

# **Third Christian Reformed Church**

## **Safe Church Policies for Children and Youth**

2015

# THIRD CRC SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Revised SEPTEMBER 2015

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## I. INTRODUCTION

One of God's most prominent characteristics and a hallmark of Jesus' earthly ministry is a special concern for children and for the powerless. In recent years, the Christian Reformed Church has taken a number of steps to protect the well-being of all those to whom it ministers, especially children and other particularly vulnerable parishioners.

The policy is intended to provide adequate protection for both the church and its parishioners without being cumbersome. It is intended as a good faith effort to put loving and sensible people in positions that may involve regular interaction with youth or regular one-to-one interaction with other adults.

## II. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document, the following definitions apply:

**A. Volunteers:** Unpaid people who work in any church capacity.

**B. Paid Staff:** All people on the payroll of Third Christian Reformed Church, including the Pastor, Youth Ministry Coordinator, Education Director, Administrative Secretary, Pastoral Secretary, Custodian, and others on the church payroll.

**C. Contract Worker:** Accompanists and pulpit supply.

**D. Parishioner:** Any member of Third CRC or participant in a program or service of the church, regardless of age.

**E. Adult:** 18 years of age or older.

## III. ANNUAL REVIEW

The ELG along with the Director of Education shall oversee the implementation of the Safe Church Policy. ELG should annually review the policy for effectiveness with input from the church Education Committee, and recommending changes, if necessary.

#### **IV. SCREENING**

**A.** Applicants for **Paid Staff** positions must complete a written application as part of the job-seeking process and consent to a criminal background check. See Appendix A.

**B.** Applicants for **Contract Worker** positions will be screened as deemed appropriate by the (ELG) and/or Council.

**C.** Applicants for **Volunteer** positions ordinarily must be members in good standing of Third CRC for at least six months.

**D.** Receipt by the church of any verifiable information about an applicant which indicates a history of committing physical or sexual abuse will result in rejection of the application unless Council grants an exception following an appeal to Council.

#### **V. COMPLIANCE**

**A.** Supervisors of Nursery, Children's Worship, Little Lambs/Learning Lambs, Sunday school, Cadets, GEMS, Vacation Bible School, middle school or high school youth groups, and the summer programs will be responsible for making sure each volunteer in their program has read and understands the Safe Church Policy. The president of Council will make sure each Elder and Deacon has done so. Program supervisors are encouraged to review the policy annually with their volunteers.

**B.** All staff and volunteers in the programs listed in V.A, and all Elders and Deacons, shall annually sign a statement (on paper or electronically) that they have read Third CRC's Safe Church Policy and agree to comply with the rules described therein. Signed statements and or electronic records will be filed in the church office. Volunteers or staff who willfully or repeatedly violates policies will be removed from their positions.

**C.** Anyone who observes a violation of prevention policies should report the violation to the ELG or the president of Council, as appropriate.

#### **VI. GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE**

From time to time adult caregivers must intervene to prevent physical, psychological, moral or spiritual harm resulting from a child's behavior. Discipline, however, should be used to nurture mature relationships and self-control. In the church, the goal also is to help children become more Christ-like. The following guidelines are to help supervisors and caregivers to develop loving, effective, and age-appropriate discipline techniques:

**A.** Parents must be informed and involved whenever a child's behavior requires more than minor correction or when a pattern of misbehavior develops.

**B.** If misbehavior is frequent, the program supervisor should be consulted to develop an appropriate response.

**C.** In cases where more than one child is involved in a pattern of misbehavior, or where misbehavior is frequent, a parent or aide should be assigned to help in the classroom or gathering.

**D.** Time outs should not last longer in minutes than the child's age in years.

## **VII. POLICIES FOR REDUCING ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTION**

The greatest risk of an incident or allegation of abuse occurs when a paid staff member, contract worker or volunteer spends time alone with a parishioner. One-to-one interactions that are lengthy, frequent or held in private or obscure places are particularly risky. Such one-to-one interaction may be unintentional, such as when a Cadet counselor driving boys home has only one child left to drop off; but it may also be planned, such as a counseling session between a Pastor and a parishioner. In either case, there is no one to protect the parishioner or to corroborate the account of the volunteer or staff if a false allegation of abuse is made. To try to reduce one-to-one interaction, the following policies will be implemented:.

**A. Adult Supervision of Minors:** In addition to program-specific policies described in section VII:

- 1.** A reasonable effort must be made to have two unrelated adult volunteers, contract workers or paid staff present in a vehicle when transporting a sole minor (age 18 and under). One driver per vehicle carrying multiple children is acceptable if the driver is in a caravan (for a GEMS or Cadets outing, for example).
- 2.** Paid staff, contract workers or volunteers planning a one-to-one meeting with anyone under 18 must get verbal approval from the child's parent or guardian and must tell the parent or guardian when and where the meeting will occur. If the youth asks that the parents not be notified, the Household Elder or Pastor should know when, where and with whom the meeting will occur.

## **VIII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC POLICIES**

### **A. NURSERY**

1. The Nursery must be staffed by at least two unrelated people, one of whom must be an adult. People between the ages of third grade and twelfth grade may volunteer for service provided they are scheduled for service with an unrelated adult. If the scheduled adult does not show up, another adult approved for service must be summoned.
2. If staffing does not meet the listed criteria, nursery care will not be offered.
3. Other than parents of nursery children, anyone not scheduled for attendant duty may not spend any time in the nursery rooms or Little Lambs/Learning Lambs rooms without approval from the Nursery or Little Lambs/Learning Lambs attendants.
4. Attendants may take children from the Nursery only for good reason, such as in case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parent(s). If an adult escorts an older child to the bathroom, the adult should make sure the bathroom is safe and then wait outside the bathroom until the child comes out. If an adult needs to assist a child in the bathroom, the bathroom door must be propped ajar.
5. Only adult attendants may change diapers, with other attendants present.
6. Parents or guardians will sign in their child, provide any additional care instructions, and note the names of people authorized to retrieve the child from Nursery. Anyone not so designated will not be permitted to remove the child from the Nursery. The person retrieving the child will sign the child out. Adult Nursery attendants must supervise each check-out and, if necessary, verify the identity of the adult retrieving the child. Children must not be released from the Nursery until an authorized person retrieves them and signs them out.
7. Nursery attendants should arrive at least 20 minutes before the service. Parents should stay until at least two attendants are present. At least two nursery attendants must stay until all children have been retrieved.
8. These rules and the Discipline Guidelines shall be posted in the nurseries.

## **B. CHILDREN'S WORSHIP, LITTLE LAMBS/LEARNING LAMBS AND YOUTH EDUCATION**

1. Little Lambs and Children's Worship must be staffed by the adult leader and a helper in fifth grade or older.

Youth education may be staffed by one adult in each room if there is more than one child present or the door to the room is left open.

2. Children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before the worship service and before Sunday school. Children in Little Lambs needing to use the bathroom should go to the Nursery bathroom. Older children should be encouraged to go to the bathroom in pairs or groups of the same age and gender. If an adult escorts an older child to the bathroom, the adult should make sure the bathroom is safe and then wait outside the bathroom until the child comes out. If an adult needs to assist a child in the bathroom, the bathroom door must be propped open.

3. Children should not leave the worship center or classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reasons.

4. Parents or guardians will sign in their children when they are dropped off at Little Lambs. Little Lambs and Children's worship for preschool - second grade will maintain a list of names of people authorized to retrieve each child. Anyone not so designated will not be permitted to remove the child from the classroom.

Adult teachers must supervise the pick-up of each child and, if necessary, verify the identity of the person retrieving the child. Children must not be let out of the classroom until an authorized person retrieves him or her.

5. Little Lambs teachers should arrive at least 20 minutes before the service. Parents should stay until at least a teacher and helper are present. For Little Lambs and Children's Worship ages preschool - second grade the teacher must stay until all children have been retrieved.

## **C. VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL and SUMMER PROGRAMS**

1. All VBS groups must be supervised by two adults or one adult and an unrelated high school student.

2. Volunteers or staff ordinarily should physically restrain a VBS or summer program child only if the child poses a danger to

him/herself or others. The child's parent or guardian will be notified immediately and the child will be sent home. Children who violate VBS rules ordinarily receive one warning; if a second infraction occurs, the child's parent or guardian is notified and the child is sent home. If a parent or guardian is not available to retrieve the child, the child will be separated from the group under the supervision of an adult but always within sight of a second adult.

3. Children should not leave their group except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reasons.

4. Bathroom assistance for younger children should be given in accordance with the rules described in VII.B.

#### **D. CADETS / GEMS**

1. Each club function should be supervised by at least two adults.

2. Counselors may meet one-to-one with club members no more than twice on any particular concern and only with the verbal permission of a parent or guardian. Such meetings must occur in public at a time and place known to the parent or guardian. If the youth asks that the parents not be notified, the Household Elder or Pastor should know when, where and with whom the meeting will occur.

3. Leaders should encourage parents of the members to have their child arrive no earlier than 10 minutes before and leave no later than 10 minutes after meetings or activities.

4. Any club activities taking place away from a church facility, out of town or overnight must be conducted in compliance with all applicable aforementioned policies. To attend, youth must have written permission slips signed by the parents or guardians.

5. Head counselors or a roamer should frequently monitor the bathrooms and classrooms.

#### **E. MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL GROUPS**

1. Each youth group meeting or event must be supervised by at least two adults. Ordinarily there should be at least one adult for every 8-10 youth.

2. Youth group leaders may meet one-to-one with a youth group member no more than twice on any particular concern and only with the verbal permission of a parent or guardian. Such meetings must occur in public at a place and time known to the parent or guardian. If the youth asks that the parents not be notified, the

district elder or pastor should know when, where and with whom the meeting will occur.

3. Regardless of the relative ages, it is always inappropriate for a club member and a club leader to date each other.

## **F. COUNCIL**

1. Elders, deacons, pastors and other ministry staff are to exercise good judgment when conducting visits alone

2. Council members and staff should be extremely cautious with the use of touch. Generally, one should not initiate an action that might be interpreted as intimate or allow the parishioner to initiate such an action.

3. All pastoral care visits must be reported to the appropriate supervising body.

4. Council members should meet with a child or adolescent no more than twice on any particular concern and thereafter only with the consent of the minor's parent or guardian or with the consent of the elders. Except in emergencies, avoid transporting a minor alone.

## **G. PROCEDURES FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IN HELPING VICTIMS OF CHILD ABUSE**

1. When you notice or suspect abuse and/or when the child first comes to you, be sure to take the child seriously. Do not disregard what the child is telling you, but stay calm and listen to the child. Assure the child that (i) you have taken them seriously, (ii) they are not to blame, and (iii) they did the right thing in telling you what happened. Do not promise the child you will not tell anyone.

2. Immediately report such a case to your organization head or staff person. He/she will, in turn, contact ELG. At this point, a determination will be made as to whether more information is needed or whether Child Protective Services will be contacted.

3. At all times, keep the information confidential. If your organization head or staff person is unavailable, contact a member of ELG. Within twenty-four (24) hours, the proper authorities will typically make an assessment of the information. Appropriate action should be taken within the same time period. Any delay could pose further risk to the victim.



4. Take note of the following activities and interactions that are inappropriate, abusive, and traumatic for children:

- Ridiculing a child's appearance or certain parts of their anatomy.
- Telling a child all they are good for is sex.
- Kissing a child inappropriately.
- Touching, grabbing or fondling a child in an inappropriate manner (i.e. the "Apron-Zone").
- Exposing a child to discussions concerning sex.
- Exposing a child to sexual name-calling.
- Inhibiting privacy in the bathroom or changing rooms, or watching a child at inappropriate times.
- Using your authority, age or stature to intimidate or manipulate a child into sexual activity.
- Taking advantage of a child's curiosity about his/her body.
- Coercing a child into sexual activity in exchange for something.
- Deceiving a child into believing any of the above activity is acceptable if it is consented to by both parties.
- Exposing a child to any of the above behavior or activities.

## Appendix A: Screening procedures and forms

### I. Volunteer Application and Compliance Form

<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	
Full name: _____	
Address: _____	
City: _____	State: _____ ZIP: _____
Home phone: _____	Work phone: _____
Have you read the entire Safe Church policy? Y / N	
Do you agree to comply with all the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy? Y / N	
Do you acknowledge that failure to comply with any of the rules and guidelines is grounds for suspension or termination from the job or volunteer position for which you are applying? Y / N	
Do you have any health concerns that may affect your ability to care for children safely? Please explain. (Use other side if necessary.) Y / N	
I volunteer or may volunteer in the following programs (please check all that apply):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paid staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Worship <input type="checkbox"/> Vacation Bible School
<input type="checkbox"/> Council	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday School <input type="checkbox"/> Summer afternoon programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Nursery	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle school group <input type="checkbox"/> Cadets
<input type="checkbox"/> Little Lambs/Learning Lambs	<input type="checkbox"/> High School group <input type="checkbox"/> GEMS
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
I verify that the information I have provided is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge:	
_____	_____
<b>SIGNATURE</b>	<b>DATE</b>

**II. Criminal Record Check Information**

The Michigan State Police will check the criminal backgrounds of any applicants for all paid positions. The church should also have background checks performed in any other state in which an applicant has lived or worked in the last 10 years.

**III. Consent form for criminal background check for paid staff**

**This form must be completed by applicants for paid staff positions at Third Christian Reformed Church. This is not an employment application. Third Church is using this form to help provide a safe and secure environment for those who participate in its programs and use its facilities.**

**FULL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BIRTH SURNAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ALIASES:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BIRTHDATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **BIRTH PLACE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GENDER** \_\_\_m / f \_\_\_\_\_ **RACE / ETHNICITY :** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TELEPHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **SOCIAL SECURITY No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**DRIVER'S LICENSE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**OTHER STATES OR PROVINCES IN WHICH YOU HAVE LIVED IN THE LAST 10 YEARS:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I have applied for a sensitive position of trust, and I am required by Third Christian Reformed Church to disclose whether or not I have any convictions or have been charged under any Federal, Provincial or State enactment;**

**I understand that, if they should decide any conviction or charge disclosed might preclude me from the function I have applied for, I will be given an opportunity to see and discuss that criminal record:**

**I, therefore, authorize the Michigan State Police and other law enforcement agencies in any of my former places of residence to inquire into and determine whether or not I have a criminal record, and also make to Third Christian Reformed Church a full and complete disclosure of any criminal record they may find.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** **Date**