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# **SAFE CHURCH POLICY & ABUSE PREVENTION GUIDELINES**

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# Purpose

Loop Church is committed to seeking to provide a loving, just environment in which all people with all their vulnerabilities are free to worship and grow in their love for and service to God and to one another. Unfortunately, even in a church setting, power can be abused in such a way that individuals experience intentional, and even unintentional, mistreatment or abuse. To assure that Loop Church remains a safe place for all persons, especially those who are vulnerable the Steering Council of Loop Church has adopted the following Safe Church Policy and Abuse Prevention Guidelines. The Policy shall govern all church sponsored programs or activities.

# Vision

Our understanding of the Gospel and our call to love one another requires that we take abuse in the church context seriously. Specifically, scripture calls the church to be a community that provides healing, seeks justice, pays special attention to vulnerable people, and exercises authority with care.

An Abuse Victims Task Force Report prepared for Synod in 2010 states the following,

*For most members of the CRC, the local congregation is our community. It is our community of believers—our corner of Christ's body on earth. It elicits feelings of love and loyalty in us, including attachment to our church leaders, who are a vital part of the community. When a church leader is accused of misconduct or abuse, community and personal stability are deeply shaken...As a community of Christ's body, however, we must seek justice and mercy; we must seek the path of love for all parties. This is not easy. Each situation is complicated and emotional. The pain is deep. The effects for the victim, the accused, and the congregation can be life changing.*

Furthermore, throughout the Bible, God consistently calls his people to pay special attention to vulnerable people. A report to Synod in 1992 from the Committee to Study Abuse includes a detailed exploration of biblical-theological perspectives on family and social life. The report explains,

*The covenant code (Exod. 20:22-23:23) and the book of Deuteronomy contain specific legislation to ensure that the enslaved, the widowed, the orphaned, the poor, and the stranger are not exploited but instead are securely integrated into the economic and social life of Israel. To this list of vulnerable groups Jesus pointedly adds children, whose very vulnerability reflects the attitude required of anyone wishing to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1-5). No fewer than five times throughout the Gospels Jesus warns that these "little ones" (in the immediate context he means children, but the image also pertains to other easily exploited groups) are God's special concern. Of those who cause them to stumble, Jesus says, "It would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the sea" (Matt. 18:6). (Agenda for Synod 1992, p. 332)*

# Definitions

## Abuse and Misconduct

There are a number of different categories of abuse and misconduct. For purposes of this policy, the church is concerned with abuse or misconduct conducted by church leaders or in a church setting. The State of Illinois provides specific legal definitions of criminal forms of abuse ranging from sexual assault to cyberstalking. The University of Illinois has pulled these together at <http://wecare.illinois.edu/policies/definitions/>.

There are plenty of other behaviors that are offensive and ungodly which do not reach the legal standards defined on the U of I website. Misconduct is behavior that is offensive to the person upon whom it is inflicted or actionable in a church setting that does not meet these legal standards. Loop church acknowledges the following as forms of misconduct:

**Physical misconduct** means (1) threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a minor or legally protected adult, or (2) offensive or harmful contact to any adult where “offensive” means behavior that is clearly socially unacceptable in the broader church community. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult.

**Sexual misconduct** includes: (1) exploiting or grooming (preparing) a person whether 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 or adult; (2) unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, co-volunteers where “unwelcome” means behavior that is clearly unwanted or unacceptable in the broader church community; (3) or sexual suggestion, sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.

**Emotional misconduct** includes: a pattern of deliberate, non-contact behavior that has the potential to cause emotional or psychological harm. (e.g. Name calling, putting people down, playing mind games, humiliating people, making people feel guilty, threatening, insulting, taunting, ridiculing, intimidating, negative questioning, or yelling)

**Spiritual misconduct** includes: the misuse of power, leadership, or influence to cultivate a culture of fear, dependence, shame, or exclusion. Spiritually abusive religious systems are sometimes described as legalistic, mind controlling, religiously addictive, and authoritarian. (The following article provides further examples of Spiritual Abuse: [article](#))

**Economic/Financial misconduct** includes fraud, corruption, theft, dishonesty, or deceit in the use of financial resources. Examples include the improper use or collection of tithes and offerings or preferential treatment based on economic status.

**Discriminatory behavior** includes unjust and prejudicial treatment of people based on based on the group, class, or category to which the person is perceived to belong. These may include race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ect.

**Microaggressions** include the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to

target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.

[\(Psychology Today Blog\)](#)

## Roles

**Victim/Claimant** under this policy is a person who comes forward with an allegation of abuse or misconduct as defined above and under state and federal law. In its consideration of victim/claimants, Loop church will pay particular attention to power dynamics that impact vulnerability such as:

- Age
- Physical Size
- Race and Ethnicity
- Gender and Sexual Identity
- Social Confidence
- Cognitive Ability
- Emotional Well-being
- Spiritual Growth
- Economic Stability
- Immigration Status

**Church Leaders** consist of paid staff, office bearers (steering council), or appointed volunteers

**Church Staff** is someone who is paid by Loop Church.

**Safe Church Committee:** The Pastor or designee, a member of the Council, and at least one member of the congregation shall form the SAFE Church Committee (“Committee”). All members of the Committee shall be trained in abuse awareness and response. Resources and documents concerning Safe Church Policy in the CRC can be found [here](#).

**Steering Council** is the group of individuals elected to serve as elders and deacons for Loop Church.

**Volunteers** represent Loop in ministries like nursery, missional communities, small groups, working with refugees, or outreach activities.

# Policy

## Guiding Principles

Loop Church is committed to the following:

1. Allegations of misconduct or abuse will be taken seriously. The default position of the committee is to believe the allegation of the victim/claimant.
2. Abuse and Misconduct as previously defined against a child or adult in a church building, in a church-sponsored program, or by church volunteers and church leaders will not be tolerated.
3. Any applicant for a church volunteer or staff position with a previous history of sexual misconduct or physical assault, or misdemeanor or felony conviction of child abuse, or pleading of no contest to any misdemeanor or felony charge will not be allowed to serve in any positions that put others at risk.
4. Allegations by a minor of abuse or misconduct by a church volunteer or church leader, in a church facility, or in a church-sponsored program will be reported to child protection -- authorities will be notified within 24 hours if there is reasonable cause to suspect that child abuse has occurred. Loop Church will cooperate with the civil authorities responsible for handling reported incidents of abuse.
5. Allegations by adults of abuse or misconduct by a church volunteer or church leader, in a church facility, or in a church-sponsored program will be reported to the proper authorities within a week if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred. Loop Church will cooperate with the civil authorities responsible for handling reported incidents of abuse.
6. An accused person has the right to due process in the church and outside the church.
7. A victim/claimant is not to be held responsible for misconduct or abuse that occurs.
8. A volunteer or church leader who is accused of misconduct will be removed from serving until the allegations are resolved.
9. A volunteer or church leader who confesses or is found guilty of sexual or physical misconduct against a minor or adult will be removed from position or office.
10. A volunteer or church leader removed from position or office due to abuse or misconduct will not be considered for re-entry or reinstatement to any position that puts others at risk. No decisions regarding reinstatement will be made without the advice of legal counsel.
11. Recognizing the destructive power of claims of abuse, the church will offer pastoral care for claimants and their families, accused persons and their families, and the congregation
12. The church will seek to support victims/claimants as they pursue healing and will not coerce or expect victims/claimants to forget or forgive.
13. All persons directly or indirectly involved with incidents of misconduct or abuse are to act with honesty, charity, and confidence in God's power to forgive and heal.

## Abuse Prevention

### Screening

Loop church commits to proactively screening volunteers and employees.

## *Volunteers*

All volunteers involved in ministry with minors are required to:

1. Read and follow the abuse prevention guidelines contained in this document (Appendix 1).
2. Fill out and sign the Volunteer Form (Appendix 2). This form will be kept in a confidential personnel file retained by the clerk.
3. Review the guidelines and re-sign the profile form each year (September).

The Steering Council of Loop Church reserves the right to request an application, conduct a personal interview, and/or ask for references for any volunteer or staff person. Ordinarily, volunteers for ministry with minors will have had at least a 6- month relationship with Loop Church prior to serving.

## *Employees*

All prospective employees shall agree to:

1. Complete an employment application.
2. Authorize Loop Church to obtain background information and opinions from former employers, personal references, educational institutions, credit agencies, reporting services and governmental agencies.
3. Allow Loop Church to verify background information and credentials.
4. Allow Loop Church to obtain criminal and credit history, motor vehicle records, and to check the sex offender registry. (Appendix 3)

Different levels of background checks are conducted depending on the responsibilities of the relevant employee position.

## *Screening Responsibilities and Confidentiality*

Staff members are responsible for having the volunteers and employees in their area of supervision complete a volunteer information form or employment application and a background check release form. All information received will be confidential; background check information will be available only to the Pastor and to those who are directly responsible for making the selection of an employee or volunteer. (See the Abuse Prevention – Background Check Screening and Implementation Policy adopted by Council for more details.)

## *Ministry Guidelines*

Each ministry area will maintain written guidelines designed to protect program participants from abuse. The ministry director, the church ministry staff, and the Abuse Prevention Committee must review these guidelines periodically. These guidelines will be consolidated as the Abuse Prevention, Safety, and Discipline Guidelines and will be used to train church volunteers and church leaders to prevent misconduct and to create positive role models in the church. Guidelines will be available for review by members of Loop Church or anyone with children or other vulnerable individuals participating in church programs. (See Appendix 1, Ministry Abuse Prevention Guidelines for details.)

## *Training*

All volunteers and staff should be familiar with the Safe Church Policy. Soon after the beginning of each church program year, staff, leaders, teachers and volunteers, who are new or who have not been

previously trained, shall be trained in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. This training will include a review of the church's Abuse Prevention, Safety, and Discipline Guidelines, reporting procedures, and how to recognize inappropriate behavior and signs of mistreatment or abuse. Annually, the Safe Church Team will designate a "Safe Church Sunday" to review the Safe Church Policy with the entire congregation.

## Facility Guidelines

Where possible, Loop Church will endeavor to incorporate features in its building and to maintain its facilities in a manner that helps prevent misconduct and abuse, that enables persons with disabilities to participate, and that reduces safety risks to all who come to the church.

## Reporting

**The Safe Church Committee will oversee the response to allegations.**

Staff, volunteers, or anyone in a position representing Loop Church are required to report any allegations of misconduct or any suspected abuse to a member of the Safe Church Committee within 24 hours. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged misconduct or suspected abuse, but only to report the suspected abuse or the incident.

When receiving an allegation, the Safe Church Committee Member should:

1. Listen closely before investigating. Take the report seriously
2. Remain calm and reassure the victim/claimant that it was good to tell someone and that it was not his or her fault
3. Do not promise not to tell anyone
4. Prepare an Incident Report (Appendix 3)
5. If the abuse allegations involve a minor, call the child protection national hotline (1-800-4CHILD) which can provide guidance and support. Then report the allegation to Child Protective Services within 24 hours. (800-252-2873 or TTY 1-800-358-5117, see Appendix 4 for additional details)
6. Contact the other members of the Safe Church committee within 24 hours.
7. Provide an incident report to the Safe Church Committee and convene a meeting with all available members of the Safe Church Committee (preferably within a week).

Based on the incident report, the Safe Church Committee should promptly determine:

1. Whether the alleged victim/claimant is a child or an adult
2. Whether the alleged offender is a church leader (paid staff, office bearer, or appointed volunteer)
3. Whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that misconduct or abuse has occurred. "Reasonable cause" is defined as a suspicion founded on circumstances sufficiently strong to justify a reasonable person in the belief that the allegations are true.

## Responding

### Process

1. Should “reasonable cause” be deemed to have been found, the Safe Church Committee will create written charges that will be given to the accused and formally request a meeting with said person.
2. If the allegations are made by an adult against a church leader (paid staff, office bearer, or appointed volunteer) of Loop Church, the Safe Church Committee is strongly encouraged to contact the Classis Northern Illinois Safe Church Team.
3. If the allegation involves a member of the church council, the committee shall notify the chair of the church council. The church council member will be immediately placed on temporary leave from the council until the matter is resolved.
4. If the allegation involves a member of the Safe Church Committee, the committee shall notify the chair of the church council. The committee member will be immediately placed on temporary leave from the committee until the matter is resolved and the designated alternate will serve in their place.
5. If the allegation involves the pastor, members of the Committee shall bring the allegations to the chair of the Steering Council, and the Classis SAFE church committee. The pastor will be immediately placed on temporary leave from the council until the matter is resolved.
6. The Chair of the Steering Council will appoint a small group of wise and experienced pastoral persons to minister with compassion to all the individuals and families involved (see Pastoral Care section for additional guidance).
7. Upon meeting with the accused to receive information, the committee will re-evaluate the allegation based on all information from both parties and writes a summary report including recommendations for action.
8. The committee’s report and recommendations will be formally brought to the Steering Council. The Steering Council will hear the report and decides what action(s) to take based on the principles of this policy, seeking restorative justice where possible and providing pastoral care regardless.
  - Any member of the Safe Church Committee involved in the making of said recommendation that is also a member of the Steering Council must recuse themselves from the deliberations of the Steering Council on this matter.
  - If the Steering Council takes action contrary to what is the reported recommendations of the Safe Church Committee, a written explanation stating the rationale for the decision as well as a copy of the report must be submitted to the Classis Northern Illinois Safe Church Committee for further review.
9. The victim/claimant and the accused will be notified in writing of the outcome of the Safe Church Committee and the Steering Council’s deliberation.
10. The victim/claimant or accused may appeal the decision to Classis.
11. If the allegations are made by an adult against a church leader (paid staff, office bearer, or appointed volunteer) of another Christian Reformed Church, the Committee shall notify the Steering Council and Classical Safe Church Team.
  - After receiving the Classical Safe Church Team’s Report, the Committee shall convene with the Steering Council to discuss the allegations and the Classical Report and determine the appropriate course of action.



- Based on its investigation, the committee shall make its recommendation to the Steering council, in a specially called meeting for this purpose. The Steering Council will then take appropriate action, based on the principles of this policy, seeking restorative justice where possible and providing pastoral care regardless.

*Criminal Proceedings:* For either church leaders or non-church leaders, if criminal proceedings are involved, the SAFE Church Committee and Steering Council shall promptly revisit the matter at the conclusion of the criminal proceedings and take other such action as the circumstances may dictate.

*Press Statements:* The church legal counsel will handle all press statements with the Senior Pastor or the Chair of the Steering Council. Requests for press statements will be referred to the church attorney.

*Records:* All information received and efforts to respond will be documented.

*Confidentiality:* Any information received and any record maintained by Loop Church regarding allegations of misconduct or abuse shall be kept confidential. This means that only those who need to know will have access to these records and only to the records for the case in question. Those with a need to know may include for example the attorney representing the church, the SAFE Church Committee, and the Steering Council.

*Disclosure:* Loop Church should disclose allegations of misconduct against a church leader only when appropriate as decided by the Council under advisement from the Committee.

1. If someone in the church is convicted of criminal child abuse, the congregation will be notified in a manner the Committee deems appropriate for the situation.
2. Loop Church should disclose information related to allegations of misconduct or abuse by a church leader as needed to protect and minister to the needs of children and families.

## Restorative Justice

The Abuse Claimants Task Force Report highlights the importance and challenge of responding to allegations of abuse with Restorative Justice principles and practices. The report states:

“Synod 2005 affirmed principles of restorative justice and urged “congregations, schools, denominational offices, other Christian institutions, and homes to employ restorative justice practices” in their community lives (Acts of Synod 2005, p. 762)... Accountability, restitution, and healing of broken relationships are major goals of the church’s response to abuse.” (484-485).

### Restorative Justice Principles

1. Seek vindication and healing for victims/claimants, not pushing them aside in pursuit of blind justice, but recognizing their pain and loss.
2. Take seriously the harm done by requiring of the offender a sentence proportional to the weight of the crime.
3. Call the offender to take responsibility for the crime and offer ways for the offender to do so.
4. Restore, where possible, the losses suffered by the victim/claimant.
5. Seek reconciliation between offender and victim/claimant, provided the victim/claimant also desires reconciliation.

6. Attempt to restore the peace of the community.
7. Involve the community in the process of justice.
8. Exercise punishment in a way that promotes healing and restoration whenever possible.

### Challenges for Application of Restorative Justice Principles

1. Power imbalances between the victim/claimant and the accused
2. The need for both parties to participate voluntarily
3. Finding and applying appropriate practices for each situation
4. Legal responsibilities and legal liabilities

### Suggestions for Implementation of Restorative Justice Principles

1. Use or involve a trained facilitator
2. Hold preparatory dialogue with individual stakeholders such as spouses, family members, and other affected church members
3. Pay attention to restoration of both victim/claimant and offender
4. Allow victims/claimants to tell about their story, the harm done, and the impact of what happened
5. Allow accused persons to present their side of the story and explain circumstances and impacts for them
6. Extend the role of an advocate to be used during the decision-making process
7. Allow the victim/claimant to state what will help in the healing process and what restitution could look like
8. Ensure that any offer of restitution by an offender be voluntary and genuine
9. Allow flexibility in the process

## Pastoral Care

The [Abuse Victims Task Force](#), formed in 2010, offer the following recommendations to support victims/claimants, congregations, and accused persons in situations of alleged abuse and misconduct:

### For Victims/Claimants

Victims/Claimants and their families present a wide range of pastoral care needs. If the abuse occurred recently, they may feel shock, fear, and confusion. If the abuse occurred in the past, they may have been living for years with emotions such as hurt, sadness, anger, alienation from the church, and more. They may be unaware of church procedures for responding to allegations of abuse. Victims/Claimants need to be taken seriously and offered immediate compassionate support.

### *Systems for support*

- Church leaders who are not part of the abuse allegations should contact the victim/claimant and family, expressing willingness to take the complaint seriously. Church leaders should express sorrow that the victim/claimant has this story to tell.
- Support resources should be offered without waiting for requests from the victim/claimant and family. The victim/claimant and family's decisions regarding use of these resources should be respected and accepted. Support resources may include referral to Christian counseling, referral

to a victim/claimant advocate, prayer, spiritual guidance, and up-to-date information regarding the response process to the abuse allegation.

- Pastoral care includes attention to financial needs. The situation should be assessed and financial support provided for counseling or other needs emerging from the circumstances. A request for financial support may be submitted by the victim/claimant or by the recommendation of the Safe Church Committee for approval to the Steering Council. All requests for financial support will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### *Interactions with victims/claimants and families*

The following guidelines for interaction with victims/claimants and their families are based on thoughtful suggestions from victims/claimants and families who have experienced abuse in the church context.

- Victims/Claimants and families need to be able to speak about their experiences and emotions without blame or shame. They need to know that others hear and understand their pain.
- Abuse situations raise many complicated spiritual questions. Victims/Claimants and families may desire assistance with the effects of abuse in their spiritual lives. Offer prayer and spiritual guidance to help them deal with their questions.
- Provide information to victims/claimants about support services and options for redress available to them within the CRC.
- Whenever possible, allow victims/claimants to make choices in the process following the abuse complaint. Respect their requests as far as possible. If appropriate, victims/claimants will be offered the assistance of a trained victim/claimant advocate for assistance during a synodically approved process, but they may choose another person to be their advocate.
- Victims/Claimants and families benefit from close communication with those involved with the response process. Keep them informed about steps in the process, decisions made, and the outcomes of hearings. Responsibility for communication with the victim/claimant and family should be assigned to a designated person. The victim/claimant advocate should also have access to this information.

### *Long-term healing*

The effects of abuse are long-term and require long-term pastoral care. Pastoral care needs do not disappear at the conclusion of the church's official response to an allegation. Healing and restitution require considerable time. Pastoral care should continue after the official response process has ended.

- Healing is promoted when victims/claimants and families hear sincere apologies and expressions of regret from offenders, the church, or others involved in the abuse situation. Genuine apologies recognize the wrong, acknowledge the suffering, and take responsibility without blaming the victim/claimant or excusing the offender. Sincere apologies cannot be forced or demanded. Repentance extends beyond words to a change in behavior. Although apologies support healing, the effects of abuse continue even following apologies.
- The deep wounds from abuse often require professional counseling for healing and resolution. Victims/claimants generally should receive assistance to pay for out-of-pocket medical and

psychological treatment needed to recover from abuse, even if the abuse occurred years prior to the disclosure.

- Some victims/claimants may desire pastoral care support as they wrestle with the concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a process that should not be advocated prematurely and cannot be forced by the victim/claimant or forced by others. Resources to explore the forgiveness process can be found on the CRC website under the Safe Church Ministry: [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch).

### *Pastoral care for children*

Particular challenges for pastoral care are presented by situations of alleged abuse of a child or teen by a church leader. By law, civil authorities must be immediately informed of such an allegation. The police or other authorities may forbid discussion of the incident with the minor until after formal investigation. Confidentiality requirements may prevent disclosing information to those who could provide valuable pastoral care to the child and family.

- Church response steps are explained in the “Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations of a Child Against a Church Leader,” available on the CRC website under the Safe Church Ministry: [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch).
- Professional counseling resources may be especially important in these situations.
- Parents, as well as the child, need pastoral care. In addition to intense emotional and spiritual effects on the parents, they may also face the need to take time off from work for the legal process involving their child.
- The child’s siblings may need pastoral care for their reactions to the complicated or confusing situation.”

### *For the Congregation*

Congregations are deeply affected by allegations of abuse against a church leader. Some members deny the occurrence of abuse even after a careful process has concluded that evidence supports the allegation. When other members accept the findings of the process and support taking measures to hold the offender accountable, the congregation may experience division. Members feel betrayed, confused, angry, or sad. Members may fear that others, including their own children, have been hurt. Abuse allegations also raise difficult spiritual questions regarding God and his church. For all these reasons and more, congregations need focused care and time to heal from the effects of an abuse allegation against a church leader. The long-term health of the congregation depends on pastoral care that effectively promotes grace, peace, and healing.

### *Disclosure*

Appropriate disclosure of information supports the healing process for individuals and the congregation. Disclosure is necessary for those who need to know, including the congregation. Experience has demonstrated that healing within a congregation is better realized when disclosure is made to the congregation. Disclosure should never involve revealing the identity of the victim/claimant or facts that would make the victim/claimant readily identifiable. Guidelines for disclosure need to be carefully followed to avoid giving grounds for a defamation lawsuit. Clear guidelines for disclosure can be one of the resources available on the CRC website for churches to access as needed. Disclosure is helpful for the following reasons:

- It is easier for a congregation to deal with a matter, no matter how unpleasant, if the matter is confronted openly rather than shrouded in secrecy. Disclosure reduces the harmful effects of rumors.
- Disclosure is also necessary to fulfill the mission of the church body to reach out to people who need the love, healing, and reconciliation that are at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Disclosure facilitates pastoral care to the congregation.
- Disclosure ministers to people who have been victims/claimants of abuse; they are encouraged when the church takes other cases seriously.
- Disclosure is preventive; it helps to prevent future abuse within the congregation and the community.

*Note:* Information for the above section regarding disclosure is taken from “An ELCA Strategy for Responding to Sexual Abuse in the Church,” produced by the Commission for Women (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1992).

### *Communication and education*

Sermons should address all aspects of healing. If the alleged offender is the pastor, then a pastoral care specialist or a skilled local chaplain can be called upon for one or more sermons. Addressing this issue from the pulpit makes the issue real and unavoidable; it is an important component in the healing process.

Educational presentations by knowledgeable community professionals promote greater understanding of the issues involved by the congregation. Safe church teams, whose mandate includes education, are a valuable resource for local congregations when abuse issues arise. Educational materials for individual use, such as books, pamphlets, videos, and websites, should be easily accessible for members of the congregation.

### *Support*

Prayer services and small groups can help congregations recover from the effects of allegations of abuse by their church leaders. Holding special prayer services as soon as possible after an abuse allegation provides an opportunity for people to gather and pray in community. Small group gatherings with a trained facilitator can provide opportunities to express doubt, anger, fear, and concern. When the accused is a staff person, fellow church staff members may have particular concerns and emotions that can be addressed in staff groups, through opportunities to pray, learn, and deal with feelings and questions that arise.

### *For the Accused*

Those who are accused of misconduct are often judged prematurely and are not pastored effectively. Paul reminds us that we are to “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way . . . fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). This applies to the accused as well as to victims/claimants. In many cases the spouse and children of the accused are secondary victims of the situation.

- The spouse and children of those accused of abuse should not be overlooked for pastoral care. They experience deep distress, confusion, embarrassment, and other strong emotions. Direct expressions of care and concern from non-involved church leaders and others in the congregation are important.
- Regardless of outcome, the accused and their families require continuing pastoral care to assist with the ongoing effects in their lives following an allegation.

# Appendices

1. Ministry Abuse Prevention Guidelines
2. Volunteer Form
3. Incident Form
4. Mandatory Reporter Form/Resources
5. Additional Resources

## Appendix 1: Ministry Abuse Prevention Guidelines

### Nursery Abuse Prevention Guidelines

1. At least two people shall be assigned to nursery.
2. When possible, only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at the same time.
3. No one may take a child from the nursery to another part of the building, except to use the bathroom or in the case of illness.
4. If a child asks for or needs help using the bathroom, the door to the bathroom stall (or the bathroom door, if there are no stalls) must be left open while an adult and the child are inside.
1. Diaper or clothing changes must be done in the sight of another adult worker.

### Children & Youth Ministries Abuse Prevention Guidelines

1. When young children are in a children's program or activity, they must not be allowed to leave the room and wander through the building without the adult responsible for them.
2. During a session of any program, if only one adult is present, the class must be held in a room with a window in the door or the door must be left partially open at all times.
3. A minimum of two leaders must be present for activities with minors. Any exceptions must be approved by the Steering Council. One-on-one situations should be monitored carefully. No one should meet with a child alone without notifying another adult.
4. All one-on-one outings require notification to the parents prior to the outing. Notification must include name, date, time, and purpose.
5. If a leader will be alone in a vehicle with a child or young person in order to give that person a ride to/from a church event, the leader should make sure permission has been obtained from the parents. In the event of an unexpected delay, the leader should contact the child's parent/guardian to notify him/her of the delay and the reason for it.
6. For overnight events, there must be at least two leaders present. If the event is co-ed, there must be at least one adult of each gender.
7. No medications (prescription or over the counter) shall be administered to a minor without prior consent from parent or guardian.

### Pastoral and Adult to Adult Ministry Abuse Prevention Guidelines

Suggestions to prevent allegations of abuse:

1. The pastor and steering council members should exercise good judgment when visiting alone with parishioners in the privacy of that person's home.
2. It is wise to use public meeting places.
3. Be cautious with touch.
4. In regards to pastoral interaction, err on the side of caution. Think defensively.

## Appendix 2: Volunteer Form

Please return to the pastor for review.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Personal Information:*

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

When did you start coming to Loop Church? \_\_\_\_\_

Current Occupation and Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Volunteer Questions:*

Any relevant volunteer experience, certifications, training, or skills Loop should know about?

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What areas of ministry are you interested in? (check all that apply)

- Set Up       Clean Up       Snack       Sound
- Nursery       Youth Programming
- Worship Planning       Leading Singing       Reading       Instrument
- Other (please list): \_\_\_\_\_

### *Background Information:*

Have you ever had any convictions (misdemeanors, felonies, pleading of no contest, reduced) Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
You will have the opportunity to clarify your response with the pastor.

Within the past 12 months have you habitually used intoxicating beverages or drugs in excess? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Will you give permission for a background check? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Have you ever been discharged or forced to resign for misconduct or unsatisfactory service from any position? If yes, please provide name and contact information for employer along with date and brief explanation on a separate sheet of paper. You will have the opportunity to clarify your response with the pastor.

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

### *Availability*

Please note any information you would like Loop to know about your availability or the frequency at which you are willing to serve:

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Please provide two personal or professional references who can address your ability to work in the position you would like to work in. Please do not list family members or church staff.

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*Background Check Authorization*

Volunteers who work with children must also complete and sign the background check consent portion of the form (below). Other volunteers are not required to do so.

Please fill in the following information if it is different than the information listed on the first page of this form:

Current Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates Used: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First, middle, last) (mo/yr – mo/yr)

Former Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Dates Used: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First, middle, last) (mo/yr – mo/yr)

Former Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates Used: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street, City, State, Zip) (mo/yr – mo/yr)

Former Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates Used: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street, City, State, Zip) (mo/yr – mo/yr)

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Drivers License Number/State: \_\_\_\_\_

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I hereby authorize Loop Church and its designated agents and representatives to conduct a comprehensive review of my background causing a consumer report and/or an investigative consumer report to be generated for employment and/or volunteer purposes. I understand that the scope of the consumer report/ investigative consumer report may include, but is not limited to the following areas: verification of social security number; credit reports, current and previous residences; employment history, education background, character references; drug testing, civil and criminal history records from any criminal justice agency in any or all federal, state, county jurisdictions; driving records, birth records, and any other public records.

I further authorize any individual, company, firm, corporation, or public agency (including the Social Security Administration and law enforcement agencies) to divulge any and all information, verbal or written, pertaining to me, to Church of the Servant or its agents. I further authorize the complete release of any records or data pertaining to me which the individual, company, firm, corporation, or public agency may have, to include information or data received from other sources.

\*\* Loop Church and its designated agents and representatives shall maintain all information received from this authorization in a confidential manner in order to protect the applicant's personal information, including, but not limited to, addresses, social security numbers, and dates of birth.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Incident Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Personal Information:*

Name of person making the report: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Position: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Description of incident:*

Who:

What:

When (include time, date):

Where:

Name(s) of witness(es):

Any additional contextual information:

### *Follow up:*

As appropriate, when did the following occur

Safe Church Committee Notified \_\_\_\_\_

Steering Council Notified \_\_\_\_\_

Classis Safe Church Committee Notified \_\_\_\_\_

Report filed with Illinois DCFS \_\_\_\_\_

Police notified \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: State Child Abuse Resources

The Illinois Department of Child and Family Services website states that “DCFS has the primary responsibility of protecting children through the investigation of suspected abuse or neglect by parents and other caregivers in a position of trust or authority over the child.

Call the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873 or TTY 1-800-358-5117) if you suspect that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed by abuse or neglect. If you believe a child is in immediate danger of harm, call 911 first. Your confidential call will not only make sure the child is safe, but also help provide the child’s family the services they need to provide a safe, loving and nurturing home.” (<https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs/safekids/reporting/pages/index.aspx>)

Also from the website:

### *What are child abuse and neglect?*

Child abuse is the mistreatment of a child under the age of 18 by:

- A parent or their romantic partner;
- An immediate relative or someone living in their home;
- A caretaker such as a babysitter or daycare worker; or
- Any person responsible for the child’s welfare, such as a health care provider, educator, coach or youth program volunteer.

The mistreatment can either result in injury or put the child at serious risk of injury. Child abuse can be physical (i.e. bruises or broken bones), sexual (i.e. fondling or incest), or mental (emotional injury or psychological illness).

Neglect is the failure of a parent or caretaker to meet “minimal parenting” standards for providing adequate supervision, food, clothing, medical care, shelter or other basic needs.

### *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*

If you suspect abuse or neglect you have a social responsibility to report it to the hotline. In addition, state law requires that most professionals in education, health care, law enforcement and social work report suspected neglect or abuse. For a comprehensive list of all mandated reporters, see the [Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act](#).

In an effort to assist mandated reporters understand their critical role in protecting children by recognizing and reporting child abuse, DCFS administers an online training course entitled [Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters](#), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For more information about the guidelines for mandated reporters in Illinois, read the Mandated Reporter Manual in English or en español. (attached)

State law protects the confidentiality of all reporters, and your name is never disclosed. You may still choose to make a report anonymously, but the inability of investigators to follow-up with you to obtain additional information may impede our investigation and the child’s safety. The law protects you from civil liability for any call made in good faith.

## Appendix 5: Additional Resources

### *Resources:*

- Illinois legal definitions: <http://wecare.illinois.edu/policies/definitions/>
- Domestic violence hotline abuse definitions: <https://www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/abuse-defined/>
- Reporting child abuse: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/safekids/reporting/pages/index.aspx>
- CRCNA SAFE Church Resource Directory: <https://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch/resource-directory>
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Networks (RAINN) <https://www.rainn.org/>
- Information and links for sexual violence on campus <http://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/campus-safety-guide/>
- Support, hope and healing for victims of pastoral sexual abuse. <http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/>

### *Partners:*

- SAFE Church offers these resources for safe church teams: <http://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch/safe-church-teams>
- Child Abuse 101 – a PowerPoint presentation posted on The Network
- Webinar: The Church's Role in Ending Child Abuse – This webinar examines how sexual abuse happens, what some of the impacts are, and then explores how churches can play a key role in ending this epidemic in our culture.
- Circle of Grace: The Circle of Grace program includes a 1-hour training video for those who work with children and youth, which includes good information about child abuse.
- Advisory Panel Process: A simplified flow chart of the Advisory Panel Process
- Counseling Services <http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org/index.htm>
- FaithCARE: Assists congregations with restorative practices <https://shalemnetwork.org/services-in-communities/restorative-practice/faithcare>
- IIRP (International Institute for Restorative Practices) <https://www.iirp.edu/professional-development/basic-restorative-practices>
- Safe Church Ministry is pleased to partner with Dove's Nest, an organization dedicated to 'Faith Communities Keeping Children & Youth Safe', to offer Circle of Grace to CRC congregations - you may order Circle of Grace here: <https://dovesnest.net/circleofgrace> - for a fee of \$75 to cover administration costs.

Attach Mandatory Reporter Manuals (English and Spanish)