participants should be conducted in view of others (i.e. open doors to offices or classrooms, in offices or classrooms with glass windows on doors, with doors ajar in restrooms when changing diapers or assisting children, etc.). All classrooms and nurseries should have unobstructed views into them.

3. **Opposite sex interactions:** Interactions between two non-family church members of the opposite sex should be conducted in a public or visible setting, or accompanied by a third person.

4. **Family members:** When members of the same family serve together, they should be accompanied by another church member (16 or older) when interacting with children or youth.

5. **Documentation/notification:** In interactions that pose a risk (i.e. a home visit alone, a private conversation behind closed doors, driving someone, etc.), the leader or church member should notify a supervisor beforehand and document the interaction afterwards.

6. **Training:** Covenant CRC will provide awareness training on the indicators of abuse that together give reasonable cause to believe that abuse may be occurring, so that staff and volunteers will be alert to these indicators.

7. **Reporting:** Any suspicions of abuse will be communicated in confidence to the Safe Church Coordinator.

Definitions of Abuse

1. *Physical abuse:* non-accidental contact that results in pain or injury to a minor, regardless if it leaves a bruise or mark, by a person with apparent or real authority.

2. *Sexual abuse:* Sexual exploitation of a minor, regardless of consent, by a person with apparent or real authority.

3. *Emotional abuse:* attempts by a person with apparent or real authority to control a minor’s thoughts or actions, by words or silence, to gain compliance or dependency.

Displays of Affection

1. Casual touching of hands and arms of younger children and youth is appropriate as long as it is not offensive to the child.
2. Lap sitting may be utilized with children preschool age and younger. School aged children should be encouraged to sit next to a teacher.
3. Full body hugs should be discouraged. A brief arm around the shoulder should be done only when appropriate and in the presence of another.

Definitions of Church Positions

1. Staff: an adult who is compensated to serve in ministry at Covenant.
2. Volunteer: an adult who is not compensated to serve in ministry.
3. Helper: a minor who is not compensated to serve in ministry. Helpers always serve under the supervision of an adult.

Screening

Screening will be implemented for all paid staff and volunteers; and will be used for the following reasons:

- It communicates that Covenant is serious about protecting our children and young people from anyone who may pose a threat to them.
- It provides important information about a person's interests and skills
- It helps to ensure the integrity of the members of Covenant working with our children and young people.

Screening will include:

- completion of a personal information profile
- interview (if personal information profile indicates further information needed)
- reference checks (if further information would be helpful)
- criminal record checks

Ensuring Safe Environments

Covenant will work towards ensuring safe environments for our children and young people by doing the following:

- All staff and volunteers will be screened, educated on the components of our Safe Church Policy, and will have signed the Statement of Individual Responsibility.
- All staff and volunteers will be held accountable for following the guidelines outlined in this Safe Church Policy.
- All staff and volunteers will not tolerate any kind of bullying.
- Staff and/or volunteers will be in rooms before children and young people arrive to make sure the environment is safe.
- All staff, volunteers, and helpers will follow the bathroom procedures outlined in the Safe Church Policy
- All doors have windows allowing clear vision into rooms.

Pastoral Care Givers (Pastors, Elders, Deacons)

1. Pastoral care givers will report all pastoral visits to their respective reporting groups (deacons to deacons, elders to elders) by submitting a list of all visits whenever they meet.
2. The use of a public place (such as a restaurant) or meeting with a third person is preferable to meeting alone with a parishioner of the opposite gender.
3. Counseling should be arranged to take place in a formal setting such as a church office whenever possible.
4. It is wise that a pastoral worker of the same gender be assigned to someone who needs frequent pastoral visits.
5. A display of affection is often an expression of encouragement and support. However, a display of affection can be misinterpreted or misused. For that reason, displays of affection will normally be limited to an arm around the shoulder, an open-handed pat on the back, clasping one another's hand, or a light touch to the forearm. A person's right to refuse affection will be respected.
6. No inappropriate (leading to embarrassment if seen or know by a third party) gifts, phone calls, electronic communication, or letters will be exchanged between a pastoral care giver and a person who is receiving pastoral care.

Policies for Nursery, Preschool, Elementary and Junior/Senior High School Ages

Nursery Policy

The nursery is available for children ages 0 -3 years old and for children with special needs. Parents using the nursery are asked not to bring children with obvious or questionable illnesses in order to limit exposure. For the safety of children in the nursery, the following guidelines shall be followed:

1. There shall be at least two volunteers from different families present in the nursery.
2. Any exchange of volunteers must not violate policy #1.
3. All parents utilizing the nursery must sign each child in and out. Children should wear nametags at all times.
4. All nursery volunteers must sign in upon beginning and completing their volunteer session.
5. All nursery volunteers must be trained and able to utilize the paging system and make use of the paging system for bathroom and diaper changing needs.
6. The "Mom of the Month" will be present before the service to make sure the pagers are distributed properly.

Children's Worship/Story Hour Children

1. Volunteers should be in their assigned classrooms before the arrival of the students in order to provide adequate supervision.
2. One volunteer and at least one helper not from the same family will be present.
3. Volunteers will remain outside the bathroom unless the child requests assistance. If possible, assistance should come from an adult of the same gender.
4. Volunteers will utilize a weekly attendance sheet. If a child leaves during the worship time, volunteers will make note of this on the attendance sheet.
5. Parents are encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to class sessions.

Elementary School Children

1. Volunteers should be in their assigned classrooms before the arrival of the students in order to provide adequate supervision.
2. Bullying and harmful behavior between students is not permitted.
3. One-on-one contact between a student and volunteer will take place in an open area on in the presence of a second adult.
4. Children over the age of 5 will not be assisted in the bathroom unless he/she is physically or mentally disabled. If assistance is required, then a parent or additional volunteer will be present.
5. Volunteers will utilize a weekly attendance sheet. If a child leaves during Sunday School, volunteers will make note of this on the attendance sheet.

Junior/Senior High Youth

1. Bullying or harmful behavior between students will not be permitted.
2. Transportation for all individuals shall require awareness of the parents or guardians.
3. One-on-one contact between a student and volunteer will take place in an open area.
4. Regardless of relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth leader volunteer and a youth group member to date.
5. No frequent and lengthy personal correspondence, writing, telephone, e-mail, or gift giving will occur between volunteer leaders and members.
6. Staff will not engage in counseling, but should immediately contact the safe person for appropriate action or direction.
7. Every year volunteer youth leaders will provide a lesson to the youth on appropriate behavior regarding emotional, verbal, and physical abuse.

Mentor Program Guidelines

1. One-on-one contact will take place either in a public area or with one other adult on the premises.
2. Notes of encouragement, thank you, or small gifts are considered appropriate.
3. Regardless of relative ages, it is never appropriate for a mentor and a mentored person to date.

Transportation and Overnight Activities Guidelines

When it is necessary for Covenant youth to be transported by teachers, staff, and/or adult sponsors, then:

1. All drivers will meet state law requirements for a valid operator's license and insurance.
2. The number of persons per vehicle should include at least two adults and two students.
3. The appropriate Permission Waiver Form, specific to the event, will be signed by a parent or guardian on all overnight stays. All such release forms will accompany the volunteers.
4. The parents or guardians will be given the travel agenda, emergency guidelines, and telephone numbers prior to departure.
5. Separate sleeping areas for each gender, with appropriate adult supervision, will be established.
6. If there is an accident or an injury, a written report will be completed.

Covenant Christian Reformed Church accepts no responsibility for non-sponsored church events.

Supervision

Paid staff and volunteers who are in charge of children and young people activities will be responsible for making sure that these policies are carried out with integrity in a loving, Christian way. These people include: Safe Church coordinator, Nursery chairperson, Children's Worship coordinator, Sunday School superintendent, Catechism/mentor leaders, Young People's leaders, GEMS and Cadet leaders.

Awareness Training/Education

The Safe Church Coordinator will meet with all people who supervise and/or work with children so they are clear about their roles and responsibilities as they interact with Covenant's youth. Covenant CRC will also provide on-going awareness training on the indicators of abuse that together give reasonable cause to believe that abuse may be occurring, so that staff and volunteers will be alert to these indicators and the protocols for reporting alleged abuse. All staff, volunteers, and helpers will sign the Statement of Individual Responsibility before working with Covenant's children and young people.

APPENDIX #1
Abuse Response and Reporting

1. Mandated reporters (anyone who has received child-abuse training) shall immediately report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse to the proper civil authorities. Afterwards, they should notify the Safe Church Coordinator.
2. Permissive reporters (those who are not defined as mandated reporters) may immediately report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse to the proper civil authorities. Afterwards, they should notify the Safe Church Coordinator.
3. Permissive reporters who are uncertain about reporting a suspicion of child abuse may consult with the Safe Church Coordinator. The Safe Church Coordinator may report if the permissive reporter refuses to do so.
4. Church officials should not contact the alleged offender until the proper civil authorities have begun their investigation.
5. The “proper civil authorities” are either Sioux County Protective Services (712-255-2699) or the State of Iowa Child Abuse and Neglect Office (800-362-2178).

Response to the Alleged Offender

1. If the alleged offender is in a position of trust or authority, or serves in ministry to youth, the person will be removed from that role or function until the investigation is complete.
2. Upon completion of the investigation, if the person is arrested or charged with a criminal or civil infraction, the person should be suspended (if paid staff) or should be denied re-entry to that role or function until the criminal or civil matter is concluded.
3. If the person confesses or is found guilty of a criminal or civil infraction, the person will be deposed (if previously suspended) or will be barred from future service in ministry to youth.
4. If the person is acquitted of a criminal or civil infraction, the person may be restored to role or function. It is advisable that the council seek legal counsel regarding reinstatement.

Response to a Child

1. If a child confides in you, listen carefully, in a supportive, non-judgmental manner. Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child’s story.
2. Avoid asking questions or trying to assess the truthfulness of the disclosure. Reassure the child that he/she did the right thing by telling you.

3. Tell the child you need to find help so the incident can be prevented from happening again.
4. Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations. Instead, share with the child that other people need to know what happened and they will talk to the child later.
5. Do not ask the child to show you any bruises; only observe accessible bruises or markings.
6. Report a reasonable suspicion of child abuse to the proper civil authorities immediately; then contact the Safe Church Coordinator.

Safe Church Coordinator/Team

Role Description: The Safe Church Coordinator is a role designed for either an individual or team that would involve the following responsibilities:

1. Educating the members of Covenant CRC regarding the issues surrounding a safe church policy and its required effects on the church's ministries, its leaders and participants.
2. Educating newcomers as to the nature of the policy and its requirements.
3. Providing for and collecting " Individual Responsibility Statements" from all leaders and volunteers participating in ministry, and keeping the files up to date.

APPENDIX #2
Statement of Individual Responsibility

Believing that God is calling me to serve the Covenant congregation, I will:

- Love, pray for, and encourage, the members of Covenant Christian Reformed Church;
- Model Christ-like behavior at all times, demonstrating His love to all who I come in contact with, both by words and actions and conducting myself in a manner that demonstrates respect and builds trust;
- Encourage, and if appropriate, correct in a manner that shows Christian love;
- Attempt to understand and respect all members' cultural backgrounds;
- Do everything in my power to make Covenant Christian Reformed Church a safe place, free of all abuse, verbal, physical, spiritual and sexual;
- Report any suspicious of abuse that I might observe to Rebecca De Smith, the Safe Church Coordinator.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____