

Winnetka Congregational Church

Safe Church Policy

The Winnetka Congregational Church (WCC) Mission Statement states in part that Church members seek to “weave the grace of God into the fabric of our relationships....” One example of this is the ethic of care we extend to Children so they may grow safe and strong in their faith. The purpose of this policy is to clearly articulate expectations for staff and church members to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of Children within our community of faith. As a Christian church, we commit to a ministry that demonstrates how we care for one another so that Children and those adults who work with them feel safe and protected at all times.

Definitions

- A. “Activity” means a program or event for Children sponsored by or under the control of Winnetka Congregational Church, regardless of whether it takes place on church premises or elsewhere.
- B. “Children” and “Child” refer to persons or a person until the age of 18 years old or graduation from high school, whichever occurs later. These words also refer to any persons without regard to age who are developmentally disabled.
- C. “Representative” includes both Volunteers and Personnel.
- D. “Volunteer” refers to a person eighteen years of age or older (18) who performs a service related to the mission and under the direction of Winnetka Congregational Church without receiving compensation in return.
- E. “Personnel” means any full-time or part-time employee of the Winnetka Congregational Church, including but not limited to the Pastoral Staff or Program Supervisors.
- F. “Pastoral Staff” includes any ministers of the Winnetka Congregational Church.
- G. “Program Supervisor” refers to a Winnetka Congregational Church employee who has primary responsibility for running one of the Church’s ministries, programs or events.
- H. “WCC Personnel Application and Disclosure Form” is the application used by Personnel to provide identification and consent to a background check that includes a review of sex offender registries and acknowledgement of awareness and understanding of the WCC Safe Church Policy.
- I. “WCC Volunteer Application” is the Winnetka Congregational Church Safe Church Policy – Volunteer Disclosure Form used by Volunteers to provide identification and consent to a background check that includes a review of sex offender registries and acknowledgement of awareness and understanding of the WCC Safe Church Policy.

- J. “Confirmand” is a participant in the WCC Confirmation Program and is a youth over the age of 12.
- K. “Mentor” is a Volunteer authorized by a parent or guardian to be engaged in the WCC Confirmation Program.
- L. “Confirmation Program” is a structured annual program in preparation for confirmation and church membership. The duration of the Confirmation Program is restricted to one program year running from September 1 through June 1.
- M. “Established Mentor-Confirmand Relationship” is the Volunteer and Confirmand counseling relationship established by the parent or guardian of the Confirmand and the Volunteer for purposes of completing the Activities under the WCC Confirmation Program.
- N. “Child Abuse” includes Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Neglect and Emotional Abuse:
1. Physical Abuse is any non-accidental act, which causes, or permits to be caused, injury to be intentionally inflicted upon a Child.
 2. Sexual Abuse is any act or interaction, with or without consent, even if initiated by the Child, which involves sexual contact, molestation, sexual exploitation, or other contact or activity of a sexual nature that is intended for the sexual gratification of a person responsible for the Child’s welfare.
 3. Neglect is when a person responsible for a Child’s welfare fails to provide for basic needs of food, appropriate clothing, shelter, or medical care, or when a person responsible for a Child’s welfare fails to provide adequate supervision.
 4. Emotional Abuse is any action that intentionally or through omission causes mental or emotional injury resulting in impairment to the Child’s growth, development or psychological functioning.
- O. “Sexual Harassment” refers to repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:
- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity.
 - Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or

- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church. It is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

P. "Sexual Exploitation" includes Sexual Harassment, sexual advances, and/or sexual contact between any Representative and Children of the Church.

Q. "DCFS" means the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Statement

As part of protecting the physical safety and nurturing the spiritual growth of Children, the church prohibits any forms of Child Abuse and Sexual Exploitation defined above between Representatives and Children. In addition, WCC prohibits Sexual Harassment of any kind among Representatives, between Representatives and Children as well as among Children. Finally, WCC prohibits Physical and Emotional Abuse among Children.

All members of the congregation are encouraged to seek out a pastor to ask questions about behaviors, language, or other evidence of seemingly improper interactions between Representatives and Children or among Children in our church. WCC pledges to respond to

allegations of prohibited behavior outlined in this Policy, discipline those persons who violate it as necessary, and follow mandated reporting guidelines according to Illinois law.

Scope

This policy governs Children and Representatives participating in any Activity, including but not limited to Christian education classes, nursery supervision, mentoring, counseling, planning meetings, social events, mission work, and music programs. Further, it covers transportation and communication between Representatives and Children. It also applies to Representatives who provide supervision of, have custody of, or otherwise have contact with Children as part of an Activity.

Screening, Prevention, and Education

A. Screening Procedures

1. At a minimum, all Personnel will be governed by this Policy and will provide identification and consent to a background check that includes a review of sex offender registries by completing the then current WCC Personnel Application and Disclosure Form. The completion of WCC Personnel Application and Disclosure Forms, including documentation of reference checks, will be tracked by the Director of Operations.
2. At a minimum, Volunteers governed by this Policy will provide identification and consent to a background check that includes a review of sex offender registries by completing the then current WCC Volunteer Application. The completion of WCC Volunteer Applications, including documentation of reference checks, will be tracked by the Program Supervisor.
3. Volunteers must be involved with WCC or be known to a WCC staff member for at least six (6) months prior to working with minors.
4. Personnel and Volunteers will complete training on the WCC Safe Church Policy. The completion of training by Volunteers will be tracked by the Program Supervisor. The completion of training by Personnel will be tracked by the Director of Operations.
5. The Human Resources Committee may require Representatives governed by this Policy to provide additional information and/or additional consents to carry out the purposes of this Policy.
6. Representatives whose background reveals any indication of Child Abuse will not be allowed to serve or participate in any Activity. An indication of Child Abuse includes identification of a person as a registered sex offender or when an investigation of an accusation by the proper authorities (e.g., DCFS) finds credible evidence supporting the investigation. In situations where the background check does not reveal an indication of Child Abuse but shows other concerning information, the case will be brought to the attention of the Human Resources Committee and will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
7. The Director of Operations will maintain signed copies of this Policy and the results of reference and background checks for all Personnel. The Program

Supervisor overseeing a Children and Youth Education program shall maintain such records for all Volunteers working with Children. All records shall be strictly confidential and may be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

8. All Representatives covered by this Policy shall submit to a background check as described above every three (3) years, or more frequently as appropriate.

B. Communication

1. Representatives' and Children's digital communication is shareable with others and is therefore not confidential. Representatives and Children are reminded that communication related to suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation outlined in this Policy apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. Finally, Representatives are strongly encouraged to use group communication with Children related to their participation in an Activity.
2. Representatives and Children are prohibited from recording or transmitting visual images in restrooms or other areas when privacy is expected.
3. No person at any time may access, display, produce, possess or distribute pornography on Church property or equipment.

C. Transportation

1. All persons providing transportation for Children must provide a copy of their driver's license and a copy of their insurance card to the WCC employee in charge of the Activity. Drivers may only transport the number of people based on the working seat belts in the vehicle and within the limits of their licensure.
2. Any professional transportation provider should be bonded and provide proof of insurance.
3. Representatives should avoid driving alone with one Child (other than with one's own child) unless prior parental consent is obtained.

D. Representatives' Acknowledgement and Education

1. Winnetka Congregational Church will provide a mandatory training program for its Personnel covering the topics of Child Abuse and safety.
2. Winnetka Congregational Church will provide training to educate Council members, and Volunteers assisting in educational or music ministries involving Children about this Policy.
3. All Representatives will provide written acknowledgement that they have reviewed this Policy and completed training.

Other Operational Procedures

In addition to the above Preventative policies, WCC sets forth the following procedures to guide appropriate interactions between Representatives and Children of our church:

A. Activities and Mentoring

1. **Two Adult Rule:** A minimum of two Representatives will be present at an Activity, except (a) in the event of an emergency, (b) for brief intervals, or (c) within the context of an established Mentor-Confirmand relationship.
2. **Rule of Three:** In the event that two Representatives are not available for an Activity, it is required that at least three individuals (at least one being a Volunteer or Personnel) be present at every Activity.
3. **Counseling of Children and mentoring of Children by Representatives** is to be done in such a way that the Representative and Child are both clearly visible from outside the room. If the use of a room with a closed door is necessary for confidentiality, it should be a room with an unobstructed window that allows for a clear view of the adult and Child. Representatives are also encouraged to meet with an individual Child in a public space such as a coffee shop.
4. For Activities that involve supervision of Children, Representatives should be at least five years older than the oldest Child they are supervising.
5. Established Mentor-Confirmand Relationships will not be subject to the Two Adult Rule or Rule of Three as long as a prior written approval of the minor's parent or guardian has been provided to the Program Supervisor. Activities under the confirmation program will be limited to the confirmation program year (September 1 through June 1). Mentors are also encouraged to meet with Confirmands in a public space such as a coffee shop. (reference form, attach)

B. Children's Assistance

Children under the age of eighteen (18) who are at least five years older than the oldest child they may supervise, will be allowed to assist at Activities as permitted by the Program Supervisor. Children providing such assistance at an Activity will not "count" toward the Two Adult Rule, but may help fulfill the Rule of Three, as outlined above .

C. Open Door/Plain View

1. In classrooms or other meeting spaces in which an Activity takes place, doors should contain unblocked clear glass windows, or top/bottom "Dutch doors" with the top door open, to allow for a clear view of the Activity. In the event a door does not contain a window, that door shall remain open during the Activity.
2. Door windows should not be obstructed during an Activity unless the room is being used as a dressing room.

D. Bathroom Visits:

1. Representatives should take care not to be alone with a Child in a bathroom with a closed door.
2. If a Representative escorts a Child to a bathroom, the Representative should prop open the door and remain outside. In the event a Child needs assistance in a bathroom, the Representative should leave the exterior and stall doors open while helping the Child.

E. Overnight Activities:

1. An Activity that involves an overnight stay shall be supervised by at least two Representatives and sufficient adult chaperones.
2. Males and females will have separate sleeping areas. If separate shower and bathroom facilities are not available for males and females, separate times for male and female use should be scheduled if practical. Likewise, Children and Representatives must shower at different times.
3. A Representative should not sleep in the same bed with a Child unless the Representative is an immediate family member of that Child.
4. The Program Supervisor shall obtain proper written consent/medical release forms from parents or guardians for each Child participating in an overnight Activity.

F. Alcohol, Tobacco and Controlled Substances

The use of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances is not allowed for Representatives or Children during any Activity. This includes any form of tobacco, including vaping and other forms of electronic cigarettes.

G. Discipline

The purpose of discipline is to teach appropriate behaviors and encourage the elimination of inappropriate ones, enabling Children to develop self-control. Representatives should model positive interactions and communications among themselves and with Children. Representatives should use appropriate verbal and non-verbal methods to reinforce positive behavior. Corporal punishment, or any form of punitive physical contact, is therefore prohibited.

Responding to Incidents and Reporting

Should any person governed by this Policy become aware of a suspected violation of the Policy, the first priority should be to insure the safety of the involved Child.

- A. If any member of the congregation or staff observes what they believe to be a criminal act involving a Child or Representative, they are advised to call the local police to investigate.
- B. If any member of the congregation or staff observes, or knows of, or is victim to prohibited conduct in this Policy, he or she should immediately communicate it in writing to the Senior Pastor and Chair of the Congregation.
 - 1. However, if the incident involves the Senior Pastor and/or the Chair of the Congregation, then information should instead be communicated to an Associate Pastor and Vice Chair of the Congregation.
 - 2. Once made aware of the report, either the Senior Pastor or Chair of the Congregation will notify the parents or guardians of the involved Child about the suspicion or incident as soon as practicable.
 - 3. Children are encouraged to report any prohibited conduct to any uninvolved adult with whom they feel comfortable. An adult receiving this information from a Child must make a written report as outlined above.
- C. The uninvolved Pastoral Staff member and the Human Resources Committee of the Winnetka Congregational Church will direct a full investigation of the alleged incident and report their findings to the Executive Committee of the WCC Council for further action within two weeks of receiving the initial written report.
 - 1. The Human Resources Committee will consider the facts and circumstances of the situation and, if deemed appropriate, conduct or cause to be conducted an internal investigation to determine (a) the credibility and strength of the evidence against the alleged abuser; (b) whether the alleged abuse is part of a broader pattern; (c) how, if at all, the measures taken to prevent such Child Abuse failed; and d) what steps Winnetka Congregational Church should consider taking to prevent this type of situation in the future.
 - 2. Further action may include but not be limited to notifying the Church's insurance carrier. In any event, the Human Resources Committee will insure that all proper reporting is completed.
 - 3. If the person accused or suspected of Child Abuse or other conduct prohibited by this Policy is a Representative, the Human Resources Committee will ban the Representative from assisting in any Activity that includes interaction with Children until the allegations are resolved.
 - 4. Any internal investigation may be halted in the event DCFS or legal authorities conduct an investigation.
- D. While any incident is under investigation, all persons with knowledge of the incident will maintain strict confidentiality and share information only as needed to fulfill the requirements of this Policy, as required by law, or under the advice of legal counsel for Winnetka Congregational Church.

1. In addition, the Illinois Abused And Neglected Child Reporting Act mandates that certain categories of persons who have reasonable cause to believe a child is abused or neglected make a report to the DCFS.
2. Clergy and other professionals who work with children in the course of their duties are included as “Mandated Reporters” under the Illinois Abused And Neglected Child Reporting Act, as explained further in the DCFS “Manual For Mandated Reporters” (revised May 2015) (found at https://www.illinois.gov/dcfs/safekids/reporting/Documents/cfs_1050-21_mandated_reporter_manual.pdf) For purposes of this Policy, Winnetka Congregational Church generally deems pastors and all employees who supervise Children participating in WCC Activities to be Mandated Reporters for purpose of complying with the Illinois Abused And Neglected Child Reporting Act.
3. All persons specified in the Illinois Abused And Neglected Child Reporting Act as Mandated Reporters are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect immediately when they have a reasonable cause to believe that such abuse has occurred. Note that mandated reporters must report *all* suspected instances of abuse and neglect that rise to this level of credibility, *regardless of where the abuse is alleged to have occurred or who the alleged abuser is*.
4. Immediately upon having reason to suspect an instance of abuse or neglect, the Mandated Reporter shall make a report to the DCFS by calling the DCFS Hotline at 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE), followed by a written report on the applicable state reporting form within 48 hours of the initial hotline report.
5. The Illinois Abused And Neglected Child Reporting Act requires that Mandated Reporters sign a statement acknowledging their status as Mandated Reporters before they commence employment and that employers retain the statements. Clergy and all employees of WCC’s Children’s and Youth education and children's music programs shall acknowledge their status as Mandated Reporters by completing the DCFS Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status Form.

Policy Review and Evaluation

The Winnetka Congregational Church Council, through its Human Resources Committee and Children and Youth Education Committee shall review this Policy on an annual basis. In the event a particular provision is found to be unworkable in practice, these committees will recommend an appropriate revision to the Council for its consideration. In addition, the Human Resources Committee will periodically review the training program for WCC personnel to ensure it continues to reflect current expertise and knowledge in the field of Child Abuse prevention, as well as current law.

Receipt And Acknowledgment

I have received and carefully reviewed this Safe Church Policy (adopted 9-13-16; modified [date]) as well as participated in training related to its enactment in Church activities. I understand the commitment of Winnetka Congregational Church to provide a safe and supportive environment for Children's faith formation. I agree to abide by the directives, standards and prohibitions set forth in the Policy and to provide such further assurances to Winnetka Congregational Church as are reasonable and necessary in connection with my ongoing work with Children.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____