

# SAFE CHURCH POLICY

## General Principles

Adopted by Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church Session, October 2008

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Mark 10:14*

### PURPOSE

The purpose of Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church’s Safe Church Policies is to help the church implement and maintain a safe environment for children, youth, and adults that will help them participate freely in the church’s ministries and programs. Our goal is for all of God’s children to feel the welcome and love of Jesus Christ and to develop a lifelong relationship with Christ.

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are to:

- 1) **Protect children and youth.** Our intent is to provide a safe environment for children and youth to learn, grow, and experience God’s love. We believe that effective ministry for children and youth requires relationships with caring, loving, and mature adults and youth leaders who can demonstrate God’s love to them. The safety policies are intended to keep these relationships and all aspects of ministries with minors safe.
- 2) **Protect Adults and Leaders.** When adults and leaders are interacting with children and youth, they need to be in a safe place as well. Our intent is to create an environment that sets appropriate guidelines and boundaries and to provide the support that staff and volunteers need to be effective in their roles with children and youth.

By implementing Safe Church policies and procedures, we are communicating the importance of Safe Church for children, youth, adults, and the church. We expect all ministry areas and programs to incorporate these policies into all activities involving minors, provide detailed guidelines and training for staff and volunteers working with children and youth, and communicate clear expectations for parents, children, and youth about adhering to policies and keeping minors safe.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND EXPECTATIONS

These principles are designed to assist those involved in ministry with all children and youth in providing a safe environment that will help students participate freely in the church’s ministries and programs. Our goal is for all of God’s children to feel the welcome and love of Jesus Christ and develop a lifelong relationship with Christ.

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## **Christian Leadership**

Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church takes seriously the roles of leaders throughout the church. Along with these leadership roles come certain leadership expectations as described in 1 Timothy. In verse 4:12, Paul commands us to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

As with all leadership roles at Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church, it is necessary for those involved in ministry to maintain a healthy balance of giving and receiving. Our children and youth learn from the model we set for them, so it is up to us as leaders, to model positive peer relationships, personal time with God and regular participation in worship. Serving, personal devotions, and peer level relationships are all important and it is our responsibility to demonstrate this for our children.

## **Safe Church Components**

The five components for ensuring a safe church are: screening, training, supervision, responding, and accountability. These principles are summarized here and are thoroughly described in the Safe Church Guidelines for each ministry area (Childcare, Children, Youth and Music School).

All staff and volunteers are expected to do everything reasonably possible to provide a safe environment for children. These instructions, although not an exhaustive list, are practical actions that can be taken.

### **Screening**

All persons who may have direct contact with children or youth must comply with screening requirements before being in a supervisory position. Screening will include a criminal background check (fingerprinting), and reference checks.

### **Training**

Staff and volunteers working with or who may have direct contact with children or youth are required to participate in the general Safe Church training within the first 90 days of serving. Each person will receive a copy of the *Safe Church Policies and Guidelines* for the Ministry Area in which they are serving and agree to read and follow these guidelines. In addition, volunteers will participate in a Ministry Area training to learn about the specific policies, rules and guidelines for supervision.

### **Supervision**

Staff and volunteers who are responsible for the supervision of children or youth during ministry activities and are expected to do everything possible to provide a safe environment. This supervision will be guided by the Two-Adult Rule, which states that there must be two non-related adults present when supervising one or more children or youth. Detailed procedures for implementing this rule, as well as Safe Church guidelines for exceptions to this rule, are completely explained in the *Safe Church Policies and Guidelines for each Ministry Area (Childcare, Children, Youth, and Music School)*.

## **Responding**

All church staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report actual or suspected abuse of children under the age of 18 whether or not it may have occurred in church ministry activities. Staff and volunteers will respond compassionately, seriously, supportively, without minimizing or explaining the behavior of others. The church will respond immediately to and take seriously all cases of actual or suspected abuse of children.

## **Accountability**

Everyone involved with children and youth are responsible for making sure that the church's Safe Church Policies and Guidelines are understood and followed. Ministry Staff is responsible for evaluating how well these policies and guidelines are being followed and providing the ongoing training and support necessary to make sure they are implemented consistently.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

At Sunnyvale Presbyterian, we all must work together to ensure the safety of our children and youth. Ministers, staff, session, parents, the Safe Church Committee, the Personnel Committee and parents all need to contribute.

### **Ministers**

Ministers are governed by the Presbytery Sexual Misconduct Prevention Policy and other Presbytery policies. In addition to conforming to Presbytery policy, ministers will be aware of all policies outlined here and will support staff and volunteers in their implementation.

Ministers will also provide guidance and pastoral care in cases of suspected or actual child abuse. In addition, when individuals fail to pass the screening criteria for working with minors, the head pastor will be informed. The head pastor will make sure that key staff members are informed that such persons are not approved to have any contact with minors involved in church programs and activities.

### **Session**

Session will be responsible for ensuring that all Presbytery and church policies regarding Safe Church are followed. Specifically, Session is responsible for:

- Appointing members of the Safe Church Committee (SCC) and having the SCC report at least annually on the effectiveness of Safe Church policies and practices
- Ensuring, through the SCC and Personnel Committee, that all elders, deacons, employees, and other church leaders have received and read these policies
- Ensuring, through the SCC and Personnel Committee, that all elders, deacons, employees, and anyone participating in ministries involving children or youth participate in Safe Church training
- Providing the funds and resources necessary for carrying out the Safe Church Policies

### **Personnel Committee**

The Personnel Committee will work with Safe Church Committee to make sure the policies

affecting church staff members are implemented. Specifically, the Personnel Committee will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that all employment practices comply with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act regarding fair employment practices
- Conducting background checks on all current and potential employees
- Appointing a staff member as the “Records Custodian” for criminal background checks and making sure that any staff member involved in this process receives the training and support necessary to handle screening information in a confidential, legal, and ethical manner
- Developing procedures and criteria for determining whether screened individuals are approved for their role or position
- Ensuring that all staff persons participate in Safe Church training
- Working with the Safe Church Committee to develop guidelines regarding working with children and youth and making sure that staff understand and follow them

### **Ministry Areas**

Ministry areas will work with the Safe Church Committee to make sure that Safe Church policies are implemented. Ministry areas with programs or activities involving minors will be responsible for:

- Determining which volunteer positions fall into the high-risk and low-risk categories
- Accepting for volunteers in high-risk positions, only those who have been completely screened and trained
- Developing written guidelines regarding supervision and safety of participants in their programs
- Using the guidelines mentioned above, train their volunteers on the specific rules and guidelines for supervision and safety in their Ministry Area
- Developing written guidelines for parents including expectations for their role in supervising children, expectations for the behavior of children and youth participating in church programs, and information about discipline and Safe Church policies that will be followed by staff and volunteers
- Communicating clear expectations for behavior to children and youth
- Reviewing and revising, as necessary, Safe Church policies for their Ministry Area(s) and practices on at least a yearly basis

### **Safe Church Committee (SCC)**

The Safe Church Committee will oversee the implementation and compliance of policies and guidelines related to the protection of minors. The SCC will be responsible for:

- Developing and implementing a confidential screening process for volunteers and making sure that anyone involved in the screening process receives the training and support necessary to handle screening information in a confidential, legal, and ethical manner

- Developing procedures and criteria for determining whether screened volunteers are approved for their role and informing the head pastor of anyone who does not pass the screening criteria for working with children and youth
- Developing training materials to be used for the general Safe Church training and working with ministry areas to deliver training to staff and volunteers
- Working with ministry areas, church staff, and the Personnel Committee to support the implementation of Safe Church policies and procedures
- Developing procedures for how breaches of Safe Church policies should be handled
- Reviewing and approving Safe Church guidelines and procedures for any program or ministry area involving minors on at least a yearly basis
- Promoting Safe Church principles throughout the church
- Reporting to Session on an annual basis about the effectiveness of the Safe Church policies and practices

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