

First Congregational Church of Western Springs Safe Church Policy

Safe Church Policy – August 2023

I. Introduction

The First Congregational Church of Western Springs is a vibrant, diverse, and Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ. We share a powerful mission, meaningful fellowship, and attention to faith formation for people of all ages.

It is the intention of our congregation to follow the commandment to love God and neighbor.

When children in our congregation are baptized, the gathered congregation is asked to promise their love, support, and care to the one about to be baptized. One of the ways we seek to fulfill this powerful promise is to establish a safe environment in which all people are protected from abusive behavior, sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and intimidation. The following guidelines are established to promote good conduct and to prevent inappropriate behavior within our church, and to address such boundary violations should they occur. All staff and volunteers affiliated with The First Congregational Church shall abide by the policies set forth, as shall organizations operating within our building.

No form of abuse will be tolerated and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal from working as a staff member and/or volunteer at The First Congregational Church of Western Springs. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth and vulnerable adults will be taken seriously. The First Congregational Church of Western Springs will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact a Clergy member or the Moderator.

II. General Definitions

1. Misconduct

As a church, we are committed to holding our leaders and volunteers to the highest standard of behavior. Therefore, the following definitions of abuse go beyond legal definitions to include any form of inappropriate conduct, misuse of power, misuse of spiritual authority, sexually inappropriate behavior, neglect, and abuse of office. These are behaviors that violate the trust and well-being of individuals and the community of believers, and they taint the office held by the offender.

2. Physical Misconduct is:

3. Threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a minor or vulnerable adult, or
4. Offensive or harmful contact with an adult;
5. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult.

6. Sexual Misconduct is:

7. Exploiting or grooming (preparing) a minor or an adult – regardless of consent or circumstances – for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the minor and/or adult;
8. Unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, co-volunteers, or

9. Sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.
10. The development of or the attempt of a ministry leader to develop a sexual or emotional relationship with a participant in the ministries of the church.
11. Sexual activity between youths at church and/or a church-sponsored ministry event.

12. Emotional Misconduct is:

13. Threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones;
14. Isolating a person from family, friends, and acquaintances;
15. Demeaning, bullying, belittling, shaming, or humiliating a person;
16. Delivering constant criticism; or
17. Emotionally blackmailing or harassing a person.

18. Spiritual Misconduct is:

19. manipulation and exploitation by appeal to religious convictions and beliefs,
20. censorship of decision making,
21. requirements for secrecy and silence,
22. coercion to conform [inability to ask questions]
23. requirement of obedience to the abuser
24. the suggestion that the abuser holds a 'divine' position
25. isolation as a means of punishment.

B. Concepts of Abuse of Power

26. **Power:** Power is the ability to influence or affect an outcome. We all have power as human beings; some of us are given more power as a result of our role or our status within a community. When power is stewarded well, it brings flourishing to all people as an expression of the shalom of the kingdom of God.
27. **Abuse of power:** Abuse of power is misusing power to harm another person, or using power and influence for personal gain at the expense of another person. Power can be used to harm another person intentionally or through ignorance, subtly or overtly, to advance one's own desires without regard for the needs or desires of others in ways that disturb the flourishing of others. At the core of all types of abuse are behaviors related to acquiring, maintaining, and misusing power and control. The same power dynamics show up in all types of abuse, whether it be sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or spiritual abuse.

C. Position Titles

Safe Church Team: The Safe Church Team, or Abuse Prevention and Response Team, shall have at least 3 people, with one person being clergy, one person being the Business Manager, and another person being designated by the executive committee.

Moderator: The elected lay leader of the Congregation, charged with chairing the Executive Committee and Church Council. The Associate Moderator may stand in for the Moderator as needed.

Ministry Leader: Any person, paid or volunteer, ordained or unordained, in a position of leadership over an area or aspect of ministry.

Clergy: Any ordained pastor who has a position of spiritual authority over other volunteers or members of the church.

Staff: Any person who is a paid employee of the church.

Parent or Guardian: A parent is a biological, adoptive, or step-parent with legal custody of a minor. A guardian legally has the care and management of a child. A parent or guardian may or may not also be categorized as an Adult Volunteer.

Adult Volunteer: A volunteer over the age of 17 who leads or assists ministry programming on an ongoing/regular basis.

Youth Helper: A youth who assists a volunteer in a program; commonly as a Sunday School Teacher for children.

Child: Children 0 - 10 years of age.

Youth: Children from 11 to 17 years of age.

Vulnerable Adult: A person over the age of 17 who is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation because of a mental or physical impairment or advanced age.

III. General Guidelines Pertaining to Criteria For Safe Supervision of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

These guidelines are designed to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from harm while attending and participating in church-sponsored events.

28. Code of Conduct:

29. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers will not engage in misconduct of any type nor abuse children, youth, and vulnerable adults in any way.
30. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers **will**:
31. Treat all children, youth, and vulnerable adults with respect and fairness at all times, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or gender expression, age, or religious beliefs.
32. Offer positive verbal reinforcement, encouragement, praise, and share appropriate jokes.
33. Engage only in appropriate physical affection:
34. Side hugs/arm around shoulder
35. Brief comforting hugs initiated by a child or with explicit permission (“May I give you a hug?”)
36. Pats on the hand, arm, shoulder, or back
37. Handshakes or high-fives
38. Holding hands of a young child is acceptable. The child must consent to the hand holding. Appropriate situations could include walking to class, walking to the Children’s Message/First Steps, etc.
39. Comply with church policies regarding interactions with youth and vulnerable adults outside of our programs.
40. Prioritize the safety and well-being of children, youth, and vulnerable adults at all times.

41. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers **will not:**
42. Stare at or comment on children, youth, and vulnerable adults' bodies.
43. Date or become romantically involved with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
44. Use, be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or be hungover in the presence of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
45. Have sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on church property or in the vicinity of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
46. Have secrets with youth and vulnerable adults.
47. Engage in inappropriate electronic communication with youth and vulnerable adults.
48. Engage in inappropriate physical contact, including:
49. Lingering Full-frontal hugs
50. Hugs without consent
51. Showing affection in an isolated area
52. Lap sitting (children 2nd grade and older)
53. Wrestling
54. Piggyback rides
55. Tickling
56. Any form of affection that is unwanted by a youth/staff/volunteer.
57. Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas
58. Speak to youth in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, vulgar, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
59. Initiate inappropriate sexualized conversations with minors or discuss their own sexual activities with youth.
60. Parents shall be informed before developmentally appropriate faith formation lessons regarding spirituality, sexuality, and relationships.
61. The First Congregational Church of Western Springs will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult.

62. Records and Covenants:

63. Parents and/or guardians should provide Ministry Leaders with identifying information, any special medical or behavioral circumstances, any legal indemnifications, the youth's date of birth, emergency contact information, consent form for digital communications, and consent form to publish photographs.
64. Recognizing that many children and youth ministry events are open to all and do not require pre-registration (Sunday School, youth group meetings, etc), parent contact information shall be collected as soon as possible via an event-appropriate guest sign-in procedure.
65. Youth should sign a Covenant outlining behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions for each program (Plymouth Fellowship, JRneys, Confirmation, and Sunday School teachers). A copy of the Covenant must be provided to parents and/or guardians.

66. Monitoring and Supervision:

The following ratios of staff/volunteers-to-children will be observed.

Infants - 1:4

Toddlers - 1:5

2 years - 1:8

Preschool - 1:10

School Age - 1:20

Mixed age group - ratio for youngest child in group

At all church-sponsored functions involving the supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, either the *Two Adult Rule* or the *Rule of Three* will be practiced. No staff or volunteers should be alone with a single child, youth, or vulnerable adult in locations where they cannot be observed by others.

67. **The Two-Adult Rule:** At least two screened adults must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving youth or vulnerable adults. At least two screened adults and/or youth helpers must be present at every function and in each classroom or other enclosed area during all activities involving children.
68. **The Rule of Three:**
69. When there is not a capacity to abide by the *Two-Adult Rule*, it may be acceptable to use the *The Rule of Three*: At least three individuals must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, including one screened adult.
70. When the *Rule of Three* is used there must be another Ministry Leader or Adult Volunteer nearby or in proximity monitoring the group.
71. **One-to-One Meetings:** In children and youth ministry as well as in pastoral care, there are times when a ministry leader or volunteer leader meets one-to-one with a youth, child, or vulnerable adult.
72. Meetings with children and youth should take place with the permission and knowledge of a parent or guardian. If one-on-one meetings occur in a ministry leader's office or other semi-private location, windows should be kept open.
73. The ministry leader or volunteer should notify the director of the ministry or another designated church leader and record the meeting in a log.
74. **High Risk Activities:**
75. Parents should sign a waiver for small children to receive help in the bathroom and/or diaper changes from staff or volunteers. If a signed waiver is not on file a parent or guardian should be contacted to take the child to the bathroom and/or change the diaper. Preschool-3rd grade children who are independent in the bathroom should be escorted to the restroom, where the staff or volunteer may wait outside the stall. When in the church facility, children in grades 4-12 may use restrooms without an escort, as long as they inform a staff member and/or volunteer where they are going. That staff/volunteer should watch to ensure they return.
76. Locker Room/Showering (Off-Campus)
77. Ministry leaders must intermittently and briefly check inside the locker room, so users know the locker/showering room is monitored.
78. Locker room horseplay such as towel snapping is prohibited.
79. Adults may not use shower facilities at the same time as youth; adults will be assigned specific shower times on work tours, during which youth are not permitted to shower.
80. Transition times and free times pose a high risk for incidents because during these times, clergy, staff, and volunteers may not be assigned a particular group of youths to supervise. To decrease the risk of incidents, implement the following procedures:
81. Set expectations with youths that they must remain in line-of-sight of staff and/or Adult Volunteers at all times.
82. Maintain an appropriate ministry leader-to-youth ratio.

83. Specify geographic boundaries.
84. Ensure that all ministry leaders and adult volunteers are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).
85. Require periodic roll calls.
86. Require supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and sweeps of the entire activity area.
87. Youth may be given free time during Mission trips with the following stipulations:
88. Youth must remain in groups of no fewer than four.
89. Ministry leaders and Adult Volunteers must retain a list of said groups.
90. Clear geographical boundaries and time limits for sight-seeing will be established for each location.
91. Any violation of the Code of Conduct will result in the youth being removed from the mission trip and sent home at the expense of the parent or guardian.

92. Overnight Activities:

93. All overnight activities must be documented and approved by clergy and/or Church Council.
94. The Director of Youth Ministry shall be designated as “lead” staff to supervise the overnight. All staff/volunteers shall review relevant policies and procedures.
95. Parents and/or guardians must be provided with full information about the overnight activity and must sign a permission slip for their youth to attend the event.
96. Appropriate adult-to-youth ratios must be established before the event.
97. Meetings with the group should be hosted in open and observable areas.
98. With regards to sleeping arrangements, separate male, and female youth into separate rooms. Safe and appropriate sleeping arrangements shall be made for transgender and non-binary youth in consultation with appropriate individuals, potentially including the Safe Church team, Director of Youth Ministry, the youth, and the youth’s parents or guardian.
99. Youth and adults shall be given the opportunity to get a minimum of seven hours of sleep; “lights out/quiet time” is therefore established seven hours prior to the wakeup time the following day. (I.e., if the group is scheduled to wake up at 7:00am, lights out commences at midnight the night before).
100. Given the risks and vulnerabilities of overnight activities, adult supervisors must check on youth throughout the night, approximately every two hours. Adult leaders should move in pairs to perform checks on all relevant areas, including sleeping quarters and bathrooms.
101. If youth are found to be outside of their assigned sleeping quarters after the established lights out/quiet time, they shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.
102. **Transportation:**
103. Any person who transports a child or youth for any church sponsored event must be 21 or older. Ministry leaders and/or adult volunteers must be background checked and have a clean driving record. Parent carpool drivers may transport children or youth with the permission and knowledge of all parents but do not need a background check if they are only serving as a carpool driver.
104. To transport children or youth, there must be an adequate safety belt for each passenger, and they will be worn any time the car is moving.
105. Transportation by one adult leader of one minor should be avoided. In the event that it is unavoidable, the following provisions must take place:
106. A clear consent from the parents/guardians of the child or youth.

107. Clear communication with the youth director or designated volunteer leader when the adult leader leaves with the child or youth.
108. Clear communication notifying the staff that the child/youth arrived safely and is no longer under their care or supervision.
109. **Discipline:** When children or youth act out during church events, ministry leaders and volunteers will take care to address the misbehavior in ways that are consistent with the following guidelines:
 110. Corporal punishment is not permitted (spanking, pinching, hitting).
 111. Parents are to be informed whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior develops.
 112. An aide or parent should be involved in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
 113. Appropriate types of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff annually.
 114. Whenever possible, leaders should address disruptive behavior by:
 - redirecting the child/youth to another activity
 - helping the child/youth focus on a more acceptable behavior
 - taking the child/youth aside if another adult volunteer/staff person is available to assist
115. **Electronic Communications:** Social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most youth. In light of the Covid-19 crisis beginning in March 2020, video-conferencing is also a widely used tool. Electronic communications offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of ministry with young people. However, their improper use can produce serious consequences. The following practices and guidelines establish healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication.
116. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers may communicate with youth via text or other digital communication unless the parent or guardian of the youth has opted out of such communication. Digital communications shall be limited to topics of program and pastoral care.
117. Clergy, staff, and volunteers may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, sexually oriented, coercive, shaming, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with youth involved in ministry activities.
118. Photographic images of a youth may not be shared or posted digitally without written parental consent. Any photograph that compromises the dignity or privacy of a youth should never be shared or posted.
119. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers shall use prudent judgment contacting youth through social media, including Realm/ACS.
120. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers may engage in the “virtual ministry” practice of videoconferencing with youth when necessary. Parents and guardians will be informed of video-conference gatherings. Security precautions should be taken to prevent unauthorized entry into video chat rooms (“zoom-bombing”). Whenever possible, two adults should be present for video-conference meetings.
121. When ongoing pastoral communication is private (i.e.: Emails, Facebook Messages, Texting, etc.) – who they are with, and their frequency should be disclosed to a supervisor.
122. Any inappropriate material posted by any participant in online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.

123. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers driving on ministry business are to avoid mobile phone use—including hands-free—when transporting children, while driving in heavy traffic, during hazardous weather conditions, or when it violates local law. Clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers are never to send or read text messages while driving. These expectations should be set with parent carpool drivers as well.
124. **Off-site contact:** When off-site, clergy, staff, and adult volunteers shall conduct themselves according to all of the same policies as when on church property, and be mindful of the increased risk of off-site interaction with youth.
125. The following forms of outside contact are appropriate:
126. Taking groups of youth on an organized outing
127. Attending public sporting events/performances
128. Attending functions and/or offering pastoral care at a youth's home, with parent or guardian present.
129. Hiring youth members of the church to work as babysitters does increase certain risks, which must be managed with care and intention. Clergy, staff, and volunteers may hire youth to babysit with permission of the youth's parent or guardian.
130. The following forms of outside contact are inappropriate:
131. Taking a single youth on an outing by themselves. In the rare occurrence this is necessary, such as when a child requires a ride home in inclement weather, express permission must be requested from the parent or guardian.
132. Visiting one youth in the youth's home, without a parent present
133. Entertaining one youth in the home of staff or volunteers.
134. A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers.

IV. Response and Reporting

Once a clergy member, ministry leader, adult volunteer, minor, or parent has expressed a concern or made an allegation about the treatment of a minor or vulnerable adult, swift and determined action must be taken to reduce any subsequent risk or additional harm to the victim, to the accused staff member or volunteer, and to the organization.

Because The First Congregational Church of Western Springs is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that everyone actively participates in the protection of youths. In the event that a Clergy member, ministry leader, or adult volunteer observes any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations on the part of others, it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations.

A. Mandatory Reporting:

135. All clergy, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers must follow Illinois State mandatory reporting requirements ([outlined in detail here](#)). Suspected abuse or neglect of a youth—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by employees, volunteers, or others—must be reported to state authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice. The number for the Illinois Child Abuse Hotline is 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873).
136. All staff and adult volunteers shall receive training to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. They will:

137. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
138. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youth and vulnerable adults against abuse.
139. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
140. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.
141. In addition to reporting to state authorities, Clergy, staff, and adult volunteers are required to report any suspected or known abuse of youth perpetrated by staff or volunteers directly to leadership so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk. Reports of suspected or known abuse may be made confidentially to the following:
 - a. Immediate supervisor/ ministry leader
 - b. Clergy
 - c. Moderator and/or Associate Moderator
142. The First Congregational Church of Western Springs cooperates fully with the authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse. Any clergy, ministry leader, or adult volunteer shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any investigation of alleged abuse. Failure to cooperate fully may be grounds for termination.

B. Guidelines for Ministry Leaders and/or Adult Volunteers responding to suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations:

143. Interrupt the behavior.
144. Report the behavior to a supervising ministry leader and/or clergy member.
145. If the report is about a ministry leader or clergy member, contact the Moderator and/or Associate Moderator.
146. Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
147. Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

C. Guidelines for the Safe Church Team in responding to allegations of abuse and/or misconduct:

148. First, determine if the youth is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.
149. If the incident has not yet been reported to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, a member of the Safe Church Team must do so immediately.
150. Suspend the accused employee or volunteer until the investigation is completed.
151. Thoroughly review the report/allegations and consult with appropriate external support (Chicago Metropolitan Association Minister and/or Conference Minister of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ; Insurer).
152. Meet with the employee or volunteer who has been reported, if advisable.
153. Review the file of the employee or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
154. Notify parents and/or guardians.
155. Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.
156. When appropriate, a member of the clergy shall offer pastoral support to the victim and/or reporter.
157. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.

158. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution.
159. Document the report and any disciplinary action.
160. Submit all related documents to the Executive Committee for review.
161. Cooperate with the authorities if an investigation is undertaken.

D. Guidelines for Ministry Leaders and/or Adult Volunteers responding to Youth-to-Youth Abuse and Sexual Misconduct:

Youth-to-youth sexual misconduct can include inappropriate touching, exposing body parts, using sexualized language, sending graphic images via text or other electronic media, making threats of sexual activity, engaging in sexual activity, and similar types of interactions.

Additional youth-to-youth abuse can include hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, games of Truth or Dare, singling out one child for different treatment, and ridicule or humiliation.

162. If a ministry leader or adult volunteer observes abuse and/or sexual activity between youth, the youth should be immediately separated.
163. The supervising ministry leader must be informed of the incident.
164. The ministry leader or adult volunteer must complete an Incident Report including observations and response.
165. In the case of abuse of any kind, inform the Safe Church team of the incident and inform the parents of the youth involved.
166. In the case of sexual activity between youth, inform the parents or legal guardians of the youth involved.
167. In some cases, if the problem is recurring, discipline may be required including not allowing one or both youths to return to the program.

E. Guidelines for Safe Church Team Response to Youth-to-Youth Abuse or Misconduct:

168. Meet with the staff who reported the sexual activity to gather information.
169. Confirm that the youth involved have been separated or placed under increased supervision.
170. Review the steps taken by the staff on duty.
171. Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.
172. Meet with parents of the youths involved.
173. Determine what actions should be taken to make sure there is no recurrence, including assessing the suitability of the program for the children involved.
174. Notify the proper authorities as appropriate.
175. Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident.
176. Review the need for additional supervision, revised policies or procedures, and the need for additional training.

V. Screening

Clergy, staff, and volunteers may not have engaged in, have unresolved accusations of, or been convicted of youth and vulnerable adult abuse, indecency with a youth and vulnerable adult, or injury to a youth and vulnerable adult.

1. Reference Checks: Clergy & Staff

Reference checks shall be conducted for all applicants prior to employment. A minimum of three references is recommended, including two professional and one personal reference. Offers of employment should not be made until the required references are contacted. Completed

reference check forms should be kept in the applicant's personnel file if the applicant is employed.

2. Reference Checks: Adult Volunteers

Reference checks shall be conducted for all adult volunteers who work closely and extensively with youth, such as PF Adult Leaders. A minimum of three references is recommended and must be conducted via telephone. References shall be kept on record.

Reference checks shall not be conducted for adult volunteers who work with youth and vulnerable adults on a limited basis - i.e., parent volunteers who chaperone or carpool for a one-time event such as a Confirmation outing.

3. Background Checks: Clergy, Staff, and Volunteers

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks should be conducted for all clergy, staff, and adult volunteers at least every three years. Staff and volunteers shall receive an electronic consent form and submit this form electronically before background checks are completed. Generally, the information should be obtained prior to employment of the applicant or commencement of the volunteer responsibilities; however, if the length of time needed to receive the results of these checks is unduly long, The First Congregational Church of Western Springs could have the applicant start the position and remain in the position until the criminal background results are obtained and reviewed. New staff and volunteers should not be left unsupervised with youths until the criminal history results are returned. The background check(s) shall include the following:

177. National multi-state criminal records search
178. National sex offender registry search;
179. Social security number trace and alias search; and
180. County criminal records search for the county of residence (for Plymouth Fellowship Adult Volunteers) or for the counties of residence for the past seven years (for paid childcare workers and staff)
181. Motor Vehicle Report (for Plymouth Fellowship Adult Volunteers and any other staff or volunteer who will be transporting minors by automobile or van for church activities).

4. Youth Helpers

Sunday School teachers who are minors are not required to undergo background checks. They will receive appropriate training and active monitoring from a Ministry Leader to ensure their compliance with all appropriate policies and behavioral expectations.

5. Employment Decisions

182. Background check reports shall be reviewed initially by the Business Manager of The First Congregational Church. Unremarkable, complete background reports shall be designated as "approved for hire" and filed accordingly by the Business Manager. For clergy or staff employment decisions, a full copy of the background check report shall also be given to the Moderator and retained in the employee's permanent file by the Moderator.
183. For existing clergy and staff undergoing an updated background check (every three years), and for all child care workers and volunteers, their completed reports with minor, non-felony convictions or other minor exceptions may be approved and filed by the Business Manager, or may be brought to the attention of clergy for consultation,

according to the judgment of the Business Manager, nature of the exception, and proposed or ongoing responsibilities of the volunteer or staff. Completed reports, which indicate a felony record, or serious, recent or frequent driving violations shall be brought to the SafeChurch team. This team shall review the background check report according to the guidance in the following two paragraphs and determine if the applicant is eligible for employment as clergy, staff, or volunteer and, if so, whether any limitations on their employment are appropriate.

184. When a criminal record exists, the committee shall consider the seriousness of the crime, statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors, length of time since the last offense, pattern of criminal activity, and activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense or offenses occurred. *Conviction* for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to employment or volunteer work with children: violent crimes, sexual assault, sexual abuse of a minor, neglect of a minor, physical abuse of a minor, and felony drug offenses.
185. Applicants convicted of felony driving offenses within the past five years and/or two or more moving violations within the last 12 months may not be hired for any position involving the transportation of youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of moving violations, the applicant may be allowed to submit to a new background check after one year, and may then be permitted to transport youth if they have not incurred additional moving violations.
186. Following the review, the Business Manager shall either electronically sign and date an “approved for hire” indicator that becomes part of the applicant’s permanent electronic profile, or shall electronically sign and date an indicator to “take pre-adverse action”. Where required by law, the Business Manager will then communicate the mandated information to the applicant regarding results of background checks which resulted in their lack of acceptability for the position.

VI. Training

Each new employee and volunteer shall receive a copy of this SafeChurch policy and receive appropriate training within 30 days of assuming duties. Training shall be renewed every three years. Records shall be maintained by a staff member designated by the Safe Church Team. Training records shall be reviewed annually by a member of the Safe Church Team.

Abuse prevention curriculum shall include a review of expected conduct, policies, and procedures defined in this policy, explanation of procedures for reporting violations of standards of conduct and suspected child abuse, explanation of Mandated Reporter obligations, identifying and managing high-risk situations, and physical security procedures.

Appendix: Organizations operating within The First Congregational Church of Western Springs facility

The First Congregational Church of Western Springs is not only concerned for the safety of children participating with church-sponsored programs, but for the safety of all children. Accordingly, church-related organizations and events such as The First Congregational Church of Western Springs Preschool and the Woman’s Society Rummage Sale, third-party organizations such as the Boy Scouts, and tenants such as the Western Springs School of Talent

Education must adhere to practices and policies that attend to the safety of children and vulnerable adults at all times.

- The First Congregational Church of Western Springs Preschool shall abide by all policies and procedures set forth by the Department of Children and Family Services.
- The Woman's Society shall abide by all relevant policies set forth in this document.
- The Boy Scout Troop 12 shall abide by all policies set forth by the Boy Scouts of America.
- The Western Springs School of Talent Education shall abide by all relevant policies set forth in this document, including background checks and SafeChurch training.

Recognizing the nature of music lessons, adult teachers shall be permitted to teach minors one-on-one. However, one-on-one lessons must take place in rooms with windows and a clear line of sight from the hallway. Parents must sign a waiver releasing The First Congregational Church of Western Springs from any liability if students are to receive one-on-one music lessons on church property.