

Safe Church Policy and Procedures Affton Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Affton Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a welcoming congregation.

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here:

If you are young or old, you are welcome.

If you have brown skin, black skin, white skin, yellow skin or any color of skin, you are welcome.

If you are married or single, widowed or divorced, you are welcome.

If you are gay or straight, you are welcome.

If you are sick or well, you are welcome.

If you are happy or sad, you are welcome.

If you are poor or rich, weak or powerful, you are welcome.

If you believe in God some of the time or none of the time or all of the time, you are welcome.

It is the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to work for healing in a fragmented world. We recognize that the world is never more fragmented than when violence and abuse occur against those most vulnerable in our society. It becomes even more fragmented when said violence and abuse is perpetrated against or by a member of the church.

The policy that follows is designed to provide a place that is safe for everyone to be nurtured in their faith development. We strive to protect the life and dignity of those who are vulnerable to abuse by striving to protect the privacy, rights, and dignity of both the victim and the accused. It may become necessary for the church (ACC) to restrict or limit the participation of individuals who are perceived to pose a threat to the safety of others, until such time that said threat is judged to no longer exist.

Policy

As a community of faith, Affton Christian Church (ACC) is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with Affton Christian Church should be aware that the church strongly opposes and prohibits any form of exploitation, harassment or abuse of others regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identification or mental capacity and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent such exploitation, harassment or abuse and to take appropriate action to remove those persons who violate this policy.

Purpose

- Establish a policy prohibiting abuse, exploitation and harassment as one step in creating a Safe Church environment.
- Increase the awareness and sensitivity toward abuse, exploitation and harassment within our ministry.
- Define a policy for protecting against and dealing with abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy:

- The terms "minor", "child" or "children" refer to all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.
- The term "youth" refers to all persons twelve (12) years of age up to, but not including eighteen (18) years of age.
- The term "adult" refers to all persons eighteen (18) years of age and older.

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- The terms “workers”, “employee”, “paid staff” and “volunteer” refer to any persons who
 - Are involved in children Sunday School classes
 - Are involved in providing child care/babysitting services during church sponsored events
 - Are involved in overnight activities with children
 - Are involved in one-on-one mentorship or counseling of children
 - Have occasional one-on-one contact with minors (i.e. church sponsored athletic team coaches, vehicle drivers)
- The term “abuse” refers to any action or lack of action which endangers or harms an individual’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development and includes, but is not limited to:
 - Physical abuse – any physical injury to an individual which is not accidental, including, but not limited to, beating, shaking, burns and biting
 - Emotional abuse – a persistent and chronic pattern of emotional maltreatment, including, but not limited to, an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
 - Sexual Abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child. If between a child and another child, when such sexual activity is without consent, without equality or as a result of coercion. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
 - Neglect – depriving an individual of essential needs, including, but not limited to, adequate food, water, shelter and medical care.
- The term “harassment” refers to behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the other person to public discrimination because of race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and any other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- The term “Responsible Adult” refers to a relative (e.g. grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.), a neighbor or family friend given responsibility by the parent or legal guardian for the welfare and safety of the child or youth when the parent or legal guardian is not in attendance.
- The term “Vulnerable Adult” refers to any adult person who by reason of profound physical disability or dependence, developmental disability, mental illness, relative social power or cultural circumstances may be susceptible to physical abuse, sexual exploitation, financial exploitation or manipulation as a consequence of being unable to physically resist, or render judgments regarding physical, mental, financial or environmental well-being. Such persons may be unable to act independently and may, to their detriment, manifest high levels of trust or fear of persons of perceived power or authority.
- Safe Church Team – a group consisting of the Lead Minister, the Board Moderator and an at-large person – appointed by the Moderator and approved by the Board. The appointed at-large member serves a 4 year term. The Safe Church Team is responsible for the administration and ongoing maintenance and modification of this policy.

Basic Procedures for Safe Ministries

- There will be at least two trained adult workers present at all times during any church event or ministry involving children or youth. In sponsored program situations where two or more children or youth groups are meeting at the church at the same time (e.g. Sunday school, Vacation Bible School) the second adult may rotate among the different youth groups to ensure that two adults are present. In that instance, doors without windows to rooms used for such activities shall remain open and there should be no fewer than three (3) children or youth with the adult teacher. At no time shall a child or youth be alone with an adult other than a relative or guardian.

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- One of the workers supervising children or youth needs to be trained in First Aid and CPR.
- There may be times when it is necessary or desirable to have workers who are themselves under the age of 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply:
 - Workers must be at least twelve (12) years of age.
 - Workers will be screened and trained as specified below.
 - Workers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
- Parents of children under 18 will be asked to sign a general permission form for planned off-site activities that are a part of regular programs.
- Parents, a responsible adult or legal guardian are responsible for the direct supervision of their children or youth who are not in church-sponsored childcare or participating in a supervised activity.
- Disciplinary problems are to be responded to by notifying the parent, responsible adult or guardian of the offending child or youth, with removal from the activity as deemed necessary. Volunteers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone.
- Children/youth who have received an injury that is minor should be given first aid as needed at the time of the injury. The child's/youth's parent, responsible adult or guardian should be notified of the minor injury when he/she picks up the injured person.

Basic procedures for Recruitment, Screening, and Selection of Volunteer Workers for Child and Youth Ministries

- 1. Six Month Rule:** No volunteer will be allowed to work with children until s/he has been a member or regular attendee of ACC for a minimum of six (6) months. This "waiting period" will give the church an additional opportunity to evaluate applicants and allow for a better evaluation of the suitability of the prospective volunteer for working with children.
- 2. Written Application:** All persons seeking to work with children, as paid staff or as a volunteer, must complete and sign a written application provided by ACC. The completed applications will be maintained in a confidential file at ACC.
- 3. Criminal Background Check:** ACC reserves the right to conduct a criminal background check on all persons seeking to work with children, as paid staff or as a volunteer.
 - a. What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Safe Church Team on a case by case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances and indecency will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children or youth. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.
 - b. The results of the Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form will be maintained in a confidential file at ACC.
- 4. Personal Interview:** Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant.

Training

Within 90 days of starting to work with children, all paid staff and volunteers will attend a boundary training class such as the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ Southeast Gateway Area of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Mid-America's "Safe Sanctuary" training. ACC will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. Record of attendance will be maintained on file at ACC.

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Basic Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse

If paid staff or volunteers become aware of abuse or neglect of a child under their care, this should be reported immediately to a member of the Safe Church Team for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Anyone observing an incident of child abuse alleged to have occurred at ACC or during a program or activity sponsored by ACC, shall follow this procedure:

1. The parents or legal guardian of the child will be notified immediately.
2. The incident will be reported immediately to a member of the Safe Church Team.
3. The person who receives the initial allegation of the child abuse will complete the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse or Injury" form (attached) within 24 hours of receiving the allegation. The completed form will be given a member of the Safe Church Team. The team will share the completed form with appropriate state authorities to support the investigation of the abuse allegation as needed. The form will be kept in a file in the church office.
4. The alleged abuser will be told of the allegation immediately. This person will be suspended from further participation in church-sponsored programs that involve children and youth. Based on the final outcome of the abuse allegation, the person's further involvement in church-sponsored programs involving children and youth will be the decision of the Safe Church Team.
5. The Safe Church Team will investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team will act only in consultation with ACC's insurance company and/or attorney. Any such internal investigation may be delayed until the investigation by state or local authorities is complete and will be affected by the results of such state or local investigation.
6. A member of the Safe Church Team will be responsible for notifying the appropriate authorities as well as the church's insurance agent and will call the Missouri State Division of Family Service (1-800-392-3738) and report the alleged abuse incident within 24 hours of receiving the allegation as required by state law.
7. The Pastor will make any necessary statements or responses to the news media with the consent of the Church Board. The identities of the child or youth who is the alleged victim, the parents, and the alleged abuser will be kept confidential.
8. The Pastor or another member of the Safe Church Team will prepare a brief statement about the allegation of abuse to share with the congregation. This statement will inform the congregation that an allegation of child abuse has been made without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, or revealing the identities of the child, the child's parents, or the alleged abuser.
9. The Pastor, church representatives and board will take allegations seriously and show care and support to prevent further harm. Whatever pastoral resources are needed should be extended to the victim(s) and their families.
10. Confidentiality and privacy of **ALL** involved: the alleged abuser, the victim, and the families of alleged abuser and victim, and the Safe Church Team shall be safeguarded. ACC indemnifies itself against anyone who is found violating the confidentiality and privacy of all involved, beyond what is outlined in this policy. Violators may be subject to immediate dismissal from their position and may be open to civil liability.

Allegations of abuse by a member of the Ministerial staff will be reported to the Board Moderator. The Board Moderator will, in turn, notify the Area office where the allegations will be handled as outlined in the document titled COM 6 attached.

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Basic Procedure for Dealing with a Registered Sex Offender

1. Discovery of a registered sex offender who is currently attending church or church-sponsored activities will be communicated to the Safe Church Team.
2. The participation of the offender in all activities in which that person volunteers or works with children and youth in church, or church-sponsored activities, will be immediately suspended.

Policy Distribution and Maintenance

- Each paid staff member and volunteer will be provided with a copy of this Child/Youth Safe Sanctuary Policy and will be asked to become familiar with its contents.
- This entire policy shall be posted on the Affton Christian Church website, <http://www.afftonchristianchurch.org/>, under *Safe Church Policy and Procedures*. Sunday bulletins will include a message stating the Affton Christian Church follows a Safe Church policy referring readers to contact the Pastor for more information. A copy of our Safe Church Policy and Procedures will be provided and recommended to programs or events involving children or youth using church property but are not sponsored by the church.

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Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse or Injury

This form is to be used to register all injuries or mishaps that occur during church programs or events that take place on or off church premises. It is also to be used for all allegations of child abuse or neglect.

Name: _____ Male: _____ Female: _____

Home Address: _____

_____ Zip: _____

Telephone Number: (____) _____ Date of Birth: _____

Name of Reporter: _____

Home Address: _____

_____ Zip: _____

Telephone Number: Home (____) _____ Work:(____) _____

1. Briefly describe the nature and extent of the injury, accident or abuse. Include specifics such as date, time and location:

2. Describe the circumstances under which you became aware of the incident. Include the name of witnesses:

3. Indicate action taken by staff and/or authorized volunteers. Include the names of staff and/or authorized volunteers:

4. Please give any other information which you think might be helpful in establishing the cause of the incident(s) and/or the person(s) responsible for it. If known, please provide the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s):

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Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse or Injury (continued)

As an Authorized Volunteer, once you have determined that a report is necessary, contact the Pastor or a member of the Safe Church Team within 24 hours. They will assist you in completing the Incident Report Form. Incident Report Forms and instructions are available in the church library or church office.

Signature of Reporter: _____ Date: _____

Role/Function/Position of Reporter: _____

For Office Use Only

Date Report Received: _____ Report Received by: _____

(If injured Person is a child) Copy submitted to Parents/Guardians

Date Submitted: _____

Submitted by: _____

Copy submitted to reporter.

Date Submitted: _____

Submitted by: _____

Further Action:

Comments:

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Affton Christian Church Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

NAME:

LAST	FIRST	MIDDLE
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ADDRESS:

STREET	CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE
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DAYTIME PHONE	EVENING PHONE	EMAIL
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I have never been convicted of, nor pled guilty/no contest to a crime. *(Exclude convictions that have been sealed, expunged or legally eradicated, misdemeanor convictions for which probation was completed and the case was dismissed, or offenses about which inquiry is not permissible in this state)*

True Not true

If not true, please briefly describe the nature of the crime(s), the date and place of conviction and the legal disposition of the case. The church will not deny a position to any applicant solely because the person has been convicted of a crime. The church, however, may consider the nature, date and circumstances of the offense, as well as whether the offense is relevant to the duties of the position applied for.

Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?

Yes No

If yes, please provide a brief explanation.

I have read and received a copy of the Affton Christian Church Safe Church Policy and Procedures. I agree to comply with all of its provisions. I agree to allow Affton Christian Church to obtain a background check prior to my activities as children's and youth teacher, mentor, or advisor. I understand that any information acquired through such a check will only be released to individuals who require this information in order to execute the duties of their Church office or position in the Church Administration.

Signature

Printed name

Date