

Children and Youth Protection Guidelines

I. Purpose- North Park Wesleyan Church (hereinafter, the “Church”) has a sacred desire to keep our children/minors (newborn through 17 years of age) safe from harm. The purpose of these Guidelines for Child Protection (these “Guidelines”) is to raise awareness, provide information and set out procedures designed to protect minors and their families from abuse while at a Church event.

Although the Church is concerned when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, the specific focus of these Guidelines is to make effort to ensure that abuse does not occur within the framework of this Church, its programs or ministry activities. These Guidelines are intended to help make the Church in all of its settings a truly safe and caring place.

II. Standards of Conduct – The Church endeavors to provide a safe environment for all minors entrusted into its care during worship services, during involvement in any church ministry and any Church sponsored event, and all encounters between minors and church workers.

A. Prohibited Conduct: Conduct that is prohibited includes:

- Child abuse – any physical, mental, or emotional abuse of a child or children involving harm or the threat of harm to a child by an adult who is responsible for the child’s health and welfare.
- Child neglect – any act of neglect that results in an unreasonable risk being posed to a child’s health or welfare by an adult who is responsible for the child’s health and welfare – also, the failure to act in a manner that would prevent or eliminate that risk by a responsible adult who has (or should have) knowledge of that risk.
- Sexual abuse and exploitation – any behavior by an adult that uses a child for sexual stimulation, whether it involves actual touching or not, and regardless of consent or apparent consent.

B. Desired Conduct: As a preventative measure, all church workers are required to follow the procedures adopted by the Church. The following best practices are suggested:

1. **Two-Person Rule:** In ministry with minors, especially involving infants and pre-school aged children, every attempt should be made to ensure the presence of two adults or approved youth in the immediate area. We understand that in some instances there will be reason to excuse an adult/youth from the area for brief amounts of time for bathroom breaks, escorting a minor to his/her parents, or to another location within the church for ministry purposes. It is our practice that these instances are not frequent in occurrence and will be managed in a timely manner to leave no adult or youth alone for more than a few moments during any ministry activity. Groups of ten or more younger children should have additional supervision depending upon the age of the children and the activity. However, for children who are older, but still under the age of 18, the following exceptions are acceptable:

- a. **Exceptions:** Classes for ages 4 through high school students may have the presence of only one approved teacher if the following measures have been taken:
 - i. The door is left open or there is a window in the door that allows unobstructed visibility into the classroom; and/or
 - ii. The classrooms are periodically monitored by another approved adult or worker; and/or
 - iii. One approved adult teacher may lead, elementary, middle school, and high school classes if two or more teenage students are present.
2. **One-on-One Meetings:** The nature of much ministry, especially youth ministry, is that it often takes place spontaneously. Nonetheless, to the extent possible, one-on-one meetings between an adult church worker and an individual minor should be conducted in an area that provides visibility to other adults and be conducted at a time when other adults are normally present in that vicinity.

III. Preventative Measures and Volunteering Requirements

A. Initial Requirements: All those who wish to work with minors in any capacity in the Church must meet the following requirements:

- Complete a children's ministry volunteer application (Form CM-1)
- Complete a New York State Child Background Safety Check provided by the Church (Form CM-2a and CM-2b)
- Provide two (2) personal references (Form CM-3)
- Have a favorable return on the New York State Child Background Safety Check
- Participate in a required child protection training provided by the Church
- Be knowledgeable about these guidelines; and
- Consistently attend church on a regular basis

Note: It is the policy of the Church that anyone convicted of child neglect or abuse (physical or sexual or any sex-based crime) MAY NOT serve in any position involving children/youth in the Church.

B. Criminal Background Check: A criminal background check must be completed and a favorable report received prior to any individual beginning work/ministry in any capacity with minors in the Church. This check will be conducted by the Church through the New York State Sexual Predators Registry. It is the policy of the Church not to accept the record of a background check obtained from any other source.

C. Mandatory Training: All workers with children, paid or volunteer, are required to complete requisite training components which are designed to instruct the participants of the:

- Church's guidelines for the prevention of child abuse
- Church's established procedures to be used in all ministries with minors
- Signs and indicators of possible child abuse

- Required steps to report an alleged or actual incident of abuse
- State law regarding child abuse specific to the entity of the Church
- Signature of the Church’s Child Safety Covenant (From CM-4)

D. Ongoing Requirements for All Who Work with Children:

- Participate in all required training sessions on child protection;
- Be aware and vigilant when working with minors;
- Keep all lines of communication open with children and peers;
- Report ALL suspected child abuse immediately pursuant to these Guidelines;
- Follow up on any reporting by timely completing of required reports;
- Cooperate with authorities and church leaders;
- Cooperate as required to obtain updated background re-checks every 2 years;
- Refrain from sharing any information about any alleged matter with all others so to protect the identity and reputation of the alleged victim and alleged abuse. Gossip is a sin, and it not only hurts the alleged abuser and alleged victim, but also negatively impacts their families and the church community as a whole.

E. Ongoing Responsibilities of Church Leadership

- Ensure all who work with minors in the Church have obtained favorable background checks;
- Ensure all who work with children in the Church have received child protection training required by the Church;
- Ensure all who work with children in the Church are knowledgeable about the Church’s Guidelines;
- Conduct periodic reviews of these Guidelines and update as needed;
- Require periodic update background re-checks every 2 years;
- Reporting incidents that may lead to claims to the Church’s insurer;
- Ensure all background check reports are maintained in a secure, locked manner and are only accessible by those on a need-to- know basis.

IV. Procedures for Reporting Child Abuse:

- 1. What Must Be Reported?** In general, a suspicion of or secondary report by another of inappropriate, abusive, or neglectful conduct of a child by a fellow worker or by any outside individual should be immediately reported.
- 2. Report to Whom?** Report internally to Pastor Megan Cusumano (hereinafter “Supervisor”) **and** the local civil authority, police. If the Supervisor is unavailable or the allegation involves the Supervisor or Supervisor’s family member, the allegation or suspicion should be reported to Pastor Jonathan Ward. It is the responsibility of the Supervisor to handle the matter in a manner consistent with these Guidelines and all applicable laws. **It is the reporter’s duty, not the Supervisors duty to make the report to the civil authority/police.**
- 3. Who Must/Should Report?** In New York State certain individuals have a legal duty to report suspected abuse or neglect of a minor. These individuals often referred to as Mandatory Reporters and, include medical professionals, educators, and human service workers.

All suspicions of Prohibited Conduct, as defined in Section IIA of these Guidelines, shall be reported consistent with local laws.

- 4. How to Report to the Supervisor?** Notify the Supervisor verbally, in person or by phone. This should be done in a place which allows both the reporter and the Supervisor to speak confidentially.
- 5. How to Report to the Appropriate civil Authority?** Call the number provided on Form CM-5 for the appropriate civil authority in this jurisdiction.
- 6. When to Report?** Make your report immediately or as soon as possible after learning of an alleged incident or you develop a suspicion that abuse and/or neglect has occurred.
- 7. What Happens When a Report is Submitted?** After a report is received by the agency or police, a reporter is usually also required to follow up with a written report within 24-48 hours. Form CM-5 is a suggested form for this report. Although, the local authorities may require specific forms. The authority agency will provide you with all details regarding when, where, and how to submit the written report. An investigation into the allegation will be initiated by the local civil authorities. Most jurisdictions will allow the reporter to remain anonymous. Unless a person knowingly files a false report, the reporter is legally protected from a civil suit based on the report in most, if not all, jurisdictions. Note that the civil authorities have no duty to share information garnered during their investigation with the reporter or the church or entity. Notwithstanding, it would be wise at the start of this process to learn the contact information of the person in charge of the investigation should further contact become necessary.
- 8. What Steps Will the Supervisor Take?**
 - a. Immediate Steps Upon Being Advised of suspicions of Prohibited Conduct as defined in Section IIA of these Guidelines: (not necessarily in this order)
 - i. The Supervisor will follow all applicable local laws. Additionally, the Supervisor may consider the following:
 1. Ensuring the alleged minor victim and all other minors under the Church's responsibility are safe
 2. Temporarily removing the alleged abuser from all contact with children via his/her ministerial positions, if applicable, while treating the alleged abuser respectfully knowing that the allegations remain under investigation. Note: Whenever any staff- paid or volunteer- is temporarily or permanently suspended it is advisable to do so in formal writing. The writing can follow a conversation, if that is preferred, but the Church's attorney should always be consulted before putting anything in writing in a potentially volatile and litigious situation.
 3. Communicating in an appropriate manner with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the alleged victim to share information on the alleged incident and to ensure that any necessary medical attention is obtained for the alleged victim. If appropriate, the Supervisor may ask the church worker/reporter to accompany him/her to meet with the child's parent(s) or guardian(s).

4. Verifying that the church worker (reporter) made the required initial report and written follow up report to the civil authorities, pursuant to New York State Law.
 5. Reporting the alleged incident to the appropriate local church leaders, such as the local board of administration;
 6. Reporting the alleged incident to the District Superintendent;
 7. Reporting the alleged incident to the Church's attorney;
 8. Reporting the alleged incident to the Church's insurance provider;
 9. Cooperating with civil authorities, attorney and insurer. *It is advisable to discuss all planned disclosures and written statements with the Church's attorney in advance of making any statements, issuing anything in writing or releasing church documents.*
 10. Keeping detailed and accurate records of all steps taken by the Church in response to the allegations. Clip and retain copies of all reports, correspondence and formal statements that are related to this matter together.
 11. Before taking any action beyond what is required by law, consult with the Church's attorney. There are often privacy, employment, healthcare, liability and other legal issues which may be unknowingly negatively impacted.
- ii. Further follow- up:
1. Meet with the reporter of the incident and leaders of the affected ministry to discern next steps, if any, to begin the healing process of those leaders and youth members of that ministry;
 2. Work with the Church's attorney to discern what is appropriate information to disclose and if, when, how, and to what extent to address the whole church community to begin the healing process;
 3. Discern the follow-up needs of alleged victim and alleged abuser and their families.
- b. The following will guide the Supervisor's actions in response to the allegations:
- i. It is the Church's policy to treat the accused abuser with dignity and confidentiality to the extent possible as the allegations may be unfounded.
 - ii. When child abuse occurs, and even if allegations are later proven untrue, many others in addition to the alleged victim are often harmed. These may include: peers of the child, family members of the child, peers of the child's parents, other workers with children in the Church, the entire congregation, and family members of the accused abuser. Though sensitive to this reality, **it is the Church's policy to first protect the child and all other children** and to cooperate with the authorities, and to promote healing of all who are adversely affected by abuse or allegations of abuse.
 - iii. Church leaders and congregants should refrain from attempts to investigate the matter. Investigation is the job of the civil authorities trained for this purpose.

- iv. With the Church's attorney, Supervisor will designate ONE and ONLY ONE spokesperson to make all necessary statements or responses to the news media and/or the public.
- v. Supervisor with assistance of counsel will prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation. Supervisor will not divulge any unnecessary details, place blame, interfere with the victim's privacy, or violate any confidentiality concerns.
- vi. Supervisor will cooperate as required by law with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child welfare agency.
- vii. Supervisor will ensure a process to handle all documentation with the utmost confidentiality and safeguard all records kept pursuant to these Guidelines. Supervisor will ensure that documentation is retained in the Church's confidential files that record every step taken during this process.