

UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH
ADMINISTRATION DIVISION (MINISTRY)

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

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APPROVED BY BOARD OF DIRECTORS: September 25, 2018
and RATIFIED BY CONGREGATION: November 25, 2018

EFFECTIVE: November 25, 2018

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth, or vulnerable adults, or is a sex offender, will be prohibited from working in any church-sponsored programs, activities, and events involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
2. All candidates for employment in any position will be subject to background and reference screening.
3. All volunteers for any ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be subject to background and reference screening.
4. University Christian Church (the Church) considers any allegation of injury, abuse, or molestation a serious matter. Each situation will be fully investigated.
5. The Church will establish a standing response team to investigate any allegation of sexual harassment, abuse, or molestation and to review requests from sex offenders.
6. The Church will report immediately all suspected instances of sexual abuse or molestation and child abuse, neglect, or endangerment to the police and to the appropriate local jurisdiction's child protective services office. (To report suspicion of child abuse and neglect to Prince George's County Child Protective Services call: 301-909-2450.)
7. Registered sex offenders convicted of Tier II and/or Tier III offenses are prohibited from participating in all church-sponsored programs, activities, and events, including worship services.
8. Registered sex offenders convicted of Tier I offenses, and others who may have been accused or charged with sex offenses but not convicted, may request a review of their individual circumstances by the response team and may be granted contingent participation by the Board of Directors.
9. If a sex offender who has been prohibited from participating in all church activities enters the church building or grounds, anyone who recognizes the offender will immediately notify the Senior Minister, the President of the Congregation, or the President-Elect of the Congregation who will ask the individual to leave.
10. If the individual refuses to leave, then the Senior Minister, the President of the Congregation, or the President-Elect of the Congregation will call the police.

DEFINITIONS

1. Adults means individuals 18 years of age and older.
2. Sex Offender Registry Tiers I, II, III – Individuals convicted by a court of law of a sexual offense must register with local law enforcement where they reside. The term and category of registration depends on the crime of conviction, the age of the victim, and the date that

the offense was committed. Those convicted of a Tier I offense register for 15 years; Tier II for 25 years; and Tier III for the offender's lifetime.

APPLICABILITY

1. This policy applies to all candidates for employment, to employees in all positions, and to volunteers engaged in the care, teaching, and leading of children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in church-sponsored programs, activities, and events.
2. This policy applies to church-sponsored programs, activities, and events both at the church building and away from the church building.
3. This policy applies to sex offenders including individuals listed on the U.S. Department of Justice National Sex Offender Registry and the Maryland Sex Offender Registry.

SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

1. All individuals volunteering to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and all candidates for employment will respond to self-disclosure questions, provide contact information for two references, not related to the individual, and the necessary personal information for a criminal background check to the Church Education Director, or other Division (Ministry) Director as appropriate, prior to employment or being permitted to volunteer.
2. The Director will conduct a criminal background check through a provider of such services. (Beginning in 2012-13 background checks are provided by Protect My Ministry, Inc.)
3. Criminal background checks will be repeated every two years.
4. The Director or his/her delegate will obtain two references for the candidate for employment or volunteering.
5. When indicated by negative background or reference checks, the Director will remove from consideration a candidate who may have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person and will inform the candidate of this action.
6. The candidate may appeal the Director's decision to the President of the Congregation.

WAITING PERIOD FOR VOLUNTEERS

All volunteer candidates will have been involved in the programs and activities of the Church for six months or more before they will be considered for any ministry position involving contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

SUPERVISION OF PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

1. At least two, non-related adults must be present at every program, activity or event involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This requirement applies to activities in classrooms, vehicles, or other enclosed areas. For large groups, the number of adult supervisors must be increased.
2. One or more of these adults must be 21 years of age or older.

3. For instances when two adults cannot be present, employees and volunteers will follow the “Rule of Three”. The “Rule of Three” means that all groups will include at least three individuals one of whom is an approved, screened adult.

RECORDKEEPING

1. Attendance - The Division (Ministry) responsible for programs, activities, and events for children, youth, and vulnerable adults will maintain an attendance list for every function. Employees and volunteers will record the date and time of the function along with the names of all participants, including employees and volunteers.
2. Emergency Contacts – The Division (Ministry) responsible for programs, activities and events for children, youth, and vulnerable adults will maintain emergency contact information for every regular participant.
3. Permission Slips – The Division (Ministry) responsible for programs, activities, and events for children, youth, and vulnerable adults will collect permission slips signed by a parent or guardian for every time the participants will be leaving the church and when any participant is transported by an unrelated adult.
4. Injury/Incident Reports – Employees and volunteers will prepare a written injury or incident report whenever such an event occurs during a church-sponsored program, activity, or event and promptly forward the report to the Senior Minister and the program, activity, or event leader.
5. Applications, References, and Background Checks - The Division (Ministry) will retain hard copies of employee and volunteer application materials, background checks, references, and notes from interviews in a locked file cabinet or other secure location. Electronic records will be kept in a password-protected, electronic file accessible only to the Senior Minister, the President of the Congregation, the President–elect, and the Division (Ministry) Directors.

RETENTION SCHEDULE

1. Volunteer applications, references, and background checks will be retained for five years and then shredded, destroyed, and/or deleted.
2. Employee applications, references, interview materials, and background checks will be retained for the length of the employment plus five years.

MANDATORY TRAINING AND ANNUAL REVIEW

Each year Division (Ministry) Directors will develop training materials and conduct a training session on this policy for all employees, volunteers, and candidates for volunteer positions.

RESPONSE TEAM

1. The response team will be composed of the Senior Minister, the chair of the Board of Elders, and the President-Elect of the Congregation and will be chaired by the chair of the Board of Elders.
2. The response team is responsible for establishing fact and dispelling rumor and suspicion about the allegation or conviction.
3. The response team will evaluate each situation on its own merit.

4. The response team will determine whether, in their judgement, the individual poses a threat to any member of the church community and will make a recommendation to the Board of Directors as to the participation of the individual in church activities.
5. The response team will retain records of their investigation and deliberations as defined under RECORDKEEPING, Item 5.
6. Should a member of the response team be accused of sexual harassment or abuse, another person will be appointed to the team by the President of the Congregation.
7. Should the President of the Congregation be accused, the President-Elect will assume the duties of President until the completion of the investigation and will appoint another member of the Board of Directors to the response team.

RESPONSE TEAM PROCEDURES REGARDING SEX OFFENDERS

1. The Senior Minister or the President of the Congregation will launch a response team as soon as he or she is aware of a sex offender who is currently attending or who wishes to participate in ministry activities.
2. The response team will initiate investigations within ten calendar days of notification and work with deliberate speed to investigate and resolve the situation.
3. The chair of the Board of Trustees will participate in the initial meeting of the response team at the start of any investigation.
4. The response team may interview the referred person, contact local law enforcement and probation departments, contact court-appointed psychologists or counselors with permission of the individual, review public records, and conduct a formal criminal background check.
5. The response team will determine whether any legal barriers to participation have been established by the court as a condition of probation or release.
6. The response team may recommend the individual be prohibited from participation in all church activities or may recommend limited participation under a written agreement.
7. If the response team recommends the individual be allowed to participate in church activities, the team will prepare a contingent participation agreement for approval by the Board of Directors.

PROCEDURES REGARDING ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

1. The Senior Minister or the President of the Congregation will launch a response team for handling allegations of sexual harassment or abuse as soon as he or she is aware of the allegations.
2. The response team will initiate investigations within ten calendar days of notification and work with deliberate speed to investigate and resolve the situation.

3. The chair of the Board of Trustees will participate in the initial meeting of the response team at the start of any investigation.
4. The response team will conduct a thorough investigation of the allegations, interview all parties and witnesses, and submit a written report and recommendation to the Board of Directors.
5. If the response team concludes the allegation was unfounded and the individual does not pose any unusual threat to others, the response team may recommend the Board take no action and consider the issue resolved unless new information comes to light.
6. If the response team concludes there is no verifiable evidence of harassment or abuse, but there is reason to think the individual poses a threat to others, the response team may recommend the individual be permitted to leave the church and never come back or enter into a contingent participation agreement that would be developed by the response team and approved by the Board of Directors.
7. If the response team concludes there is convincing evidence of sexual harassment or abuse, the response team will report the findings to the Board of Directors with a recommendation for action(s) as follows:
 - a. If the accused individual is an employee of the church, the Board will terminate the employment agreement immediately;
 - b. If the accused individual is a member or regular participant of the church, the individual will be permitted to leave the church and never come back or enter into a contingent participation agreement that would be developed by the response team and approved by the Board of Directors;
 - c. If the accused individual is an ordained minister or candidate for ordination, the Board of Directors will report the findings of the investigation to the Christian Church Capital Area.

CONTINGENT PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

1. Contingent participation agreements will be prepared by the response team for approval by the Board of Directors.
2. The contingent participation agreement will address:
 - a. Activities, days, and times in which the individual may participate in church activities
 - b. Restrictions on access to certain locations on the property and in the building
 - c. A requirement that the individual be chaperoned at all times
 - d. Other conditions unique to the situation
 - e. Disclosure to the congregation the status of the individual, i.e. presence on Sex Offender Registries
 - f. Disclosure to the congregation of all information gathered by the response team
 - g. Disclosure to the congregation of all conditions of participation
3. The agreement will remain in effect for as long as the individual participates in the church.
4. The agreement will be signed and dated by the sex offender, the chair of the response team, and by the President of the Congregation following approval by the Board of Directors.

SEX OFFENDER CHAPERONE TEAM

1. The Board of Directors will establish a chaperone team as part of a contingent participation agreement with a specific individual.
2. The chaperone team will be composed of no fewer than five adult volunteers recommended by the response team and approved by the Board of Directors to monitor a specific individual.
3. Chaperones will be familiar with the individual's situation, understand the restraints put on the person, and be comfortable fulfilling the duties of a chaperone for a sex offender.
4. A minimum of two chaperones will be required to be in the same room as the referred person at all times while the individual participates in church activities.
5. All chaperones will serve open-ended terms.
6. If a chaperone resigns or is otherwise unable to serve, the response team will recommend a replacement for approval by the Board of Directors.
7. Should the number of chaperones on the team drop to fewer than five, the contingent participation agreement with the individual will be suspended, and the individual will not be permitted to participate in any church activities until the team is restored to at least five members.
8. All chaperones will undergo criminal background screening in accordance with this policy.
9. The chaperone team will be led by a member of the team selected by the President of the Congregation.
10. The chaperone team leader will coordinate the scheduling of chaperones and maintain logs of their service.
11. The chaperone team will meet no less than twice a year to monitor the implementation of the agreement.
12. Family members of the offender will not be permitted to be chaperones.

NOTIFICATIONS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND TO THE CONGREGATION

1. The response team will report progress on investigations to the Board of Directors as part of the Safe Church Policy item on the agenda of all regular board meetings.
2. The chaperone team will report progress on contingent participation agreements to the Board of Directors as part of the Safe Church Policy item on the agenda of all regular board meetings.
3. The Board of Directors will call a Special Meeting of the Congregation in accordance with the Plan of Organization, Article III, Sections B and C, to provide verbal and written information to the congregation regarding any actions taken in the following situations:
 - a. An incident of harassment or abuse is being investigated or an investigation has been completed and the Board has acted;

- b. The Board has approved a contingent participation agreement with a sex offender;
 - c. The Board has denied a request from a sex offender to participate in Church activities.
4. The Board will protect the identity and privacy of victims.
 5. If an incident of harassment or abuse has resulted in the dismissal of an employee, the President will identify the former employee.
 6. If a contingent participation agreement has been approved, the President will name the individual and report the conditions of participation to members of the congregation in writing. In addition, the sex offender will appear in person to disclose his/her status to the congregation.

REVISION OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The Board of Directors may amend this policy at any time.

FORMS

Forms will be available in hard copy and online at the Church website.

1. Permission Slip for Youth Programs Form
2. Emergency Form
3. Information/Application Form
4. Reference Response Information Form
5. Injury and Incident Report Form
6. Attendance Register

END OF POLICY

History

1. *Initial policy approved by Board of Directors on February 25, 2013; effective: July 1, 2013*
2. *Amendments approved by Board of Directors on September 25, 2018 and ratified by Congregation at Special Meeting on November 25, 2018.*