

## **Safe Church Policy**

### **Mill Creek Community Church**

#### **BASIS**

As a community of faith, Mill Creek Community Church is committed to creating and maintaining programs within an environment in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn, and work together. To that end leadership is trained, supported, and equipped for their roles with children, youth, and one another.

Abuse continues to be a problem in our society in general; and, the statistics show that even Christ's church is not immune. Mill Creek Community Church strives to be the heart and hands of Jesus Christ to all those who are involved in the ministry here. The Safe Church Policy is designed to establish proper procedures and education to prevent, respond, and deal with all forms of abuse and misconduct.

#### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In our congregation, we recognize God's tender love and concern for children (Luke 18:16) and our duty to reflect these by doing all that is reasonably possible to protect the children who participate in church programs from verbal, physical, or sexual abuse while they are under our care. Jesus commissioned his disciples to nurture his lambs and protect his sheep (John 21:15-17). He charges his followers to never allow anything that might hinder children from knowing his love and truth (Matthew 19:14). Our commitment is to avoid intentional and unintentional behavior that might cause our children/youth to stumble (Matt 18:6). Christ's church is called to take this responsibility seriously.

Along with the Christian Reformed Church as a denomination, we seek to combat abuse and misconduct regardless of age as such behavior tarnishes the image of God in us, his created human beings. Abuse and misconduct also destroys human relationships. We are called and committed to bring healing and justice to our church communities and elsewhere. The procedures and guidelines included in this Safe Church Policy are implemented for the purpose of creating an environment of trust and justice for wrongdoing when needed. In our denomination, the church is responsible for being a safe community that confronts sin, including the sin of abuse addressed here. The church seeks to bring healing to its victims and help to its perpetrators. The church consciously works for the prevention of all abuse.

Synod (the Denominational Governing Body) also called on the church “to encourage perpetrators to seek appropriate help.” Church councils are “to help their congregations to publicly acknowledge that the sin of abuse exists among us; to support efforts to address such abuse promptly so that the abused and abusers may experience the healing power of God’s grace; and to take positive steps to make their congregations safe for all persons.” (Acts of Synod 1992, p. 673). In all of these, and other ways, the church and each individual congregation can become a “colony” of the kingdom where “they will neither harm nor destroy on all [God’s] holy mountain” (Isa 11:9), where every tear is wiped away (Isa 25:8), and where there is peace (Gal 3:15)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The primary intent of the MCCC policy is to help prevent child abuse in the church facility and by church staff and volunteers. We acknowledge that the implementation of a child abuse prevention policy will not eradicate abuse in the membership of a church in part because most abuse occurs in homes rather than in the church facility itself. However, the increased general awareness of the risks and signs of abuse may be expected to help prevent it. If even a small part of abuse is prevented, it will be a significant achievement for the protection of children and youth.

A comprehensive prevention program can protect our volunteers and church staff from being suspected or falsely accused of abuse. It can serve to protect our church from the scandal and trauma that an incident of abuse could bring upon our congregation. There are also financial reasons for establishing a prevention policy. Insurance carriers that hold liability policies for churches favor the development of abuse prevention policies and procedures to reduce liability. Attorneys who work for insurance carriers and those who represent the victims of abuse in court also have recommended that churches adopt abuse prevention policies. As Proverbs 22:3 warns, “A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

The underlying concern and responsibility in all our efforts is to guard the honor and reputation of our Lord Jesus Christ. If a child in our church is harmed through another person’s sin, some people will inevitably think less of the church and of our Lord. As Paul warned the Christians in Rome, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom 2:24). Our prevention policy is established as one way to prevent such dishonor from happening in our church and community.

## GENERAL PREVENTION POLICIES

The following definitions are given for the purposes of both the general and specific policies stated below.

- *Volunteers* are individuals who serve in a child or youth program and/or who have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.
- A *Volunteer Assistant* is a person at least 12 years of age and, whenever practical, at least four years older than the children or youth in the program.
- *Staff* are those individuals paid by the church to serve in a child or youth program, have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision, and others employed by the church who routinely occupy the same facilities with child or youth programs.
- *Children, youth, or minors* are individuals under eighteen years of age.
- *Screening* – As part of its abuse prevention policies, the church has adopted screening procedures for staff and volunteers. They include filling out an application form, submitting personal references, engaging in a personal interview, having a criminal background check, and being fingerprinted if one is indicated. These and the positions and conditions to which they apply are described in the *Screening Procedure* section below.
- *Compliance* – All volunteers must agree to comply with the church's abuse prevention policies. A volunteer or staff person who refuses to follow prevention policies or who violates these policies may be required to relinquish his or her responsibility in a child or youth program. It is very important that, once policies are adopted, they be consistently observed. If they are not, potential liability may be increased. If a particular policy is viewed as unrealistic or for some other reason is not being consistently observed, this should be reported to the Safe Church Team for appropriate action.
- *Training* – Supervisors and/or leaders of any program serving minors, and where possible, all other volunteers and staff, will attend training programs on the signs and symptoms of child abuse, awareness of abuse, reporting suspected child abuse, and the dynamics of abuse. A signed certificate of attendance at these training sessions shall be on file for each person involved. This file will be reviewed annually to ensure that it is up to date. (See form: *Certificate of Training* prescribed in Section D below).
- *Internal Reporting* - Volunteers and staff who become aware of possible child abuse in any church program, or abuse that is committed by any church volunteer/staff person, must immediately report the matter to their immediate supervisor/leader unless that person is the suspected abuser. In that case only, they will report to another supervisor or church leader. Any abuse indicated through observation or stated by the victim must be reported to Child Protective Services immediately. Snohomish County ENHARM Hotline: 866-363-4271

- *Church Facility* – Modifications of the facilities and ways that the facilities are used that would tend to reduce the risk of church-related child abuse will be considered. (See Section A, below)
- *Discipline* – Volunteers and staff persons who work with youth will agree to abide by the adopted discipline policy stated in Section B.
- *Reducing the Risks of One-to-One Contact* - To reduce the risk of an incident of child abuse or an allegation of child abuse, it is necessary to reduce the times of greatest risk—when a volunteer or staff person spends time alone with a child or youth. To that end, volunteers and staff will agree to abide by the policy stated in Section C.

## SPECIFIC PREVENTION POLICIES

### A. CHURCH FACILITY

Recommendations for modifications to the church facilities and changes to the ways that the facilities are used that would tend to reduce the risk of church-related child abuse will be coordinated by the Safe Church Team. These recommendations will be reviewed by the Church Council for approval, as necessary and forwarded to the appropriate committees. The Church holds insurance coverage with the ***Church Mutual Insurance Company***.

### B. DISCIPLINE

As image bearers of God, we and our children should display the Christian attitude and behavior expected of God's people (Phil 2:3, Col 3:12-14, Gal 5:22-23a). Children/youth leaders should do their best to model these for those they lead. When our children/youth fall short of following even these imperfect models, we are charged with the duty to exercise discipline in such a way that they are encouraged in Christian living.

The following policies are commonsense rules to help in this:

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
2. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted.

3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor infractions, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
4. Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved in each session in classrooms where misbehavior is a serious ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children's/youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must be appropriate for their age and level of comprehension, taking abilities and disabilities into account as well.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
8. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
9. Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:
  - >distract the child/youth with another activity
  - >help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behavior
  - >separate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff person is available to assist
- 10.** For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes. Consider taking the child by the hand and use the words, "We are going to let you watch. When you are ready to rejoin the group, you may do so." When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers/leaders should get help before losing their tempers.

### C. ONE-TO-ONE CONTACT

1. Two-person rule: During a session of any child or youth program, whenever possible, at least two volunteer or staff persons shall be present with minors. At least one leader shall be an adult and the other(s) may be a volunteer assistant (see lead paragraph in *General Prevention Policies*).
2. A parent shall be notified before a planned one-to-one contact with a minor and his/her written permission granted for the meeting.
3. Whenever possible, at least two volunteer/staff persons shall transport children or youth in a church vehicle and/or in a volunteer/staff vehicle.
4. A parent shall be required to sign a waiver allowing his/her child to be transported alone when this is necessary on a regular basis.
5. In the church facility, a second volunteer/staff person shall observe one-to-one contacts between a volunteer/staff person and a minor. Outside of the church facility, one-to-one contacts shall occur in a public place or be observed by another volunteer/staff person.

### D. CODE OF ETHICS AND CERTIFICATION OF TRAINING

Each child/youth worker must agree to comply with the child/youth abuse prevention policies of the church. This shall be evidenced by his/her signing the *Code of Ethics* form. To ensure familiarity with the prevention policies and procedures, each worker shall also sign the *Certification of Training* form. These forms shall be kept on file by the Safe Church Team and reviewed at least annually to help ensure all current workers understand and agree with the policies and procedures. A complete data base including all leaders and volunteers of youth and children will be kept on the computer accessed by the Office Administrator.

### E. NURSERY

1. Minors may serve in the nursery program only in the presence of a supervising adult.
2. For attendants in both the infant and toddler nurseries, the ratio of at least one adult attendant to four children (1month-11 months) is required. At least two attendants must serve in a nursery whenever it is scheduled. If a “difficult” child presents a problem, its parent should be called in to help. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child’s parent(s). For children who do not need assistance in the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who need assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Parents of children who require a diaper change while in the nursery will be “paged”. Diapers will not be changed by nursery attendants unless it is deemed an emergency.
3. Only one adult member of a family should serve in a nursery at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) should not serve in a nursery at the same time.
4. An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for a specific service may not spend time in the nursery room(s) during or after the service.
5. For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes. Consider taking the child by the hand and use the words, “We are going to let you watch. When you are ready to join the group, you may do so.” When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers/leaders should get help.
6. The Discipline Policy applies to the nursery programs.

## F. CHILDREN'S WORSHIP/SUNDAY SCHOOL/VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL/MOPS

1. Only one adult member of a family should serve in a classroom at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) should not serve in the same classroom unless a volunteer assistant is also present.
2. Whenever children's programs are in session, two volunteers, including at least one adult, should be present. (The normal child/volunteer maximum ratio is dependent upon age group. (Infant/Preschool ratio 1:4; School age 1:10 ratio)
3. Only adults may ordinarily assist children with bathroom needs. If the adult leader is conducting the session, a minor volunteer assistant may help when necessary. Bathroom assistance will be conducted as in the nursery policy whenever feasible. Children will be encouraged to use the bathroom facilities before and after class.
4. Children should not leave the classroom except for illness, bathroom use, or another compelling reason.
5. Classroom doors should be left open to allow for an unobstructed view of the room from the outside. A door with a window installed is ideal.
6. Procedures must include signing in and signing out to ensure children are dismissed to permitted individuals.
7. For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes. Consider taking the child by the hand and use the words, "We are going to let you watch. When you are ready to join the group, you may do so." When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers/leaders should get help.
8. The General Discipline Policy applies to each children's program.



## G. YOUTH GROUPS –

1. Each year, and more frequently as appropriate for new members, youth group leaders should sponsor a class about abuse for members of the youth groups. This class should cover topics appropriate to the age level, such as date violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, awareness of the signs of abuse, and prevention of abuse.
2. Youth group leaders may meet privately with a youth group member once or twice and thereafter only with the written permission of a parent. Any such meeting should occur in a place open to public view.
3. Regardless of relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other. Similarly, a youth group leader should not date a friend of a member of the youth group, or an acquaintance of similar age of a member.
4. Youth group leaders may be single or they may be married couples, but, if couples, another adult must be present at the youth group function.
5. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders should provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders should not hold a youth group function without appropriate or sufficient supervision, for example, with only one youth group leader. These guidelines apply also to activities away from the church site.
6. While an appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. For that reason, displays of affection between youth leader and youth group member ought to be limited to such actions as a brief side hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch on the forearm. A youth group leader's or member's right to refuse such a display of affection must be respected.
7. No gifts, phone calls, or letters with the intent to develop a private personal relationship should be directed to a youth group member or his/her friend or an acquaintance of similar age by a youth group leader.
8. Discipline in the youth groups will be conducted in a manner appropriate to the age of the members. Behavior expectations should be clearly communicated at the beginning of each season, and reminders of the need for Christian attitudes, words, and actions given as necessary.

## GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY RE: NETWORKING/COMMUNICATION

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Be mindful that our calling is to meet students where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for students safely.

- 1 Ministry youth workers may not transmit any content that is illicit unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities.
- 2 Except in an emergency, youth workers may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group e-mail, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, e-mail address, or photograph.
- 3 Use prudent judgment in the time contacting students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use—normally do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time one would not normally call their home phone line, ie. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.
- 4 Implement privacy settings and personal boundaries
  - a. Applying privacy settings that are consistent with all students across all platforms.
  - b. Reviewing accessible content and photos frequently.
  - c. If a student texts you after hours and it's not an emergency—wait until morning to reply.
- 5 Youth workers who become aware of activities that require reporting such as possible child abuse through electronic media must immediately notify their supervisor. The ministry will consult with the appropriate persons and report abuse as required by law.
- 6 When utilizing any social networking site to communicate with students associated with MCCC youth group, invite other MCCC youth workers to view and respond to the content. The youth ministry social networking accounts will be shared among youth workers in order to connect with students and to help self-regulate communications with students.
- 7 When possible communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas—not in private messages—this includes images.
- 8 Parents or a Supervisor must be notified of the contact individual and frequency of ongoing private pastoral communications such as Emails, FB Messages, Texting, etc.
- 9 Youth workers may only tag students on posts, images, and/or videos with signed parental consent (Photo Release Form).
- 10 Mandatory reporting laws will be followed.
- 11 Any inappropriate material posted in online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.
- 12 Video Chatting with students is strongly discouraged. In cases where Video Chatting is used, the awareness of appropriate personal clothing and surrounding areas must be considered carefully.
- 13 SnapChat and other forms of communication that cannot be recalled (in case it needs to be reviewed or reported on) is not to be a means of communicating with students from the youth ministry.

- 14 Emails and texts should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of a received email or text raises concerns or questions, share it with a member of the staff, Pastoral team, or supervisor.
- 15 Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies.
- 16 Youth workers driving on ministry business are to avoid cell phone use—even hands-free—when transporting children as this is in violation of the law. Youth workers are never to send or read messages while driving.

#### TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES

Drivers for youth group events must be 21 years old or older and have a valid current Drivers' License.

Whenever possible, at least two volunteer/staff persons shall transport children or youth in a staff or volunteer vehicle.

A parent shall give written consent allowing his/her child to be transported. In an emergency, verbal consent may be necessary to accommodate a specific situation. If the youth/child is the only passenger in the vehicle it is recommended that the leader call the parent/guardian at the time of departure from the event place to allow an estimated time of arrival.

## SCREENING AND QUALIFICATIONS

The screening procedure is an essential part of our attempt to achieve two goals: first, to reduce the incidence of child abuse and, second, to reduce the liability of the volunteers, the staff, and the church. The procedure consists of four steps: application, interview, references, and criminal background check. The applicability of each screening step to various positions is described in the sections below.

### H. APPLICATIONS

1. The application form serves the church by requesting information about the applicant and his or her suitability for the position. Applicants for staff or volunteer positions shall receive further consideration only after an application form has been completed. Volunteers who are already serving in a position and have completed the forms on file prior to the adoption of this policy will not be asked to fill out additional applications.
2. Information of a personal nature that the applicant wishes to remain private shall remain confidential and be safeguarded as indicated below in **M. Personnel Files**
3. All adults and minors sixteen to eighteen years old, seeking a volunteer or paid position with children or youth, shall complete the application. Volunteer Assistants younger than sixteen years of age will not be required to submit an application because they will be under the direct supervision of an adult.
4. The application shall be reviewed for possible selection of the applicant for the position as indicated in the policy stated below in *Selection Process*

### I. INTERVIEW

1. A personal interview shall be required of all applicants for a paid position with the church. Furthermore, an applicant for a volunteer supervisory or leadership position shall be interviewed to assess the applicant's supervisory and/or leadership skills. Teachers or leaders of child/youth programs should also be interviewed. In addition, an interview may be scheduled with any other volunteer applicant at the discretion of the responsible church leader.
2. Whenever possible, the individual who will supervise the applicant in the position should conduct the interview. The interviewer must be familiar with the church's Safe Church Policy. Notes taken during the interview must be attached to the Application Form and turned over to a member of the Safe Church Team. (Verna Alberda, Jim Clarke, Jill Hoogerhyde).

## J. REFERENCES

1. Applicants for certain positions indicated herein are required to provide letters of reference, using only the provided reference form. References would preferably be from previous employers, past colleagues or others with specific knowledge of, and experience with the candidate's qualifications. It is important that the qualification form have follow up contact information, with the understanding that the applicable ministry leader may contact the reference(s).
2. Applicants for any paid staff position shall submit **three** letters of reference (use form). It is recommended that applicants being considered for any leadership position also submit at least **one** referral form. For other volunteer positions, if the applicable ministry leader, or committee, feels they may need additional information about a candidate, references may also be required.
3. Any references obtained shall be held in strict confidence. Although the applicant knows the names of those who have completed the references, the contents of these references shall not be disclosed to the applicant. (See *Reference Form*)

## K. BACKGROUND CHECK INFORMATION

1. The consent of the applicant must be obtained before initiating this background check. MCCC is currently using the services **First Advantage** agency for background checks. Information regarding any criminal conduct or abuse that is received shall be disclosed only to the applicant and to the individual who would supervise the applicant if he or she is hired or approved to volunteer.
2. A criminal history check shall be requested for volunteer and paid staff members who conduct frequent and/or lengthy one-to-one meetings with children as well as directors of children's or youth's programs, pastors, ordained staff, and staff who routinely occupy the same facilities with children or youth programs.
3. A criminal history check shall be done on an applicant only after the first three screening steps are completed. This check, when applicable as indicated below, shall be completed before an applicant is selected for a position.

## L. STEPS APPLICABILITY TO POSITIONS

1. The personnel screening steps that are required for the various staff and volunteer positions in the church, are indicated in the chart included below. If a person serves in more than one position, the screening steps for the position requiring the most steps will apply.
2. Whenever an approved volunteer or staff person moves into an indicated position or the occupied position becomes an indicated position, the criminal history check step may be required. These may also be required at the discretion of the administrative committee. In general, once these steps have been taken for an individual, they will not be repeated.

### SCREENING STEPS FOR POSITIONS IN MILL CREEK COMMUNITY CCHURCH

POSITION	APPLICATION	INTERVIEW	REFERENCES	BACKGROUND CHECK
Senior Pastor	X	X	X	X
Youth Pastor	X	X	X	X
Office Administrator	X	X	X	X
Worship Director	X	X	X	X
Youth Leaders	X	X	X	X
Children's Leaders	X	X	X	X
Nursery Attendants	X	X	X	X
Janitor	X	X	X	X
Elders/Deacons	X	X	X	X
Food Pantry Directors	X	X	X	X
MOPS	X	X	X	X

## M. PERSONNEL FILES

1. All forms, letters, memos, and records of information related to the screening process of an individual shall be kept in a well-organized, locked file cabinet. Only those persons who make decisions about placing applicants in available positions shall have access to this file in consultation with the Safe Church Team.
2. Access to the personnel file shall be kept confidential. The Safe Church Team shall have full access and shall control access by others to the personnel file. Access by others shall be limited to the file of the individual occupying or being considered for placement in the position under consideration. These "others" are the leader of the team or program for which the position making the application is being submitted.
3. Personnel files shall not be altered or destroyed. Personnel files of individuals who have left a position or the church are to remain intact in the locked file cabinet. They may be moved to a separate place for "closed files." (Files of deceased personnel need to be kept as cases may come up for investigation after the death of the accused.)
4. An individual's personnel file may be subpoenaed by an insurance company or an attorney in case of a civil suit or criminal investigation. Caution must be exercised that only verifiable information is placed in a personnel file. If information obtained is unsubstantiated, it should be labeled as such. The source of any supporting documentation of any charge or allegation of wrongdoing must be carefully identified. No anonymous communication shall be placed in any personnel files.

## N. SCREENING COSTS

The criminal history check costs should be borne by the general fund of the church.

## O. SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process for staff and volunteer personnel for the programs and ministries of the church involves consideration of many factors. Child abuse prevention and the policies necessary to implement it are an important and integral part of these. The following are especially important from the viewpoint of child abuse prevention:

- *Position descriptions* – Written position descriptions are to be available for review by the applicant and the Selection Committee.
- *Screening Steps to be used* – The screening steps to be applied to each position shall be clearly understood by both applicant and the Selection Committee.
- *Selection Discretion* – Positions will be filled solely at the discretion of church officials. For reasons, including but not limited to completing a screening step, not providing information, providing information subsequently determined to be inaccurate based upon information obtained from references or a criminal history check may give reason for denial of an appointment. Legal advice shall be obtained as deemed necessary by the administrative committee. The elders shall be asked for advice in the handling of the denial of a position to an applicant deemed unsuitable because of personal struggles or convictions of any nature revealed in the application. Obtaining legal advice shall also be considered in such a case.
- *Church Membership* – To be considered for any volunteer position working with youth, an applicant ordinarily shall have been a member of this church for at least six (6) months. An exception may be permitted when the applicant has met the other requirements for the position in a known church for at least six months before becoming a member of this church and comes highly recommended by the leadership of that church. An applicant who is not a member may be considered for a volunteer position if all other selection requirements are met and special permission is granted by the Council.
- *Confidentiality Requirement* – All information obtained shall be held in confidence according to the policy written above in **M (Personnel Files)** and the requirements of the applicable law.
- *Notification of Selection Results* – The applicant shall be notified as to the acceptance or denial for a position by the Program Leader.



## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**As a body believers working to create safe places for all who participate with MCCC, it is our responsibility to understand and create an awareness of the meaning of abuse, neglect, harassment, bullying, and other forms of wrong-doing. For our purposes, the following definitions are intended to assist this understanding.** For further guidelines and definitions related to the terms below, please refer to: *Preventing Child Abuse: creating a safe place* by Beth Swagman and WA State law RCW.

### **Child Abuse- physical abuse, physical neglect sexual abuse, emotional abuse**

Exploitation or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the child's health, welfare, or safety or the negligent treatment or mistreatment of a child by a person responsible for providing care to the child. (See Swagman's book, page 36-37)

### **Harassment**

MCCC is committed to providing adult/volunteers, employees, and others an environment that is free of harassment. The church prohibits harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, age or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law. MCCC will not tolerate harassment within its ministry or its workplace, whether the harassment is a minister member, employee, church member employee, church member, visitor or a member of the public. (For further information on "Harassment", see (Swagman's book beginning on page 114).

### **Bullying**

"Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. "Three characteristics of bullying are: (1) It is intentional, (2) it is repeated, and (3) It involves an imbalance of power. Bullying is serious as it has major life-long implications for those who bully and for the victims of bullying. For Christians, bullying is a spiritual issue as God's design for healthy self-concepts, loving relationships, and the community of believers is threatened. (see Swagman's book, page 107)

### **Violence**

Language, physical threats or actions intended to do harm or intimidate others. Items such as firearms, knives, chemicals, explosives carried for the purpose of injury or intimidation. None of these or other such items are permitted on the MCCC property.

(See “Signs and Symptoms of Abuse”, p 141, *Preventing Child Abuse, creating a safe place*, 2009.)

## REPORTING

### **General Reporting Background**

While making a report of abuse can be difficult; disclosure of an incident of abuse must be seen as the right thing to do. It is important to remember that, in most cases, staff and volunteers are untrained to conduct an investigation and should not attempt to do so. It is advised to “stay with the facts” that have been observed or told by the victim. (More detailed information regarding “Understanding the Reporting Process” can be found in Beth Swagman’s book, *Preventing Child Abuse: creating a safe place*, Chapter 6, page 61.)

### **Reporting Suspected Child or Youth Abuse**

MCCC as a body; but, leaders of youth and children’s programs in particular, must be watchful for signs and symptoms of abuse. Any observed or stated sign of abuse must be reported to Child Protective Services (Snohomish County ENDHARM Hotline 866-363-4271), or the Police Department. Use the form entitled, “Incident Report Form” as a guide for information that will be requested. If unsure of the interpretation/truth of the information being received from a youth or child, it is recommended that the information be referred to the Safe Church Team or immediate supervisor. This information must be kept confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential as far as is possible.

### **Other Allegations of Abuse, Misconduct, Harassment, Bullying, Violence**

All other forms of suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior must be reported to the Safe Church Team at the first opportunity. Use the form entitled, “Incident Report Form. This information should remain confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential as far as is possible.

## RESPONDING

Proper reporting and proper responding to incidents of abuse or other forms of misconduct are essential. MCCC recognizes the sin of abuse and the possibility of allegations which could be proven false. Each situation requires determining how to best care for the allegedly abused child and family and the alleged offender and family.

Washington State Law imposes immediate reporting requirements whenever a church supervisor learns that an employee or volunteer has abused or neglected a child. This obligation is imposed on individual supervisors, not on the Church. Each person who has supervisory authority over staff or volunteers must make sure s/he personally meets the reporting requirements.

All other forms of misconduct (see “Definition of Terms”) must be written up using the “Incident Report Form” and reported to a member of the Safe Church Team within 24-48 hours. The report should be made without attempting to investigate or substantiate an alleged abuse. Anyone who is unsure whether the behavior is abuse, harassment, bullying, or violence should report or consult a member of the Safe Church Team.

Many different scenarios are presented when cases of abuse or other misconduct occur in the church community. Responding effectively and in a Godly manner require careful assessment for all individuals and acts committed. Guidelines for helping MCCC to respond can be found in Chapter 7 of Beth Swagmans’s book, *Preventing Child Abuse*.

The MCCC Safe Church Team will work in conjunction with the PNW Classical Safe Church Team to respond to matters of Abuse or Misconduct. The Classical Safe Church Team receives in depth training on a yearly basis and has knowledge and experience with cases involving Leadership Misconduct, Restorative Justice, and other related areas.

## SAFE CHURCH TEAM

The MCCC Elders shall appoint a Safe Church Team to serve an unlimited term. This team will be interviewed and revised as needed on a yearly basis. This will occur in conjunction with the yearly review of the Policy following the beginning terms of newly elected elders and deacons.

The responsibilities of the Safe Church Team are:

Be responsible for overseeing the Safe Church Policy by knowing it in detail, updating and revising as needed.

The Safe Church Team will emphasize, promote, and equip Ministry Leaders, Staff, and Volunteers to practice God-honoring leadership in all ministry areas.

Oversee the safe-keeping of the body of believers and those who are invited to participate with us. Inform and require clear understanding and adherence to the screening and discipline guidelines outlined in the Policy.

Advise and consult with civil authorities as the WA State Law requires.

Communicate with the Classical Team and Denominational Safe Church Office when appropriate.

Notify Legal Counsel and Church Insurance agent when indicated.

Maintain records on history of child abuse allegations reported at MCCC. Reports and responses will be kept in a locked file of the MCCC office.

Promote disclosure and confidentiality as appropriate to: 1) protect victims from further misconduct or abuse; 2) protect alleged offenders from unfair prejudice; 3) prevent additional persons from being victimized; and 4) promote healing.

One member of the Safe Church Team will be designated as the contact person to the Media/Press. All remarks/facts regarding an allegation of abuse shall be referred to the designated Media Contact person.

**THE ABOVE POLICY WAS APPROVED BY THE MILL CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH COUNCIL on March 7, 2017.**

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**This policy should be reviewed and signed on a yearly basis by the Council Chairperson.**

**REFERENCES**

1. *Child Abuse Prevention Program*, by Beth Swagman, CRC Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1995
2. *Policy for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse*, Bethany Bible Church, Phoenix, Arizona, 1996
3. *Preventing Child Abuse: Creating a Safe Place*, by Beth Swagman, Faith Alive Christian Resources, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009
4. *First Seattle Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Policy, Seattle, WA. (Revised, 2013)*

*This document was prepared and written by Verna Alberda with a heavy reliance on the work of Beth Swagman, former Director of the CRC Denominational Safe Church Office. The resource referred to throughout the policy is "Preventing Child Abuse, creating a safe place", published in 2009. My husband and I were honored by the dedication of her book to us as we worked alongside her for many years at the Local, Classical, and Denominational Church levels.*

***MILL CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH***

***SAFE CHURCH POLICY***

**Mark 9: 36-37 Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**