



**POLICY FOR PREVENTION OF ABUSE
OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS
(Created August 03, 2021)**

**Harvest Anglican Church
Simpsonville, South Carolina**

A. BIBLICAL BASIS:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck, and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abuse acts committed as part of ceremonies of rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban, and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real and it appears to be increasing. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

B. PURPOSE:

Our purpose for establishing this policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We desire to reduce the risk of abuse by using good, consistent policies and procedures that deter predators and guarantee the safety of all individuals.

C. COVENANT STATEMENT:

Harvest Anglican Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our ministry leaders working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting ministry leaders; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our ministry leaders working with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

D. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement that we will nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care. With this policy, we live according to the example of Christ and surround children and youth with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.

E. DEFINITIONS:

- **Children**: Birth through 5th Grade
- **Youth**: 6th Grade through 12th grade; for the purposes of this policy, 18-year-olds still attending high school will be considered youth.

- **Vulnerable Adults:** Individuals who cannot defend themselves and need protection, such as those with mental limitations, those who are grieving, elderly, and physically handicapped
- **Ministry Leader:** A leader who is either a paid and unpaid adult, clergy or lay person, who is directly or indirectly responsible for children, youth or vulnerable adults
- **Sexual Abuse:** The sexual exploitation or use of a child or youth for satisfaction of one's sexual drive. Sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All sexual abuse is an exploitation of an individual's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Sexual abuse is *criminal behavior* that involves individuals in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching such as: fondling, oral, genital, and anal penetration, intercourse, and behaviors that involve non-touching aspects such as: verbal comments, pornographic photographs and videos, obscene phone calls and texts, exhibitionism, and allowing children to witness sexual activity.
- **Verbal Abuse:** any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens any child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- **Physical Abuse:** any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health
- **Mental Injury (Emotional Abuse):** Injuries to intellectual or psychological capacity of an individual's functioning (belittling, isolating, terrorizing). Must be determined clinically.
- **Neglect:** Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, supervision, or health care.
- **Mandatory Reporters:** South Carolina law (20-7-510) has provided for many years that doctors, nurses, dentists, optometrists, medical examiners, emergency medical services, mental health, allied health professionals, Christian Science practitioners, religious healers, school teachers, counselors, social or public assistance workers, child care workers, police or law enforcement officers, undertakers, funeral home director or employees, judges, school principals and assistant principals are mandatory reporters. Pastors and volunteers are also mandatory reporters.

F. RECRUITING/SCREENING WORKERS:

To create a safe environment within our church and to comply with our insurance company requirements, each church staff person and volunteer who works with

the church's children or youth programs (and vulnerable adults) will be screened and appropriately trained on protection issues. Careful screening is one way to prevent abuse. Employees and volunteers involved with children, youth or vulnerable adults must be at least 21 years of age or at least five years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve and at least in the 6th grade. For exceptions to this rule see Paragraph G1. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years to better have perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving. Persons not meeting these standards may not serve in a role of authority; however, they may be utilized as assistants to those in leadership positions. As part of the application process, these persons must complete an application, be interviewed by an appropriate staff member, or the director of the area in which they work.

1. **Six Month Rule**

Harvest Church, whenever possible, will not use anyone as a volunteer worker for children or youth in the church unless they have been an active participant of the church for at least six (6) months. In some situations, this rule is not feasible and may be waived based on probation. If the Six-Month Rule is waived, program leaders may take additional steps to screen the applicant at their own discretion.

2. **Application**

Each person being considered for work with children or youth, or vulnerable adults will complete and sign a copy of our ***Application Form***. Youth under the age of 17 are exempt from the application process. The application includes standard contact information, experience and qualification for the position, voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history, a consent to have a background check and covenant statement. Program directors issue the application, collect the completed copies, complete the interviews, and forward all materials to the pastoral staff. The completed application will be maintained in a locked file.

3. **Background Checks**

State criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who have responsibility for children, youth, and vulnerable

adults. Driving record checks may be made of anyone who will be driving children or youth in their personal vehicle at the discretion of the program director. State criminal background checks will be conducted in all states in which the individual has lived in the past seven (7) years. Criminal background checks will be rerun every two years or when deemed necessary.

4. Interview/Reference Checks

All applicants are to be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview. A record to include the date of the interview will be made and filed with the application. This policy is effective August 3, 2021 and applies only to those individuals who become involved after that date. Reference checks may be done at the discretion of the interviewer.

5. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Also, anyone convicted of DUI within the last five years may not be used as a driver.

6. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor. When evaluating candidates, the following factors will be considered if an applicant is a survivor of child abuse:

- Whether the applicant has previously committed an act of child abuse or molestation (anyone who has maltreated children may not serve in children's or youth ministry)

- The extent of professional counseling the applicant has received
- The opinion of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant
- The opinion of leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved; how closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying

7. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know.

8. Reviewing and Decision

Once the application is completed, interview done and, if necessary, reference check conducted, the supervisor/director of the activity involved reviews everything and, if deemed acceptable, forwards the packet to the designated staff person who will have the criminal records check done. The designated staff person will notify the supervisor/director of the appropriate activity when the results are received. If there is a need for a personal interview to clarify any of the information, that should be scheduled as soon as possible, and the results of the interview recorded in writing and kept on file. Confidentiality must be maintained in all situations where negative or derogatory information is involved. The Priest/Pastor, or designee, will be consulted before any individual is notified that they will not be allowed involvement.

G. STAFF SUPERVISION GUIDELINES:

Activities of children, youth and vulnerable adults affiliated with our church will be governed by the following guidelines:

1. Two Adult Rule:

At all events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults the Two Adult Rule applies.

There must be two adults (21 years of age or over) present. Exceptions to the Two Adult Rule are made for classes and youth meetings or when multiple classes are meeting within close proximity to each other. Or, when meetings are held at a public enterprise (ex. restaurant, coffee shop, etc.).

On Sunday mornings in the nursery, there will be at least one nursery attendant age 21 or older in at least one of the rooms, and at least one other nursery attendant age 18 or older. Age 16 is the minimum age requirement for nursery workers.

2. Ratios: The following ratios are established goals:

- Nursery: One (1) adult to each four (4) infants and children
- Children (other than nursery): One (1) adult for each ten (10) children
- Youth: One (1) adult for each ten (10) youth

(Note: It is understood that scheduling adults for events will have to be based upon anticipated number of children and youth and in some cases the goal may not be met.)

3. Chaperoning:

If we go offsite, all drivers are to be at least 25 years old. The ratio of chaperones for day trips one (1) chaperone to every eight (8) youth (1:8) and one (1) chaperone to every five (5) children under the age of 12 (1:5) with a minimum of two adults. On overnight trips there must be at least one male and one female adult chaperone if the group is of mixed gender. The overnight ratio is one (1) chaperone to every eight (8) youth. When feasible, chaperones are to sleep in a separate room, not in the room with the youth. A parent informational meeting will be offered prior to any overnight trip.

4. Nursery Checkout Procedure:

The church nursery will observe the check-in/check-out procedure using planning center “check ins” which gives out a security label for the child and the parent/guardian at the time of check in and the only way to check out the child is to have the matching label.

5. Open Door Policy:

Church staff members, volunteers who lead programs and parents/guardians of individuals being served by our church have the right to visit classroom and other activities at any time.

6. Individual Counseling:

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Individuals receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in the counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported.

7. Parental Permission:

Program directors (nursery, children, youth, etc.) are responsible for getting and appropriately distributing parental permission forms. Children and youth need to have Permission Form/Emergency Medical Forms for involvement in church sponsored programs or activities. This form can be in an electronic or paper format. These are to be updated annually. The person in charge of each trip and/or retreat outside of Greenville County will carry Permission Forms/Emergency Medical Forms. Forms are to be readily available for events within Greenville County. If a child shows up without forms, every reasonable effort will be made to call/contact the respective parent to obtain their permission and the required medical information.

8. Auditable Records:

Individuals responsible for activities are to maintain auditable records. This applies to band practices, Bible studies, summer programs, nursery, Youth meetings, etc. Records should be provided to the Program Directors of each ministry (nursery, children, youth, etc.) for filing or to the Priest/Pastor if they are not available.

9. First Aid and Safety:

Each adult supervisor needs to know the closest emergency fire evacuation route, location of fire extinguisher, and location of first aid equipment with report forms for injuries and accidents. Nursery, Youth and Children's program directors all must be certified in CPR and First Aid. On youth trips, when not with an adult, youth must be with three or more other members of the group.

10. Safety at water related events:

Leaders of events that include swimming either in pools, lakes, rivers, or oceans are to review application forms and know what special parental instructions apply to participants and how well participants swim. It is also the leader's responsibility to ensure that some form of "lifeguarding" is available. Additionally, if some youth or children do not participate in the swimming event but choose to go, some adult not in the water will have responsibility for monitoring the activities of the non-swimmers.

11. Classroom Discipline:

All teachers and workers are to use the following discipline measures:

- If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."

- If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
- If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone and away from the other students.
- If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the designated staff person who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
- ***No physical punishment or verbal abuse; e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.*** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

12. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the individual involved. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap, but it is **not** appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave in this way.)

Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present, and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom. In this event, the door should be cracked, and another adult should be within line of sight or line of hearing.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers, our behavior must always foster trust; it should be above reproach.

A person's preference not to be touch should be respected. Do not force affection upon anyone. Church workers are responsible to protect individuals under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

13. Exception to Policy:

In unusual situations, exceptions to policies may be necessary. Exceptions are to be approved and recorded in writing and placed in file by the ministry leader involved.

14. Training/Education:

The responsibility for Safe Sanctuary training rests with every Program Director for their designated area of ministry (Nursery, Children, Youth, etc.). The training, as a minimum, will be a complete review of information contained in this document with adequate time for questions and answers. A video teaching series from Ministry Safe will also be available for training. All individuals will receive training before they begin to interact with minors and annually thereafter. Records will be kept showing the names of those receiving the training and the date on which it was received.

15. Parental Responsibility:

Parents are responsible for children and youth when not part of a church children's or youth program or event. Parents should not drop off children and youth prior to 15 minutes of an event's scheduled start time. All children and youth should be picked up by 15 minutes after an event's scheduled end time. Children and youth should not be roaming the church buildings or premises without adult supervision.

16. Transportation:

When traveling in vehicles, the two-person rule is in effect unless traveling in a group of vehicles. Caravanning vehicles must stay within one mile of each other while on the road. Youth will not be used as drivers leaving the church premises to attend an event. Youth may drive to an event from a location other than the church.

17. Communication

H. ACCIDENT REPORTS:

When an incident occurs, the adult supervisor completes the Report Form for Injuries and Accidents and turns it into the church within 24 hours of the incident.

I. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in whom they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance, and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer or paid staff member of the church, that person will:

1. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child/youth as the situation requires.
2. Report the incident immediately to the senior Priest/Pastor.
3. If applicable, notify the Program Director (children/youth) who is the designated church child/youth protection representative who will:
 - Prepare written documentation of the incident on the "Report Form for Suspected Sexual or Physical Abuse."
 - Notify the County Office of DSS. This is a requirement of state law. *(Note: Do not attempt to investigate. This should be left to the professionals who are familiar with such cases.)*
 - If the Priest/Pastor is the accused, the designee will notify the Senior Warden of the Vestry (Leadership Council) and the Bishop.

- Provide a copy of the written documentation to the Pastor/Priest or the Senior Warden of the Vestry as appropriate.

One of the Pastors or the designee will notify the parents/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety of the child/youth until the parents/guardians arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parents/guardians do not desire the matter to be reported. *(Note: If one or both of the parents/guardians is the alleged abuser, contact the authorities discussed above and follow their advice.)*

After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities (*paragraph 1, 2 above*) the designee will report the incident to the church attorney, the church insurance company and the Bishop.

A list of emergency phone numbers (parents/guardians, DSS, attorney, insurance company and Bishop) will be available to church staff at all times.

Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child/youth is secure, the pastor or the designee may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff member, that person will be relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is completed. The salary of a paid staff member will be continued until the investigation is completed and the matter settled.

The Priest should handle any contact with the media. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is being investigated and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

A copy of the written report shall be kept to insure ongoing ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It will be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's office.

Signed and agreed: _____ Date _____