

8. Protection of Children and Youth

Introduction

The protection of children and youth is an important part of the church's ministry. For the purposes of this policy, abuse is defined as "bringing harm to a young person (under age 18) that occurs immediately or through accumulated effects over a period of time."

There are four basic categories of abuse:

- **Neglect** occurs when harm is caused by withholding life's necessities. The ability to provide the necessities, but failing to do so, is the factor separating neglect from the effects of poverty.
- **Emotional abuse** occurs when young people are consistently told they are of no worth and never will be. Name calling and threatening harm or injury are forms of emotional abuse.
- **Physical abuse** is the bodily injury of a person.
- **Sexual abuse** is any sexual activity between a young person and an adult, or between young people when there is an unequal distribution of power. This includes exposing a young person to sexual activity or pornography without their direct participation.

Abuse occurs in every part of society. Church families and church programs are not exempt from abusive situations. In addition youth workers are not exempt from being misunderstood, or from being falsely accused of child abuse. Therefore, the church has established a six-point strategy to reduce the risk of abuse.

Safeguarding Children and Youth and Those Who Minister with Them

The following principles form the foundation of the church's program for protecting children and youth and those who minister with them.

A. Education:

Congregations can receive support in presenting educational programs on child abuse from local social service agencies. Mission center training should consist of programs to assist congregations in preventing and dealing with situations of child abuse.

B. Selection:

The selection of adults to share in ministries with young people is critically important. The church is morally and legally duty-bound to have *all* potential youth workers go through an application and screening procedure *before* they begin sharing ministry.

C. Training:

Training for youth workers is also of critical importance. Congregations that find it difficult to offer training locally should involve their youth workers in training events at the mission center level. Training is also available from Front Ministries at World Church headquarters.

D. Protection Barriers:

Protection barriers are a key element in the church's program to safeguard children and youth. The barriers that will be most helpful are:

- **Two-deep leadership**—two registered youth workers are required at all times when supervising children and youth. Coed groups and activities must have coed leadership.
- **Visible one-to-one contact**—all contact with children and youth should be in view of other adults and young people.
- **Respect of privacy**—youth workers need to respect the privacy of young people in camp living situations, and they should protect their own privacy as well.
- **Appropriate dress**—dress codes should take into consideration the Christ-centered nature of all church programs.
- **Constructive discipline**—discipline should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is *never* permitted.
- **Appropriate physical contact**—physical contact between young people and youth workers is an area where great wisdom *must* be exercised at all times. Physical contact should always be for the benefit of the young person.
- **Youth worker assistants**—youth ages 15-20 *must* be registered and given training, and must be under the direct supervision of a registered youth worker.

Assuring that these principles are well known and followed by all who minister with children and youth will enhance the quality of ministry overall and provide protection of those involved in children's and youth ministries.

E. Prompt Reporting:

Young people should be encouraged to *report* any improper behavior. Adults in the church are encouraged to teach children and youth the following:

- Young people need to *recognize* situations that place them at risk of abuse, how abusers operate, and that anyone can be an abuser.
- Young people need to know that if they *resist*, most abusers will leave them alone.

- Young people must *report* any attempted or actual abuse to their youth leader or pastor. They should be given the assurance that when they report attempted or actual molestations, they are helping protect themselves as well as other young people from further abuse and that they will not be blamed for what may have occurred.

Congregations should contact local social agencies or World Church Forefront Ministries for additional information on assisting young people to avoid abusive situations.

F. Swift Action:

Swift action in dealing with suspected abuse is essential. Every administrative officer should be aware of the church policy on ministerial sexual misconduct. Youth workers who suspect abuse, or who receive abuse reports, are *required* to inform their administrative supervisor (pastor, camp director, mission center president) immediately. All states and provinces in the U.S. and Canada have laws requiring the reporting of suspected cases of child abuse. Similar jurisdictions in other nations typically have similar laws. Know and abide by the requirements for your area. For those individuals who receive a report of abuse or molestation, the responsibility for reporting that information is twofold:

- the incident must be reported to the appropriate civil authorities as specified by law, and
- the incident must be reported to the administrative officer concerned.

Administrative supervisors are required to remove any youth worker suspected of abuse from any contact with young people. The alleged offender will not be eligible to participate in any program or ministry with children or youth present until completely exonerated of the accusations.

Youth Worker Selection and Screening Process

The six principles for protecting children and youth and those who minister with them are important to the church's ministry with children and youth. Screening those who will work with children and youth is central to the protection of both parties. The following screening process will be used to screen all people who work with children or youth in the church or in church-related activities and programs.

At the heart of any children's/youth ministry are the adults who willingly give time, talent, and self to young people. Adults who view involvement with young people as a *ministry* are the key to successfully meeting the needs of children and youth.

The guiding principle for all programs of ministry with children and youth in the Community of Christ is stated as follows:

Only registered youth workers will be used in the church's children and youth programs and ministries. Reg-

istered youth worker assistants will only be used under the supervision of a registered youth worker.

Steps in the Screening Process:

1. ***The purpose of the selection process is explained to the applicant.*** This step helps to determine how best to use the applicant's gifts and talents and helps assure the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of the young people involved.
2. ***The applicant completes the registration application.*** All questions on the form must be answered.
3. ***The completed application will be reviewed by the appropriate church officer.*** References are checked. The applicant's current pastor or former pastor if the applicant is new to the congregation, and two other personal references will be contacted. Persons may not serve as references or check references for members of their own family. The church officer then signs the Record of Contact form indicating their recommendations about the person applying to be a registered youth worker.
4. ***The applicant is interviewed.*** After the application review has been completed, the applicant is interviewed by the appropriate church officer, or their designate. The interview is critical and no applicant can become registered without being interviewed. When the interview is complete, the interviewer must sign the Statement of Personal Interviewer, indicating they either recommend or do not recommend the applicant as a youth worker.
5. ***The administrative officer reviews the application, references, and interviewer's statements,*** and indicates his or her approval or disapproval of the application. If the administrative officer is satisfied that the applicant is of good character, and that they have the qualities needed to serve as a registered youth worker, they will sign the endorsement statement on the Statement of Church Officer.
6. ***The application is reviewed by the mission center president.*** After completion and review by the church officer, the application and all related papers are forwarded to the mission center president. Mission center presidents then sign to indicate their approval or their disapproval of the applicant as a registered youth worker. All forms are then forwarded to Forefront Ministries.
7. ***Final approval of the application is given by Forefront Ministries,*** in consultation with the First Presidency and Legal Services. All applications and supporting documents are kept confidential.

Follow Up:

Only registered youth workers will be used in church youth programs, with the exception of guest ministers from other denominations. Reports on who is currently a regis-

tered youth worker or youth worker assistant are available from the church's membership database. Online recorders, pastors, or congregational financial officers can run these reports. Otherwise, these reports are available from the mission center recorder. To ensure quality, safe programs, it is appropriate to ask people to register even if they are not

currently serving in ministry with children and youth. This allows for substitutes or replacements without jeopardizing the ongoing safety of a program. This would include those who are not directly responsible for ministry with children and youth, but who serve in close relationship, such as cooks at camps and all priesthood.

9. Planning and Conducting Conferences

Additional questions on this policy should be addressed to Forefront Ministries, 1001 West Walnut, Independence, MO 64050 or by e-mail to youthworker@CofChrist.org.

The church has a long tradition of coming together in conferences to transact the business of the church, to worship, and to fellowship together. Conferences are held at the congregational, mission center, and World Church levels.

Conferences are the legislative bodies of the church. They may be regular or special. Generally, regular conferences shall be held annually or otherwise as agreed upon by those who constitute their membership. They may represent the church at large, a mission center, or a congregation. They are subject to the jurisdiction of the First Presidency, members of the Council of Twelve, and appropriate mission center presidents or congregational pastors.¹

World Conference:

The World Conference is the highest legislative body in the church. The World Conference is composed of delegates elected by mission center conferences as well as members of the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve Apostles, the presiding evangelist, the Presiding Bishopric, the church secretary, the presidency of the Quorum of High Priests, and the presidents of Seventy. The First Presidency presides over a World Conference. Information on the basis for delegate representation can be found in the Bylaws of the Community of Christ in Article IV, Section 2.

Field Jurisdiction Conferences:

Conferences of mission centers or congregations are regular gatherings authorized by a congregation, a mission center, or by the presiding officer of these jurisdictions. The member of the Council of Twelve who has administrative supervision may also call a conference if the need arises. These conferences have to do with the common interests of the church members within the specified areas. Mission centers have the option of providing for delegate conferences. In such cases the mission center conference is authorized to determine the basis for representation.²

Special Conferences:

Special conferences may be called by the First Presidency for the World Conference; by the mission center president

for mission center conferences; and by the pastor for congregational conferences. In emergencies special conferences may also be called by the supervising administrative officer having jurisdiction. The call for special conferences shall specify the purpose of the conference and only business mentioned in the call of the conference may be transacted.³

Congregational Conferences:

Congregational conferences shall be convened at least once annually and at such other times as are determined by action of the body. Congregations may consider legislation relating to congregational affairs. They may also consider legislation relating to the affairs of their mission center and recommend its enactment by that mission center's conference. No action by a congregational conference can be out of harmony with actions taken by higher jurisdictional conferences. All congregational conferences shall be scheduled by the pastor in cooperation with the mission center president. The mission center president shall receive adequate notice and should be invited to offer any suggestions or nominations he or she may desire to present. In emergencies, and especially when a congregational pastor is incapacitated or the congregation shall have fallen into disorder, the mission center president may request or call a congregational conference; in this or any other necessary situation the mission center president may recommend procedure, present nominations for office, or do such other things as will best protect the interests of the church. When these interests shall require, the mission center president may take over direction of the congregation for a time, administering the work thereafter—either directly or indirectly—until a more permanent arrangement can be made. If the mission center president is thought to have proceeded unlawfully in any of these matters, appeal is to the supervising field apostle.⁴

Mission Center Conferences:

Unless specific agreement has been given by the field apostle, mission center conferences should meet at least annually. These conferences are authorized to transact business relating to the enhancement of ministry and expansion of the work within the mission center. Enactments of a mission center conference are confined to matters of concern to the mission center, including the