

# Madison Christian Community

## Parish Protection Program for Children and Youth: Standards of Behavior, Policies & Procedures

### Introduction to Policies & Procedures

As Christians and as members of the Madison Christian Community we affirm the following values:

- We are called to love, care for, and protect all persons, especially children and others who are vulnerable.
- We are called to provide safe places of justice and hospitality where all of God’s children might gather to know and to be known in community and by God.
- We are called to celebrate children and to pro-actively protect and heal those who are in danger or have been hurt.
- Our church is a holy place of sanctuary where all can gather for worship, study and service with the assurance that they are safe and secure in the community of faith.

One of the ways we live out these values is through the Parish Protection Program. The Program guides us in our ongoing efforts to be and to create a safe, vital, healthy community through its screening and orientation process for volunteers, and by holding MCC members accountable to simple guidelines that ensure safety and security for all.

## Standards of Behavior

- 1) **Open Door Policy:** Always work with youth in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter. Always welcome and encourage parents and guardians to attend classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, and events.
- 2) **Dual Leadership:** Two adult leaders will be present at all activities involving children or youth.
 

Private consultations between an adult and a minor shall occur in a room with a window in the door and when another adult is in the general area. Counseling should be as confidential as possible without sacrificing safety.

Planned individual contact between an adult and a minor outside the church building shall occur only in public places and with prior consent of the minor and verbal or written consent of the parent or guardian.
- 3) **Adult Leadership:** The following chart outlines minimal levels of adult supervision recommended for children and youth ministry activities that take place **away** from the Madison Christian Community. The

**Dual Leadership Standard** applies to these activities as well.

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Counselor/Youth ratio Guidelines</u>
0-5 years	Minimum of 2 adults and consent of parent/legal guardian plus one additional adult for every 5 children beyond 10 (15 youth = 3 adults)
6-8 years	Minimum of 2 adults plus 1 additional adult for every 6 youth beyond 12 (18 youth = 3 adults)
9-14 years	Minimum of 2 adults plus 1 additional adult for every 8 youth beyond 16 (24 youth = 3 adults etc.)
15-18 years	Minimum of 2 adults plus 1 additional adult for every 10 youth beyond 20 (30 youth = 3 adults)

- 4) **Five Year Separation Rule:** When using high school students or young adults as Sunday School Teachers or Youth Leaders there shall be a five year separation in age between these young persons and those they are supervising or leading.
- 5) **Transportation:** Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. During events, drivers shall avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult unless prior written or verbal approval has been obtained from the parent or guardian.
- 6) **Respect of Privacy:** Adult leaders and staff need to respect the privacy of minors and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Situations requiring privacy include using rest rooms, changing clothes and taking showers. If an adult accompanies a small child to the bathroom, the outer door of the bathroom will be propped open. If an adult accompanies a child into the stall of the restroom, two adults should be present. Adult leaders and staff must wear pajamas or similar clothing when sleeping and swimming suits when swimming.
- 7) **Overnights:** When an activity/trip involves overnights, all activities shall be conducted in an open area with a minimum of two adult supervisors.
- 8) **Separate Accommodations:** A minimum of two adult leaders will be present at an overnight activity.

If youth participants include males and females, the adult leaders should be males and females. Should these

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adults be husband and wife, a third adult advisor is suggested.

One minor shall not sleep alone in a tent, bedroom, or hotel room with one adult, unless the adult is their parent. When minors and adults share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room, there should be at least three individuals per room. An adult must not occupy the same bed as a minor unless it is the minor's parent or legal guardian.

Males and females will sleep in separate rooms at events and have separate access to bathroom facilities. When separate shower facilities are not available, separate shower schedules for males and females will be established.

Parents will be advised of the names of the adult leaders for any youth related trips and will be notified of any changes in adult leadership as soon as possible.

- 9) **Housing:** When private homes are used for overnight events, the youth director and/or pastor will make final approval of all adults involved. At least two youth will be assigned to each home.
- 10) **Secret Activities:** All aspects of the church program are open to observation by parents and church members. No one who works with children and youth will conduct secret activities or ask that activities be kept secret.
- 11) **Constructive Discipline:** Discipline used in church activities shall be constructive, respectful and reflect Christian values. Physical, sexual or emotional punishment is not permitted. No child or youth shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any form of physical punishment. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insult or shouting. Never deny basic necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter or medical care. Teachers, youth leaders and others leading any activity with children or youth are encouraged to listen to the child or youth, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs or give alternate choices.
- 12) **Hazing and Harassment:** Physical or verbal hazing, harassment, and initiations are prohibited at all church activities. This includes the use of put-downs and excessive teasing.
- 13) **Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco:** The use of tobacco, alcohol or any illicit drugs or over the counter or prescription drugs not used for their intended purpose, (except for wine used in communion) shall not be used by any youth while participating in any congregation sponsored youth event. Use of such products will result

in the offending youth being removed from the activity and sent home. Parents will be notified of the offense.

- 14) **Dating:** Adult leaders or staff will not date or be romantically involved with children or youth.
- 15) **Sexual Activity:** No sexual contact is permitted between adults and minors or between minors and minors. Sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual material, the exposure of sexual parts of the body or other sexually abusive behaviors are prohibited.
- 16) **Youth Group Activities:** Physical contact such as wrestling, horseplay, sardines or other high contact games are not appropriate recreational activities. No adult leader will initiate or encourage physical or intimate contact with children or youth. Setting boundaries is the responsibility of the adults. The Youth Group is a group ministry. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the times listed in congregation publications. No pairing, or otherwise separating off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds is permitted without adult supervision.
- 17) **Youth Members of Boards and Committees:** No youth member of a Board, Committee, Subcommittee, or Task Force, shall be in attendance at a meeting with less than three adult members present, without the presence or prior consent of the youth's parent or legal guardian.
- 18) **Leaving and Locking:** The last three people, including the staff person locking the door, will leave our facilities together. We avoid situations where one adult and one youth or child is left at the facility's door waiting to be picked up by parents at the end of an evening activity. Parents are encouraged to respect concluding times.
- 19) **Nursery:** The church nursery will have an identification system that links each child and his/her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) so that no unauthorized person may take the child without consent of the parents or legal guardians. The nursery is encouraged to have two adults or one adult and one teenager on duty at all times of operation.
- 20) **Visitors On-site:** The staff or volunteers serving our church shall be aware of who is visiting our facilities. Visitors are welcomed and shall be accompanied on their visit to the areas frequented by our youth and children by an appropriate person.
- 21) **Reporting Responsibilities:** Any inappropriate conduct or suspected violation of these standards shall be reported to the Parish Protection Advisory Group or a staff person. If you are unsure whether or not your

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suspected case would violate the standards outlined here, it is strongly recommended that you err on the side of caution and report your suspicion immediately.

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Screening and Orientation Process**

There are three steps involved with completing the Parish Protection Screening and Orientation Process: Application, Memorandum of Understanding, and Orientation.

Volunteers who do not complete this screening and orientation process within six months will be relieved of their duties until they complete the three steps.

The Parish Protection Advisory Group reserves the right to ask volunteers to re-do the entire process if circumstances warrant it.

### **Step 1: Application**

Applications will be mailed to new volunteers & staff and will be completed and returned within two weeks.

#### Timeline:

*Paid Staff* – prior to beginning service

*Regular Volunteer* – before or within the first two weeks of service

*One-Time Volunteer* – may be exempted as long as they are always accompanied by a staff member.

#### Processing:

Applications will be reviewed by a Parish Protection Advisory Group member.

1. All information will be kept in strictest confidence. All forms will be maintained in a locked filing cabinet.
2. Wisconsin Department of Justice Background checks will be conducted by a pastor.
3. Personal references will be contacted by a MCC Staff Person.
4. If information is revealed in this process that draws the applicant's fitness for ministry with children and youth into question, the process outlined under "Handling Questionable Background Information" (see next page) will be followed.
5. Background checks will be conducted every three years for as long as the volunteer continues to be actively involved with children and/or youth or as long as the staff member is employed.

6. Once applications are reviewed, applicants will be informed of the outcome.

### **Step 2: Memorandum of Understanding**

1. Volunteers must review the Standards of Behavior and sign the Memorandum of Understanding indicating their agreement with our policies and procedures and their understanding of the importance of keeping children and youth and our entire community as safe as possible.
2. The Memorandum of Understanding will be returned with the application or within two weeks of turning in the application.
3. Volunteers will be expected to complete a new Memorandum of Understanding yearly.

### **Step 3: Orientation**

1. Applicants who are approved will attend an Orientation session.
2. Orientation sessions will be offered in September, January and June as needed. Ideally, this Orientation would be completed before the staff person or volunteer begins his/her work with children or youth. If this is not possible, all staff and volunteers must attend a training session at the next offered session.
3. The purpose of the Orientation is to share information and provide a forum for an open, guided discussion about the value of the Parish Protection Program for the health and vitality of our community. The curriculum may include:
  - a. Reflecting on the scripture 'let the children come to me' and how disruptive it is to children's lives when they experience a place as unsafe.
  - b. Learning how to recognize signs of abuse and how to report suspected abuse whether church related or from other parts of a person's life.
  - c. Discussing boundaries and how clear boundaries create more trust and freedom.
  - d. Applying concepts from Universal Precautions in health care to Parish Protection. We do what we do not out of mistrust of individuals but rather to promote a healthy and vital community. No one can easily identify a potential perpetrator, so there are some things we expect everyone to do to make our church a safe place.
  - e. Considering personal responsibility as a member of this community in making children and all other members of the community feel safe.

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Other training opportunities may be made available from time to time or as needed. The Parish Protection Advisory Group reserves the right to require additional continuing education as needed.

### Handling Questionable Background Information

Employers may only refuse to hire a qualified applicant because of a pending charge or conviction for an offense that is substantially related to the particular job. It is wise and ethical to apply this same standard to volunteers. A recommended list of criminal convictions that would prohibit one from working with children and youth are those listed in Section 48.65 (1m) (g) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

When a person's application form, references and/or records check indicate there may be reasons this person should not work with children or youth, further information will be gathered before a decision is made. What follows is our procedure for handling questionable applications to help ensure that all applicants are treated fairly.

1. A MCC pastor will be the only person who will conduct background checks.
2. If questionable information is revealed, the pastor will contact the individual with the questionable background information and explain that there is something in the background information which may disqualify the individual from working with children and youth.
3. If there was a criminal conviction, the pastor will ask for information about the nature of the crime in order to determine if the crime was one that would prohibit the individual from working with children or youth. This information will be requested only to determine if the conviction is substantially related to the position.
4. The pastor conducting the records check will also ask what type of rehabilitation efforts have been made by the individual and request written permission to consult with the individual's counselors, therapists, or other professionals who have helped in the rehabilitation process using the **Confidential Information Request Form**.
5. The pastor will contact the Insurance Company holding our building insurance policy if the questionable information being researched has to do with sexual misconduct.
6. The pastor will consult with the individual's additional references, which may include counselors, therapists, law enforcement officers, legal counselor, social worker, and with a lawyer for recommendations.
7. After the necessary information has been gathered, the pastor will make a presentation to the Parish Protection Advisory Group.
8. The Advisory Group will make a determination

about the individual's ability to work with children or youth based on the information gathered, nature of the criminal conviction, goals of the program, the Recommended Standards of Behavior as well as other liability, and safety concerns. Successful rehabilitation does not guarantee a person the right to work with children or youth. The possible decisions regarding the individual's suitability to work with children and youth are: no, yes with restrictions, or yes.

9. The person will be informed of the decision made by the Advisory Group.

### Record Keeping

The following information will be maintained for each volunteer or staff member:

- application form
- results from WI Department of Justice if the background check reveals any issues
- notes, etc. from interview if one is conducted
- notes, etc. from references
- proof of training participation
- signed statement of understanding
- information on any questionable cases and their resolutions.

### Confidentiality

The credibility of the Parish Protection Program depends on confidentiality. All people involved with handling personnel records and discussing problem cases understand the confidentiality expectations and have signed a Confidentiality Statement to this effect. Confidentiality means that:

- Information is not shared from the application forms, references, or records checks with anyone other than those directly entrusted with reviewing this information.
- Paperwork related to the Parish Protection Program is carefully handled and not left out in common view. Paperwork is kept in a locked file when not being used.

While the results of the records checks are legally public information, as a courtesy, they will be treated as confidential. If someone asks for the results of a check, they will be advised as to how they might get the information from the Department of Justice.

### When Inappropriate Behavior is Suspected

If a volunteer or paid staff person is suspected of inappropriate behavior (ie. physical, sexual, emotional, verbal abuse, threats or intimidation), the following procedure will be followed to evaluate the impact of this behavior on that person's suitability to work with children and youth.

- If anyone suspects inappropriate behavior toward children or youth on the part of MCC staff or

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volunteers, that person is strongly urged to speak to a member of the Parish Protection Advisory Group as soon as possible following the incident and to make their allegation in writing using the Incident Report Form. The Parish Protection Advisory Group recommends that an Incident Report Form be completed and submitted to them within 24 hours of the incident or knowledge of the incident whenever possible. All allegations will be handled with utmost concern for everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

- 1.a. If the incident involves a member of the Parish Protection Advisory Group, the person in question will report to a different group member and will not be involved with the incident's evaluation procedure.
- If the person who suspects inappropriate behavior is not comfortable speaking to a member of the Parish Protection Advisory Group they are urged to speak to either of the pastors, or the president of the MCC.
- A member of the Parish Protection Advisory Group will notify the parents or guardians of the children or youth involved in the allegation that one has been made.
- All incidents involving children and youth will be reported to the Dane County Department of Health and Family Services (608) 261-4973 either by the person who witnessed or suspects the inappropriate behavior or by one of the pastors at the MCC. (Under Wisconsin law Clergy are mandated reporters).
- A member of the Parish Protection Advisory Group will also contact our insurance carrier, seek legal counsel and contact the appropriate Ecclesiastical body – the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin (ELCA) (608) 270-0201 or the Southwest Wisconsin Association office (UCC) (608) 244-3350 to notify them that an allegation has been made and is being reviewed.
- The Parish Protection Advisory Group will review the allegation to determine if it substantially relates to youth safety and/or the work the individual is performing using the Recommended Standards of Behavior and the Wisconsin Statutes as a basis for evaluation.
- If the Parish Protection Advisory Group finds that the behavior does not put children, youth or other adults at risk or raise safety concerns, and the insurance carrier agrees in cases involving alleged sexual misconduct, they will have a conversation with the individual whose behavior was called into question about steps to resolve the problem.
- If the Parish Protection Advisory Group finds that the behavior raises children and youth safety concerns, the individual whose behavior was called into question will be suspended until the circumstances surrounding the allegation are reviewed. Other staff and volunteers will be notified of the suspension and ongoing process on a need-to-know basis. Utmost care and concern will be taken to protect the

confidentiality of the children and youth involved as well as that of the alleged perpetrator. Pastoral care will be provided to all parties.

- After reviewing additional evidence gathered, the committee involved will remove the individual if evidence shows there are child or youth safety concerns.
- Other staff and volunteers will be notified of the person's removal on a need-to-know basis.
- All Parish Protection Advisory Group actions will be carefully documented using the Incident Report Form and Alleged Incident Follow-up Report Form.

### **When Legal or Other Action is Pending**

When legal action is pending against a staff person, volunteer or applicant, a designated MCC staff person will contact our insurance company for any legal action related to sexual misconduct. In all cases the Parish Protection Advisory Group will use the **Wisconsin Statutes** and the **Recommended Standards of Behavior** to evaluate the impact of alleged behavior on the adult's suitability to work with children and youth.

If the legal action pending would impact the adult's suitability for working with children, the following process will be followed:

1. The individual or his/her application will be suspended until the case is resolved.
2. Only people who might be directly involved with the person involved in legal action will be notified of legal action. (Staff, other volunteers, parents etc.)
3. At the conclusion of the legal action, the Parish Protection Advisory Group will meet to review the outcome. Usually the individual would be reinstated if found innocent and removed if found guilty.

### **Definitions**

**Child** a person age 0 to 10 years

**Youth** a person age 11 to 17 years

**Adult** a person 18 years of age and over

**Volunteer** any adult who has been a member of the MCC for at least 6 months and who is working without compensation with children and youth as a Sunday School teacher, confirmation mentor, youth leader, nursery volunteer, event chaperone or in any other ongoing capacity

### **Parish Protection Advisory Group Membership**

At least one MCC pastor, the Director of Youth Ministry, the Director of Children's Ministry, and at least one MCC member at large.

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