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# Safe Sanctuary Policy

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Forest Hill Church,  
Presbyterian  
Cleveland Hts. OH

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7/14/2022

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## **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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#### **PRESBYTERY OF THE WESTERN RESERVE**

5312 Mayfield Rd.  
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#### **GENERAL PRESBYTER**

Presbytery of the Western Reserve  
The Rev. Sharon Core  
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(216) 273-6905

#### **CHURCH INSURANCE AGENT**

Sovereign Insurance Group  
920 Cassatt Rd Suite 100  
Berwyn, PA 19312  
Katrina Santiago, Account Manager  
(484) 654-3337

#### **CLEVELAND HTS POLICE DEPARTMENT**

40 Severance Circle  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118  
Non-Emergency Phone: (216) 321-1234  
Emergency: 911

#### **CUYAHOGA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)**

3955 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44115-2583  
216-696-KIDS  
(216) 696-5437 to report abuse  
(216) 431-4500

#### **OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES**

855-O-H-CHILD  
(855) 642-4453 to report abuse

#### **DESIGNATED MEDIA SPOKESPERSON**

Reverend Dr. Gene McAfee

**Information Last Updated: January 2025**

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

## **Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian**

### **Cleveland Hts., OH**

**We are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth/vulnerable adults participating in the life of our church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse.**

Jesus teaches us, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5)

“The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the universal Church, is responsible for nurturing baptized persons in Christian life, and Presbyterians believe this baptismal commitment to be a serious one, understanding it to apply to all in the church’s care, including children, youth, and vulnerable adults.” (Book of Order W-3.0403)

### **I. PURPOSE**

Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian, adopts this Safe Sanctuary policy to:

- A. Provide procedures specifically designed to reduce the risk of harm, abuse and neglect to children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- B. Protect church staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of harm, abuse or neglect.
- C. Respond to all allegations of harm, abuse or neglect in a fair and compassionate manner.
- D. Limit the extent of our church’s legal risk and liability.
- E. Strengthen our call to be The Beloved Community.

### **II. POLICY APPLICATION**

This Policy applies to all Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian sponsored activities that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults. No policy can foresee every possible circumstance to which it may be applied. Whenever applicable, questions of civil, criminal, and employment offenses should be addressed with the relevant authorities immediately.

### **III. TRANSPARENCY/ACCESS**

Copies of this Safe Sanctuary Policy (“Policy”) and any updates will be distributed (in print or electronically) to all new hires, and (in print or electronically) to staff members, Church Elders, Deacons and volunteers. The Policy and any updates will be available to congregation members, attendees, visitors and the public in print and electronically on the church’s website.

## **IV. PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT SAFE SANCTUARY**

### **A. SELECTION AND SCREENING OF CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

These procedures apply to persons being considered to work with children/youth/vulnerable adults in church programs, as paid staff or volunteers, either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church grounds: Candidates will:

1. Be at least eighteen years-old and five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be working with.
2. Be members or active participants of Forest Hill Church for a minimum of 6 months. (*Applies only to volunteers.*)
3. Complete a criminal background check. For persons who have lived in Ohio for the past five years, an Ohio BCI background check will be conducted. For persons who have not lived in Ohio for the past five years, an FBI background check will be conducted. Forest Hill Church will reimburse applicants for the cost of the criminal background check.
4. Be ineligible to serve with children/youth/vulnerable adults in any capacity if there is a conviction on his/her record of certain felonies or misdemeanors, including, but not limited to, any of the following:
  - a. Criminal homicide;
  - b. Aggravated assault;
  - c. Crimes related to the possession, use, or sale of drugs or controlled substances;
  - d. Sexual abuse;
  - e. Sexual assault;
  - f. Injury to a youth;
  - g. Incest;
  - h. Indecency with a Youth; Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a youth;
  - i. Possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution, or display of harmful material;
  - j. Employment harmful to youth;
  - k. Abandonment or endangerment of a youth;
  - l. Kidnapping or unlawful restraint;
  - m. Public lewdness or indecent exposure;
  - n. Crime that involves drinking and driving, such as driving while intoxicated.
5. Provide proof of completed COVID vaccination.
6. Complete an application, including references. References will be contacted and a written record of these contacts will be kept confidential and retained with the application form.
7. Complete interview(s) as determined by personnel committee, supervising staff member and/or appropriate ministry. Results of the interview(s) will be kept confidential and only disclosed to those persons requiring this information to decide whether the applicant should be accepted as a staff member/volunteer.

### **B. TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONS WORKING WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULTS**

1. Every church staff person and volunteer who works with children/youth/vulnerable adults, either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church grounds, will be required to attend annual staff/volunteer development training on Forest Hill's Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures.
2. Annual training will be provided by Forest Hill Church or an entity contracted by Forest Hill Church to provide such training.
3. The training will cover the Safe Sanctuary Policy, procedures to support the policy, and procedures to report suspected abuse. Other topics may be covered as appropriate.

## **C. STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR FOR PERSONS IN MINISTRY AT FOREST HILL CHURCH**

1. Persons hired/accepted to be in ministry with children/youth/vulnerable adults will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by Forest Hill Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.
2. Following annual training, all staff and volunteers working with children/youth/vulnerable adults will sign a covenant indicating that they have read, understand and agree to abide by Forest Hill Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

## **D. SAFE SPACES**

1. "Open Door" policy is in place at all times. Parents, guardians, volunteers, church staff, members and/or visitors may visit and observe child/youth programs/events at any time.
2. Rooms occupied by children/youth/vulnerable adults will have doors with windows, or Dutch doors (top of door opens and bottom remains closed.) If lacking these, the door(s) will remain open when the room is occupied.
3. Two adults, unrelated to each other (i.e. not married, partnered, relatives) will be present at all times during in-person programs/events attended by children/youth/vulnerable adults. Two related adults may be present if a third unrelated adult is also present. If circumstances arise when two adults are not able to be present, the program/event will be conducted in an area that is visible to others, allowing any adult or one who is designated, to periodically check in.
4. A Registration Form will be completed by the parent/guardian of each child/youth/vulnerable adult who participates regularly in programming at Forest Hill Church. Registration Form will include child's name, age, pertinent medical information, known allergies, as well as emergency contact information.
5. Rooms used by children/youth/vulnerable adults will be checked weekly by church staff and volunteers to ensure safety and to identify and remove/remediate any health/safety hazards.
6. Emergency procedures and exits will be posted in all rooms designated for use by children/youth/vulnerable adults.
7. A first aid kit and emergency contact numbers will be maintained in all rooms regularly occupied by children/youth/vulnerable adults. A list identifying children/youth with allergies will be maintained and be accessible to any adult responsible for programming with those children/youth.
8. Staff and volunteers will ensure that there is at least one working cell phone readily available in any room or space in which events or programs for children/youth/vulnerable adults are taking place.
9. Staff and volunteers will ensure that children/youth/vulnerable adults are not accessing unused, unoccupied or locked spaces in the church building.
10. At least one or more gender-neutral restrooms and/or a single stall restroom will be open and available to children/youth/vulnerable adults at all times.

## **E. SAFETY IN ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS**

One-on-One Meetings between adult staff, volunteers, mentors and children/youth/vulnerable adults are generally prohibited but may take place in special circumstances (such as, but not limited to, Youth confirmation class members meeting with their adult mentor; pastor meeting with youth or Vulnerable Adult for counseling.) In these circumstances:

1. The parent/guardian of the child/youth/vulnerable adult must give consent and be given information about when and where the meeting will take place, the name and contact information of the adult.
2. Meetings should take place in a public space (e.g. coffee shop, public park) or in a meeting space that is visible/in proximity to others (e.g. pastor's office with open door/window, living room of family home with parent present in next room.)

## **F. SAFETY OFF-SITE AND OVERNIGHT**

1. Parent/Guardian will receive information about off-site/overnight events, including the nature of the activity, location, expected departure/return times and locations, adult leaders' names and contact information.
2. Parent/Guardian will complete a permission form prior to off-site/overnight event. Form will include child/youth name, age, pertinent health/medical/insurance information, known allergies, emergency contact information, including permission for emergency medical care.
3. All permission forms will be safely stored and be accessible to adult leader(s) at any off-site or overnight event.
4. Two adults, unrelated to each other (i.e. not married, partnered, relatives) will be present at all times during all in-person off-site or overnight events attended by children/youth/vulnerable adults. At least three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision. Two related adults may be present if a third unrelated adult is also present. If two adults are not able to be present, the event will be conducted in an area that is visible to others/public.
5. Additional considerations for overnight events:
  - a) Privacy will be maintained in use of restrooms and sleeping areas (e.g. in shared restrooms, adults will observe separate showering/grooming times; if necessary, at least two adults will enter sleeping areas of children/youth.)
  - b) No adult will sleep alone in a room with children/youth/vulnerable adults, except in the case of a parent/guardian sharing a room with their own child/youth. When accommodations necessitate shared sleeping rooms, at least two unrelated adults will occupy a room with children/youth/vulnerable adults.
  - c) Adults will take measures to assure safety (e.g. monitoring hallways, remaining accessible to children/youth throughout the night.)

## **G. TRANSPORTATION**

Any adult (staff or volunteer) providing transportation for children/youth/vulnerable adults to/from/during church events will:

1. Be known to the designated leader(s) of the event.
2. Be at least 25 years old.
3. Provide a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated.
4. Provide proof of insurance for vehicle being operated.
5. Operate a vehicle with seat belts for driver and each passenger.
6. Be accompanied by at least two children or youth.

## **H. VIRTUAL MEETINGS WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULTS**

1. Invitations to virtual meetings on Zoom, Google Meet, or other platforms will be sent to parents/guardians as well as children/youth/vulnerable adults.
2. Parents/guardians and all meeting participants will be advised if the virtual meeting is being recorded.
3. Two adults will be present during virtual meetings. This may include the adult leader and at least one parent/guardian who is in the same room with their child/youth and observing the meeting.
4. No adult will meet one-on-one with a child/youth in a virtual meeting space, breakout room or chat.
5. All chat functions within meetings will be open to all so that everyone, including other adults, can see the chat. This will be announced at the beginning of every meeting.

6. Participants (adults, children, youth) are prohibited from:
  - a. displaying inappropriate or offensive messages or images in virtual meetings (e.g. on clothing, on camera, on chat, through links) including but not limited to: messages or images that are sexual or suggestive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, threatening, profane or abusive.
  - b. using their device in private areas, (e.g. bathroom) with the camera and microphone on.

#### **I. CHURCH-PUBLISHED CONTENT (WEBSITE, PRINT MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA)**

1. Publications (including but not limited to print media, website, social media) created on behalf of the church and its programs will be monitored to maintain appropriate content.
2. Prohibited content includes (but is not limited to) language and/or images that are sexual or suggestive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, threatening, profane or abusive.
3. No photo, video or likeness of a child/youth/vulnerable adult will be published in church publications (including but not limited to print media, website, social media) without the permission of the child's/youth's parent/guardian.
4. Last names, addresses and/or other identifying information about children/youth will not be published in church publications (including but not limited to print media, website and social media platforms) except in special circumstances with permission of parent/guardian, such as the following, but not limited to: recognition of child/youth participation in worship on live-stream or in bulletin; graduates listed in newsletter.

#### **J. COMMUNICATION (PHONE, TEXT, EMAIL, DIRECT MESSAGING ON SOCIAL MEDIA)**

1. Church staff and volunteers will send/post group communications to children/youth/vulnerable adults and will include parents/guardians in these communications.
2. Parents/guardians will be informed of the modes of communication that will be used by church staff and volunteers to contact children/youth/vulnerable adults, providing the parents/guardians with an opportunity to approve/disapprove and to participate in the group communications.
3. Adult staff and volunteers will not initiate or maintain private communication with an individual child/youth/vulnerable adult via (including but not limited to) phone, text, email, direct messaging on social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat.)
4. Communication initiated by individual child/youth/vulnerable adult to church staff and volunteers is prohibited, except in circumstances that include (but are not restricted to) reporting abuse, the potential for self-harm or harming others.

#### **V. RESPONDING TO / REPORTING INJURIES AND ACCIDENTS**

- A. Adult leaders who interact on a regular, ongoing basis with children/youth/vulnerable adults will receive annual training and/or refresher training in First Aid/CPR.
- B. An incident report will be completed and filed by person(s) who witnessed and/or provided aid within 24 hours of an injury or accident involving a child/youth/vulnerable adult.



## **VI. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We will report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to take any allegations seriously and to remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.

- A. Copies of this Safe Sanctuary Policy (“Policy”) which includes procedures for responding to abuse, will be made available to all staff, volunteers and congregation members in hard copy or electronically.
- B. Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of child/youth abuse should be made aware that state law requires the immediate reporting of such abuse to the civil authorities.
- C. A person who suspects, observes or receives a disclosure of abuse to a child/youth/vulnerable adult should immediately report it to the pastor, the Director of Family, Youth and Children’s Ministry or other designated church leader.
- D. A church leader who receives a report of abuse will report it promptly to local law enforcement and appropriate state authorities. The leader will also report such abuse to the Stated Clerk and designated Safe Sanctuary Response Team.
- E. Any person bringing a report of abuse or assisting in investigating will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

## **VII. SAFE SANCTUARY RESPONSE TEAM**

- A. The Response Team should be comprised of at least four members, including the Pastor and the Director of Family, Youth and Children’s Ministry.
- B. The Response Team will be familiar with the terms of this Policy as well as established procedures under the Rules of Discipline, Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for responding to complaint(s) of alleged child/youth abuse.
- C. The Safe Sanctuary Response Team will have the following responsibilities in response to allegations of child/youth abuse or neglect:
  - 1. Provide for the safety of the alleged victim if abuse occurs at church or church-sponsored event.
  - 2. Ensure the allegation is reported to the civil authorities under state law.
  - 3. Immediately notify the parent/guardian of any minor child/youth.
  - 4. Notify the church’s insurance company of the allegation.
  - 5. Make decisions concerning the temporary removal of the individual accused from any contact with minors pending an investigation and/or removal of the accused from an event until a resolution of the allegations has occurred.
  - 6. Respond to any media requests with advice from the church attorney, taking care to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
  - 7. Provide victims and their families with resources that may aid in the particular spiritual, psychological, or emotional needs and trauma that arise from the devastation of abuse.
- D. If the report is against a teaching elder, the response team will send a written statement of allegation to the stated clerk of the presbytery that holds the teaching elder’s membership. This written statement of allegation shall trigger the formation of an investigating committee under the Rules of Discipline of the Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II.

- E. If the report is against a ruling elder, the response team will notify the clerk of session of membership that an allegation of offense has been received against an elder that triggers the formation of an investigating committee under the Rules of Discipline of the Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II.
- F. If the report is against a church employee or volunteer, the response team will notify the person(s) or committee responsible for supervision of the employee/volunteer, personnel, and the church attorney. The response team will request a follow-up report from the supervisory body of the outcome of any subsequent investigation or discipline.
- G. A written summary of any proceedings in such cases will be maintained, with confidentiality, by Forest Hill Church.

## **VIII. POLICY REVIEW AND MODIFICATION**

- A. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed annually by the Director of Family, Youth and Children and by the Family, Youth and Children's (FYC) Ministry.
- B. Staff members, volunteers, parents/guardians or other persons in the congregation may propose changes or additions to the Policy to the FYC Ministry at any time for consideration.
- C. Family, Youth and Children's Ministry, in consultation with appropriate persons, committees and Personnel, will be responsible for submitting any changes in the Safe Sanctuary Policy to Session for approval.
- D. The Director of Family, Youth and Children will be responsible for ensuring that any updates to the Policy are distributed (in print or electronically) to staff members, Church Elders, Deacons and volunteers, and that updates are available to congregation members, attendees, visitors and the public in print and electronically on the church's website.

Safe Sanctuary Policy Draft submitted to Session: 5/25/2022

Approved by Session of Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian : 5/25/2022

**Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions**  
**From the Ohio Administrative Code: Rule 3344-95-02**

**(A) Child abuse: An "abused child" includes any child who:**

- (1) Is the victim of sexual activity, which includes children who are the victim of statutory rape, sexual assault.
- (2) Is endangered as defined in section 2919.22 of the Revised Code. A child is endangered if the person who is the parent, guardian, custodian or is in loco parentis of a child creates a substantial risk to the health or safety of the child. Specific examples include child abuse, torture, excessive corporal punishment that creates a substantial risk of serious physical harm or impairment to the child's mental health and encouraging, permitting or compelling a child to act, model or otherwise participate in the production, presentation, dissemination or obscene, sexually oriented material.
- (3) Exhibits evidence of any physical or mental injury or death, inflicted other than by accidental means, or an injury or death, which is at variance with the history given of it.
- (4) Because of the acts of his parents, guardian, or custodian, suffers physical or mental injury that harms or threatens to harm the child's health or welfare.
- (5) Is subjected to out-of-home care child abuse.

**(B) Neglected child: A "neglected child" includes any child who:**

- (1) Is abandoned by the child's parents, guardian, or custodian.
- (2) Who lacks adequate parental care because of the faults or habits of the child's parents, guardian, or custodian.
- (3) Whose parents, guardian, or custodian neglects the child or refuses to provide proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical or surgical care or treatment, or other care necessary for the child's health, morals, or well-being.
- (4) Whose parents, guardian, or custodian neglects the child or refuses to provide the special care made necessary by the child's mental condition.
- (5) Whose parents, legal guardian, or custodian have placed or attempted to place the child in foster care or for adoption in violation of sections 5103.16 and 5103.17 of the Revised Code.
- (6) Who, because of the omission of the child's parents, guardian, or custodian, suffers physical or mental injury that harms or threatens to harm the child's health or welfare; or,
- (7) Who is subjected to out-of-home care child neglect, as defined in section 2151.06 of the Revised Code.

**(C) "Child"**

For the purposes of this policy, this definition includes a person under the age of eighteen years or a person under twenty-one years of age with developmental disabilities or physical impairments, as defined in section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

**Vulnerable Adult Definitions**  
**From the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and U.S. Department of Justice**

**A Vulnerable Adult is a person 18 years of age and older and includes, but is not limited to, any of the following:**

- (1) A person who is significantly limited in mobility, vision, hearing, emotional or mental functioning.
- (2) A person who has a physical or mental condition that substantially impairs her/his/their ability to adequately provide for her/his/their daily needs and meet essential requirements for physical health, safety or self-care, even with reasonably available appropriate technological assistance.
- (3) A person who is wholly or partially dependent upon one or more other persons for care or support, either emotional or physical, regardless of where the person resides.
- (4) A person who is unable to receive and evaluate information or make or communicate informed decisions.
- (5) A person who is in danger of harm/abuse, is unable to protect herself/himself/themselves, and may have no one to assist her/him/them.

**(B) The most common types of vulnerable adult abuse** reported in Ohio are neglect, self-neglect, exploitation, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

- (1) Neglect is the failure of an adult to provide the goods or services necessary for his or her own safety and/or well-being – such as avoiding physical harm, mental anguish, or mental illness – or the failure of a caretaker to provide such goods or services.
- (2) Exploitation is the unlawful or improper act of a caretaker using an adult or his/her resources for monetary or personal benefit, profit, or gain.
- (3) Physical abuse is the intentional use of physical force that results in injury, pain, or impairment. It includes pushing, hitting, slapping, pinching, and other ways of physically harming a person. It can also mean placing an individual in incorrect positions, force feeding, restraining, or giving medication without the person's knowledge.
- (4) Emotional abuse occurs when a person is threatened, humiliated, intimidated, or otherwise psychologically hurt. It includes the violation of an adult's right to make decisions and the loss of his or her privacy.
- (5) Sexual abuse includes rape or other unwanted, nonconsensual sexual contact. It also can mean forced or coerced nudity, exhibitionism, and other non-touching sexual situations, regardless of the age of the perpetrator.