The Dwelling Place

HIS PRESENCE · HIS PEOPLE · HIS PURPOSE

Safe Church Policy

Adopted by Church Leadership team on 18 July 2023

Commitment

The Church is committed to providing places, services and programs that promote physical, emotional and spiritual health and safety and model the love of Christ to all whom we have contact with, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

The Church has adopted the *Safe Church Policy* to:

- help us live out our biblical mandate to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30-31);
- implement the 10 Child Safe Standards;
- provide a framework to inform the provision of safe environments and programs for children, young people and vulnerable adults; and
- meet our legal obligations in relation to:
  - staff and volunteers engaged in Child-related Work (or, in ACT, Regulated Activities); and
  - reporting matters, including Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct, and Reportable Conduct involving a Child, to government authorities.

The *Safe Church Policy* outlines the commitment of the church to principles in various areas. More detail regarding the practical implementation of these commitments is available in the relevant procedures and guidelines

Scope

This Policy applies to:

- all Church Leadership, staff and volunteers;
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs;

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Activities and Services for Children at the Church

As a church, we commit to providing spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

1.1 Church Leadership:

a. recognise that children and young people are an integral part of the Church and talk about this in services, sermons, training events and meetings;
b. involve children and young people in the routine of church life where appropriate
c. consider the needs of children and young people when they make decisions about budgets, buildings, renovations, use of property, décor, or catering; and
d. encourage children and young people to have input in decisions that affect them by including them in church forums and meetings when appropriate.

1.2 Safe Church Team:

a. talk with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to feel safe, to be listened to and to have their views respected (including discussing what they should do and who they should approach if they feel unsafe or hurt, or they suspect that someone else is unsafe or hurt); and
b. ensure their contact details are accessible to children

1.3 Staff and volunteers:

a. listen to children and take seriously what children are saying;
b. talk with children and young people about the kinds of behaviours, attitudes or 'culture' that they would like to promote in their group;
c. encourage children and young people to have input regarding the content and activities they would like to be part of their group.

Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

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2. Staff and Volunteers

2.1 Screening, selection and induction of Staff and Volunteers

a. The church will undertake appropriate screening processes for all staff and volunteers
b. The church will engage in fair and transparent selection processes for all staff and volunteers
c. The church will provide appropriate induction for all staff and volunteers
d. All staff and volunteers are to be recruited, selected and inducted in accordance with the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers.*

2.2 Training and Resourcing of Staff and Volunteers

a. The church will ensure that staff and volunteers develop the knowledge and skills to create safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
b. The church will ensure that staff and volunteers have access to information about creating safe spaces and that they all undergo appropriate training regarding the available Procedures, Guidelines and Forms.
c. The church will support staff and volunteers with adequate resources to enable them to maintain and promote safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
d. The church will implement the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*

2.3 Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

a. The church will provide spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.
b. The church will expect all staff and volunteers to uphold the *Code of Conduct* which includes expected behaviours for those who engage in ministry with children and/or vulnerable people.
c. The church will expect staff and volunteers to follow *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*.

Please see the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers* and the *Screening Questionnaire* for more detail.

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3. Conflict, Complaints and Concerns

3.1 Responding to Child Protection Concerns

a. The church will ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all child protection concerns and any complaints relating to child sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child in accordance with the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*.
b. The church will ensure that all child protection concerns and complaints will be reported to the relevant government departments and, if necessary, Police as soon as possible and in accordance with legislative duties.

3.2 Complaint Handling

a. The Church will respond to complaints in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*.
b. Where there is a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has engaged in abuse, including child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct involving a child, the Church will treat the allegation as a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* and respond in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers.*
c. In the event of receiving a complaint that relates to a minor breach of the Code of Conduct or a grievance, the Church may determine to respond to the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Resolving Conflict.*

Please see the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns and the Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* for more detail.

4. Safe Environments

4.1 Physical Environments

a. The Church will ensure that physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed
b. The Church will comply with Work, Health and Safety requirements.
c. The Church will consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk to children and vulnerable people.
d. The Church will identify and address risks arising from the physical environment in which programs and activities take place.
e. If the Church has any residential property that is identifiable as being church property then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property obtain and hold WWCC or WWVP clearance for the duration of their residence.
f. The Church will consider whether any ministries it supports, including overseas ministries, have appropriate child protection practices in place? (This includes consideration of whether supporting orphanages overseas is appropriate)

4.2 Online Environments

The Church will promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication
Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

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5. Risk Management

5.1 Persons of Concern

The Church will manage any person identified as a Person of Concern in accordance with *Fellowship of Congregational Churches – Church Handbook*.

5.2 Risk Assessments

a. The Church will ensure that Ministry Leaders complete and make a record of a risk assessment in relation to any program or activity undertaken at, for or with the Church.
   - for regular activities, the risk assessment will be conducted at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in the program activities, attendance or location.
   - for special activities, the Ministry Leader or Safe Church Team will complete a risk assessment.

b. The Church will ensure that appropriate and reasonable precautions are adopted to address risks identified as part of a risk assessment. When considering what measures are appropriate, the Church will consider the likelihood of an incident occurring, the seriousness of the consequences and the difficulty of avoiding the risk.

c. The Church will store risk assessment forms in a secure location for a period of at least 45 years.

6. Third Parties and Affiliated Entities

a. The church will require any third party (tenant or external party using church property) that provides services to children and/or young people to provide written confirmation of their compliance with the Child Safe Standards at least annually.

b. The church will ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with Child Safe Standards including annual reports to the governance body regarding child safety.

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7. Recordkeeping

a. The Church will retain all written records for a minimum of 45 years, in hard copy and/or electronically in a secure manner.
   - Where records contain, or may contain, sensitive information, they will be kept in a manner that protects confidentiality and will only be accessed by a limited number of authorised persons.
   - Where records are kept in hard copy, they will be held in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and physical conditions.
   - Where records are kept electronically, they will be monitored to ensure security and ongoing accessibility.

b. Records to which this item applies includes, but is not limited to:
   - Ministry Information Sheets
   - Staff and Volunteer files
   - Attendance (sign-in/sign-out) sheets
   - Risk assessment forms
   - Safe Church Register
   - Safe Church Concerns forms and any contemporaneous notes regarding reporting decisions
   - Annual Safe Church commitment by third parties and affiliated entities
   - Dated copies of any *Safe Church Policy*, Procedure, Form or associated document in force at any time

Please see the *Privacy Policy* for more detail.

8. Review and Accountability

8.1 Internal Review

The Church will review this policy annually.

8.2 External Accountability

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the Fellowship of *Congregational churches Office Bearer appointed by the FCC Executive Committee* in relation to any Reportable Conduct, Child Protection Concerns and/or Complaints against Accredited or Recognised Ministers in accordance the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*.

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9. Definitions

In the *Safe Church Policy* and associated documents, unless the context otherwise requires:

Church means the local church which adopted this *Safe Church Policy*, as indicated on the cover of the Policy.

complaint includes any allegation, suspicion, concern or report of a breach of the Church's *Code of Conduct* or the *Fellowship of Congregational Churches policies and procedures for provision of Safe Ministry Practices and the Protection of Children and Young People* (where applicable). It also includes disclosures made to an institution about any child protection concern.

Creating Safe Spaces means Creating Safe Spaces training offered by the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT or alternative training that is Safe Church Training Agreement approved and has a face-to-face component.

disclosure means a process by which a person conveys or attempts to convey that they are being or have been abused or neglected.

governance body means the body designated by the constitution of the church to be responsible for the management of church affairs. This may be the Diaconate, Elders, or the Church Council.

Mandatory Reporting Legislation means
In NSW, the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*

Pastoral Staff means any pastor or any accredited or recognised minister or any paid or unpaid staff member of the Church who is engaged in pastoral ministry through the Church.

Reportable Conduct Legislation means
In NSW the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* (NSW)

Safe Church Register means the register required to record information relating to
In NSW staff and volunteers who engaged in Child-related Work and their relevant details in accordance with section 9A of the WWCC Legislation.
In the ACT, staff and volunteers who engaged in a Regulated Activity and all relevant WWVP clearances.

vulnerable means the state of being unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason, and includes those that suffer disadvantage such as social and financial hardship.

WWCC Legislation means the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act* 2012 (NSW).

WWVP Legislation means the *Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act* 2011 (ACT).

young person means a person who is 16 or 17 years old.

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