

# **SOUTH CHURCH IN ANDOVER SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

**Approved June 26, 2006**

## **Statement of Purpose**

The congregation, pastors and staff of South Church in Andover aspire to be members of a Christ-centered fellowship where all can seek a closer relationship with God in a trusting, nurturing place. As part of this mission, one of South Church's goals is to provide a safe environment for all children and youth entrusted to our care as they participate in our programs and use our facilities. We also want our church to be a haven free of sexual misconduct and harassment. To help reach these goals we have adopted the following policies and procedures to reduce the possibility of child sexual or physical abuse, sexual misconduct and harassment of any type from occurring in our church. Educating our church community on topics of abuse, sexual misconduct and harassment will better enable us to recognize potential problems and the implementation of prudent guidelines should help further safeguard our children, youth, members, and visitors. While these policies and guidelines cannot anticipate and prevent all misfortune, they can state a purpose and provide guidance to achieve the purpose. These policies express our keen interest in protecting our children and youth while maintaining the trusting atmosphere of South Church for the entire congregation and our visitors.

## **Screening Church Employees and Volunteers**

South Church welcomes the involvement of church staff and volunteers in the Sunday school and youth programs at various levels of commitment, provided they have been members for at least six months. In rare circumstances, exceptions to this policy can be made by the Moderator in consultation with the Advocacy Panel. The Director of Youth Ministries and the Christian Education Director shall be primarily responsible for screening applicants for such staff and volunteer positions, including their respective boards. All volunteers must be careful not to place themselves in a situation where they will have unsupervised contact with minors. There are two levels of screening: primary and secondary.

### **Primary Screening Procedure**

Church staff, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, and all other volunteers who will have frequent contact with children and/or youth must undergo the primary screening procedure by reviewing this policy and the attached guidelines, signing a policy acknowledgment form, and completing the attached survey and the Criminal Offender Records Investigation (CORI) check (a criminal record will not automatically disqualify an applicant.) Once the information is reviewed, clarified if necessary, and verified by the Senior Pastor or his designee, the volunteer or staff member will be considered an authorized volunteer or employee.

### **Secondary Screening Procedure**

Volunteers who will have limited contact with children or youth over the course of a year, such as the occasional nursery assistant or youth group driver, should review this policy and the attached guidelines and return the signed policy acknowledgment form to the church office. In advance of each trip during which they will be driving, volunteer drivers will also give the Director of Youth Ministries or his designee a copy of their driver's license.

## **Education and Training**

The Senior Pastor will be responsible for educating volunteers, staff and church members regarding this policy. As part of each new church employee's orientation to South Church the Senior Pastor will educate the employee about this policy and his or her responsibility to abide by it. In addition, the Senior Pastor will ensure that the Christian Education Board and the Youth Board define and implement guidelines designed to further the intent of this policy, and educate volunteers on these guidelines through regular training programs. These guidelines will be appended to this policy and subject to annual review by the Advocacy Panel and the Board of Trustees. The Senior Pastor will also ensure that the Board of Trustees design and maintain procedures related to building use which upholds this policy. Annual training programs will teach church staff and authorized volunteers how to report possible child sexual or physical abuse, sexual misconduct, or harassment of any type to the Advocacy Panel and how to discuss

questionable behavior with the Advocacy Panel.

### **Maintenance of Records**

Records of all actions required by this policy and any material pertinent to it, including CORI checks, surveys, applications, and acknowledgment forms shall be kept for a legally appropriate time in a secure and confidential place as determined by the Senior Pastor and the Advocacy Panel.

### **Advocacy Panel**

#### **Purpose**

An Advocacy Panel shall be established for two purposes. First, any member of the South Church community who believes they may have information about a matter involving child sexual or physical abuse, sexual misconduct and/or harassment of any type, must report the allegation or concern to the Advocacy Panel or to a church staff member who will immediately contact the Advocacy Panel. Following the guidelines titled, Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Child Sexual or Physical Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Harassment of Any Type, the Panel will prudently determine, to the best of its ability, the facts of matters brought to their attention and, where necessary, recommend remedial actions to the Moderator. Secondly, the Panel will serve to support staff members charged with confirming the suitability of volunteers.

#### **Panel Membership**

The Panel will be composed of three church members, including at least one female and one male, appointed by the Moderator for indefinite terms. The Panel will be a formally constituted church committee and its members may serve on other boards. Panel members will be noted on documents related to this policy and changes will be announced promptly in the Bulletin and on the South Church web site.

### **REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE, SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND HARASSMENT OF ANY TYPE**

- 1 Church staff and board members must report allegations to the Advocacy Panel.
- 2 The Advocacy Panel will take all allegations seriously, and will respond to allegations with appropriate respect for privacy and confidentiality.
- 3 Care and safety of alleged victims and their families are the first priority. The Advocacy Panel will engage whatever pastoral resources are needed.
- 4 The Advocacy Panel will document all activity involved in handling the incident noting the date, time, persons involved as well as a summary of the matter. All documentation will be held as confidential.
  - a All incidents involving children shall be reported to the Department of Social Services, 1-800-792-5200, the UCC insurance Advisory Board, 1-301-990-3500, the Moderator and the church's attorney.
  - b Should it become necessary, full cooperation will be given to civil authorities under guidance of the church's attorney. If permitted, the attorney will be present while any investigative questions from the police or social service agency are being answered by any person involved in the incident.
5. When questionable or inappropriate behavior related to possible child sexual or physical abuse, sexual misconduct or harassment of any type is observed, it should be reported to the Advocacy Panel. The incident will be documented by the Advocacy Panel which will prudently determine, to the best of its members' abilities, the facts of matters brought to their attention and, where necessary will make a report and recommend remedial actions to the Moderator.
6. The Advocacy Panel will treat the accused with dignity and respect and offer support. If the accused is a member of the church staff, he/she should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is completed. If the accused is a paid employee, a decision will be made to maintain or suspend his/her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
7. The Advocacy Panel will, as it deems necessary and prudent, issue a public statement to inform the congregation as well as to respond to press inquiries. The statement should communicate that the church

regards these allegations seriously and offers responsible action, concern and support for all involved. No details of the allegation will be released. The Advocacy Panel will not deny that the incident occurred, assign blame or minimize the situation (e.g. "It wasn't all that serious.") No statement will be issued until it has been approved by the Moderator and the church's attorney.

## **Church School and Youth Ministry Guidelines for the Care of Children, Youth and Adults**

### **The Two Adult Rule**

All our children and youth in the Church School or Youth Ministry program shall be under the care and supervision of two adults, one of whom may be a trained high school aide, age 18 or older. Further, no staff, teacher, or authorized volunteer, or anyone else working with our children or youth should place himself or herself in a compromising situation by being alone with a child, children, or youth out of sight of other teachers, staff, volunteers, or parents except in a pastoral situation that requires confidentiality and an individual meeting. In this case, the staff person or authorized volunteer shall inform one other staff person of his or her whereabouts, with whom he or she is meeting, and the scheduled meeting duration.

No staff, teacher or authorized volunteer shall be alone with a child or youth in the bathroom for purposes of toileting, clean up from craft projects, or care of illness or injury except when necessary. In this case, the bathroom door will be left open.

The shower facilities in the Youth Ministries Room are only to be used at designated times with adult permission and with at least two adults in close proximity.

Parents or guardians will not be permitted to leave children or youth at scheduled church activities unless two adults one of whom may be a trained high school aide age 18, or older are present.

In the case of a medical emergency where it is deemed a child or youth must be taken to a medical facility, the parent or guardian will be notified and asked to meet the child and accompanying adult at the facility as soon as possible.

### **Reporting Responsibilities**

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult worker and a child or youth shall be promptly reported to the Pastor, Associate Pastor, Superintendent of Church School, Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministries, or Advocacy Panel Member.

### **Overnight Rule**

All chaperones supervising overnight stays of Church children or youth shall have been cleared to do so by the Pastor or other designated official. At least two adult males will dorm in close proximity with boys and two adult females with girls. Further, a signed permission slip is required which lists the names of the chaperones to be present. In the event of an emergency, the Director of Youth Ministries may substitute a listed chaperone with a replacement chaperone.

### **Youth Members of Boards and Committees**

No youth member of a church board, committee, sub-committee, or task force shall be in attendance at a meeting with less than two adult members present, one of whom may be a trained high school aide, 18 or older, unless the meeting is taking place during regular business hours or during church time. In this case, at least two youth must be present and the meeting leader will inform a staff member of the nature of the meeting, the location, and who is attending.

### **Bathroom Supervision**

Normally, teachers or any classroom or youth volunteers who accompany a child to the bathroom should remain outside the bathroom while the child is inside.

If a child needs assistance with dressing, undressing, or clean-up two adults will be present, one of whom may be a trained high school aide.

If a child needs assistance with dressing, undressing, or clean-up, and only one adult is present, the door to the bathroom must be open.

If anything unusual occurred during this assistance, those present will write a note describing the help given and

persons present and hand it to a member of the pastoral staff at the close of the scheduled activity or church school that day.

If a teacher or aide is left alone in a classroom due to bathroom necessities, the teacher in the nearest or neighboring classroom should be informed, or the assistance of another adult solicited.

Diapering of infants and toddlers may be done in the nursery/classroom if two people are present, one of whom is an adult. As an alternative, a parent should be called to the nursery/classroom to do the diapering.

Children in grades 3-8 can use the bathrooms unescorted provided they move in pairs and they return within a reasonable time frame. This privilege can be granted or rescinded at the teacher's discretion.

### **Regarding Discipline**

The purpose of discipline with children or youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, and cooperation.

No child 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.

Teachers, advisors, adult workers, or aides helping in the classroom or during youth activities are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time outs or give appropriate alternative choices.

If a child or youth is disruptive, a teacher, aide, staff member, or other adult may be sent to locate the Director of Christian Education, Superintendent, Director of Youth Ministries or other church staff. If none are available, a parent should be contacted and brought to the room.

### **Youth Activities**

Setting boundaries and determining appropriate recreational activities is the responsibility of the adult leaders. No adult leader, staff or volunteer should initiate contact or encourage physical or intimate contact with youth. The Director of Youth Ministries is responsible for implementing and enforcing appropriate boundaries through education and training for youth, parents and adult leadership.

### **Group or Youth Fellowship**

Youth Fellowship is a group activity. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the times listed in church publications. No pairing, or otherwise separating off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds is permitted except with permission of the group leaders.

### **Drugs, Tobacco, Alcohol**

The use of any drugs, tobacco or alcoholic products on or in church facilities is not permitted. Any violations in this regard shall be promptly reported to Pastor, Associate Pastor, Superintendent of Church School, Director of Christian Education, or Director of Youth Ministries and acted on according to church protocol.

### **Transportation**

Church staff cannot transport children or youth between church and home. Transportation to and from church activities is the responsibility of each child's parent or guardian.

Specific guidelines related to the governance of the South Church youth program will be made available to all youth group participants. (See below.) Prior to an off-site activity, volunteer drivers must show a valid driver's license to the Director of Youth Ministries, Church School Superintendent, or other staff designee. Trips will leave from and return to the church.

Trained high school aides 18 years of age or older will not be permitted to transport youth unless they have the written permission of both the aide's and the youth's parent or guardian.

## **Guidelines for Youth Participation**

The Director of Youth Ministries will develop and conduct training for all staff, adult volunteers and interested youth over age 18 who wish to serve as trained aides, and for all youth interested in serving in the role Alpha Phi Chi or the role of mentors. Guidelines pertinent to youth programming that support our Safe Church Policy are outlined below.

### **Notification, Education, and Permission**

To ensure that all youth and youth parents/guardians are aware of the Safe Church Policy and the guidelines for

participating in the Youth Program, at the outset of the school year:

1. Youth Board will hold a meeting to outline and explain these policies and ask all constituencies to sign copies of them. Those not able to attend will be sent email communication and asked to send in signed copies of the forms.
2. Parents/guardians will also be asked to complete a general permission slip giving their agreement for allowing their children to participate in the programs and providing pertinent contact and medical information.

If a youth member's friend wants to participate in a South Church youth activity on a one time basis, his or her parent/guardian must sign a permission slip that includes pertinent contact and medical information.

### **Two Adult Rule**

At each youth event, we will make every effort to have two adults present as chaperones in addition to the Director of Youth Ministries.

### **Sign In/Sign Out**

When participating in youth events, youth must sign in and sign out with the designated adult.

### **Drop Off/Pick up**

Car pools must drop off and pick up youth from the doorway by the kitchen only. Youth must exit the church from this doorway only.

### **High School Attendance**

If high school students leave a youth meeting or event before the official ending time, they will not be allowed to return unless they receive special permission from the Youth Minister or adult leader.

### **Protocol for Infractions**

Any violation to the youth participation guidelines will be referred to the Youth Board for consideration.

### **Arrival /Departure**

Adult leaders and chaperones will be asked to arrive 10 minutes before scheduled events. They will be asked to remain at the close of a program until all participants have left. Parents/guardians will be encouraged to honor scheduled start and stop times.