

**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF MOUNTAIN LAKES**

**SAFE CHILD
MANUAL**

Dear Members and Friends,

The Community Church of Mountain Lakes is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy environment in which young people can experience God's love. We believe that preventative steps can be taken to keep our children safe. The policies and procedures contained in this manual have been created to that end.

This manual has been updated from an earlier one created in 2005, which was developed using a variety of sources, including materials developed by the United Church of Christ, and by recognized experts on this topic.

Please spend time familiarizing yourself with the contents of these pages. We ask for your cooperation in the ongoing quest to create the safest possible space for all who enter our doors, and continued prayers for the safety of all God's children.

The Church Council

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THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF MOUNTAIN LAKES SAFE CHILD MANUAL

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As a community of Christian faith, the Community Church of Mountain Lakes is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with the Community Church of Mountain Lakes should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Prejudice and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by Church policy. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

I. DEFINITION OF TERMS

When used in this Manual, the following terms shall have the meanings set forth below.

Authorized Minister: A person who holds Ordained Ministerial Standing or has been Commissioned or Licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ.

Board: Those Boards as designated in the By-laws of the Church and which currently include the Deacons, Trustees, Outreach, Christian Education, and Parish Life.

Church: The Community Church of Mountain Lakes.

Church-Sponsored Sites: Any group, page or list serve that is created by The Community Church of Mountain Lakes for the purpose of establishing, maintaining or growing ministries to and with minors and/or adults.

Congregation: The Members and Friends of the Church, and any other person attending and/or participating in worship and/or activities that the Church sponsors.

Friend: An individual who is not a member of the Church, but who is known to the Members of the Church as a person who regularly participates in the services and/or activities of the Church, and who is listed in the church directory as a non-

member. For the avoidance of doubt, a Friend of the Church can include a person who does not regularly attend worship at the Church if that person is regularly and actively involved in one or more activities that the Church sponsors and is known to staff for six months or more or has been recommended by a member of the church.

Inappropriate Content: Content that is improper or offensive, but also content that might be suited to the medium but not to the relationship.

Member: A person who meets the requirements for “reception into membership” and assumes the responsibilities of membership as described in our Church By-laws, Article III, B & C.

Ministry Provider: A person engaged by the church, whether volunteer or paid, in one of its ministries, (including but not limited to): Authorized Ministers, Faith Formation teachers, and Junior and Senior High youth leaders.

Ministry Recipient: Any member of the Congregation or any student/child/youth in one of the Church’s programs.

Ministry Relationship: The relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the Church and the one being served by the Ministry.

Reporting: Individuals who work with youth are responsible to report to clergy any activity or language which indicates that a minor is being harmed (e.g. sexual assault, physical abuse or emotional torment) by a youth or adult, considering doing harm to themselves (e.g. cutting or thoughts or plans of suicide) or harming others (e.g. abuse, homicide or rape). Any information that is posted on a Church-sponsored site that includes this type of information should be reported to clergy, documented in church records and deleted from the site. By law, clergy are mandated reporters.

Staff Member: An individual who is an employee receiving compensation from the Church.

Youth Event: An event sponsored by the Church that is designed specifically for children under 18 years of age. This only includes activities to which the Church

gives both monetary and congregational support and in which the Church has the ultimate control, decision-making, and management authority over the policies and procedures of said activities. Examples of Church-sponsored Youth Activities include choir rehearsals, retreats, middle school and high school youth group meetings and outings, and other youth activities in other areas. For the avoidance of doubt such sponsored activities shall not include activities conducted by a third party on the premises of the church where those activities are effectively under the control of the third party, whether or not the church contributes any support to the activity. Examples of third party activities are scouts, AA groups, YMCA camps, and any other groups that simply rent space in the church.

II. POLICIES IN SELECTING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH MINORS

The Church is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to ensure this, we expect that all individuals seeking to serve in a volunteer Ministry Relationship with minors shall be Members or Friends of the Church. It is the policy of the Church to provide adequate supervision for all Youth Events. All volunteers/tutors working with children or youth must read the Community Church of Mountain Lake's Safe Child Manual and sign a document attesting to the fact that they have read it and will follow it. Additionally, all volunteers must view the video tutorial on this subject. They will have an opportunity for questions and discussion after they have watched the video. They will then be asked to sign a document attesting that they will adhere to the policies and practices described therein. They will also be asked to fill out the Screening in Faith Form and to provide current references.

The Council will be responsible for determining any other training programs that might be used in lieu of or in addition to what is described above. Each Board will be responsible for ensuring that their respective programs with youth and children include only trained persons.

A person, as designated by the Senior Pastor and approved by the Church Council, will verify references and complete background checks on all individuals applying for, or appointed to a paid staff position. The aforementioned designated person

shall also verify at least one reference for volunteer Ministry Providers. Any problems with the reference checks shall be brought to the attention of the Board or Council, as appropriate. Reference checks should be completed within sixty days of request for involvement and before engaging in a Ministry relationship with minors.

Each volunteer submitting an application to work with children must be individually reviewed and approved by the Board responsible for overseeing the program. For example, Faith Formation teachers and youth coordinators would be approved by the Board of Christian Education. Approval will be documented in the appropriate area on the Screening in Faith Form.

All staff members, paid and volunteer, who have contact with children need to follow the Safe Child Policy and to complete the training/application program unless they have already completed a similar program which they can document.

III. PROHIBITED PRACTICES

No person serving in the role of a Ministry Provider (adult or youth) may engage in any of the following behaviors.

Sexual exploitation: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Ministry Provider engaged in the work of the Church takes advantage of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the Ministry Provider.

Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person, contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the other person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment.

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

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

IV. SUPERVISION POLICIES

The leadership of the Church has enacted the following internal procedures and policies in working with our children and youth. All individuals serving in a Ministry Relationship shall follow these policies.

1) Provide Adequate Personnel: Youth Events should always include adequate supervisory personnel, preferably two safe child trained leaders. Supervision should be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or guardians.

2) Obtain Parental Permission: In situations where Church staff or volunteer workers have a legitimate reason (such as in a mentoring or counseling capacity) to be alone with a child, the Church worker must obtain the consent of the child's parent or guardian beforehand.

3) Address Unacceptable Behavior Immediately: Any inappropriate conduct that falls within the prohibited practices listed in section III, must be stopped immediately by the person leading the relevant activity. The incident should then be reported to the Senior Pastor (or the chair of Pastoral Relations if the matter

involves the Senior Pastor). The Senior Pastor (or chair of Pastoral Relations) then reports this to the Response Team and they together with the Pastor (or Chair of Pastoral Relations) shall be responsible for taking corrective actions which may include issuing prompt warnings, notifying the parent or guardian of the child, notifying appropriate local or state officials if appropriate, and setting up monitoring procedures to prevent recurrences of the activity. Any person paid or otherwise, who repeatedly ignores such warnings and continues with such inappropriate conduct may be terminated or otherwise removed from their position; such termination may be immediate for a single violation of sufficient gravity. All such terminations shall be appealable to the Council, which shall have the final decision-making authority.

4) Ensure Adequate Visibility at Youth Events: Wherever possible, activities involving minors should have two safe child leaders. If this is not possible then doors to the rooms should be left open during activities so that persons passing by can observe inside. Program leaders also should make random visits to classrooms and frequently visit or inspect areas of Church buildings that are isolated from view.

5) Observe Overnight Rules: Special attention must be given to overnight activities that involve youth. All adult chaperones and supervisors must be approved in advance to work with youth. Approval will be obtained from the chairperson of the Board responsible for overseeing the activity and from the staff member running the program. For overnight trips involving youth, there should always be two adult chaperones and, for coed groups, the chaperones shall include one male and one female whenever possible. For large groups of children, there should be a ratio of one adult for every six to eight youth.

6) Two Adult Rule: Two supervisors should be present during any Church Youth Event or any other activity involving minors. Preferably one of these supervisors will be someone over 21 years of age. There may be temporary or extraordinary situations where this is not always possible. In the event that two adult supervisors are not present on an ongoing basis, the program director and Church Council should be notified.

V. DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICIES

I. Guidelines – Safe Church (Minor to Adult Relationships)

Social Networking Sites - Relationship and Group Status

1. Adults should not submit “friend” requests to minors. A minor may request friendships with adults, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with minors prior to responding to these requests.
2. When and where available, Ministry Providers may choose to create separate private and professional profiles on networking sites to create a line of privacy.
3. If a Ministry Provider chooses to accept friend requests from minors that are associated with our Church, we recommend that all communications happen publicly or with other parties involved.
4. Ministry Providers who choose to accept friend requests from minors should use all privacy settings applicable to shield said minor from any inappropriate content that may exist within the Ministry Provider’s profile.
5. We strongly recommend “closed” groups, but not “hidden” groups be used for Church purposes.
6. Any inappropriate material posted on Church sites will be documented for Church records, and then deleted from the site. Any material related to the harm of a minor or by a minor will be reported to clergy.
7. Any content that details inappropriate behavior during a Church-sponsored event or activity should be addressed by a Ministry Provider and parents.

II. Guidelines – Boundaries (Adult to Adult relationships)

Social Networking Sites - Relationship and Group status

Members of The Community Church of Mountain Lakes who seek religious or spiritual advice from our Ministry Providers via digital means (email, social

networking site posts, etc.) should be aware that their communication is NOT confidential. Use of digital means to communicate nullifies confidentiality.

III. Guidelines for Communication and Contact

Guidelines for Transitions

After a staff member's employment with the Church ends, they should no longer offer pastoral care to anyone associated with the Church through digital communication or any other means.

Guidelines for Digital Communication

1. We acknowledge that materials posted on our Church-sponsored sites are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.
2. We acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site.
3. We uphold the following guidelines:
 - Appropriate language must be used.
 - We will not share your contact information without your permission. You can share your own information, but we request that you do not share that of others without their permission.
 - Individuals may tag themselves in photos but should not tag others, unless given permission by said person.
 - We will not allow acts of: cyber bullying or posting pictures that depict abuse, violence, or sexual acts. Anyone posting material of this nature will be removed and denied access to the site and group.
 - Mandatory reporting laws will be followed.

Guidelines for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs

1. Adults should refrain from video chats with youth.
2. Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.

Guidelines for Publishing/Posting Content Online

1. All Faith Formation registration forms will allow for parents & guardians to give permission to The Community Church of Mountain Lakes via checking a Media Release, which provides permission for their minor child(ren) to be photographed or videoed for distribution on our website, Church emails, and social media outlets. Parents or guardians can check yes or no.
2. Photos that are published on our Church-sponsored sites will not include name or contact information directly identifying the minors in the photos.

VI. REPORTING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This Safe Child Manual and Policy is aimed at ensuring that child abuse does not occur within the Community Church or during its sanctioned activities. In the unlikely event that any person has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused, that person shall report it immediately (first verbally, then in writing) to the person who is leading or supervising the Church Youth Event. The report should include the type of abuse, the physical and behavioral indicators that are present, or a description of the inappropriate behavior that was witnessed with names and dates. Pursuant to New Jersey state law, this reporting obligation covers suspected abuse, even if it is not known where the abuse may be occurring (at Church or elsewhere).

The lead or supervising person (depending on the program) must immediately contact the Senior Pastor, with the report of suspected abuse (first verbally, then in writing), who will then contact the Response Team. Failure to do so in a timely manner may result in discipline, including discharge. Any complaints by or against the Senior Pastor for child sexual abuse or sexual harassment shall be directed immediately to the President of the Church Council. At no time shall any person, staff or volunteer, attempt to conduct a detailed inquiry either through investigation or interrogation of a child beyond that information necessary to cause such a person to have reason to believe that a child may have been abused. It shall be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor together with the Response Team, to decide if the allegation should be reported to the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) and if so, to make that report. It shall also be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor to convene the Response Team to respond as

appropriate with caring, investigation and if appropriate a recommendation of discipline or other responsive action. The Response Team shall work under the advisement of the Senior Pastor, the Council, and local civil authorities.

VII. CHURCH RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Church Council will assign a Response Team at the beginning of each church year (September) for the coming year. The Response Team will consist of at least three Members, with multiple genders being represented. These team members may be drawn from the Board of Christian Education, the Church Council, and the general church membership.

The Council shall name one member of the Response Team to be the spokesperson for the Church who will speak in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way. All members of the Response Team will follow our local Division of Youth and Family Services reporting requirements.

A clear position statement of our Church regarding safety of all shall be posted on our website.

All allegations will be taken seriously, with appropriate internal and external investigations conducted. Care and support to the victim and the victim's family will be shown and pastoral care will be offered.

Situations will be handled forthrightly and confidentially with due respect for all people's (alleged victim and accused) dignity and privacy. The Response Team will not release the names of minors unless as directed by the appropriate civil authorities. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities. The parents or guardian of any minor will be notified.

All actions involving an incident will be fully documented in writing.

If the accused is a Church volunteer, that person will be temporarily relieved of their duties until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

If the accused is a paid employee, the Council will, relieve said employee of their duties that involve minors and choose to either maintain or suspend their income

until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. All incidents will be reported immediately to the Church insurance company, attorney and denominational officials.

VIII. RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Much of the material used in developing this manual came from the following sources.

"Child Neglect and Abuse in New Jersey 1997-1998", State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services, Division of Youth and Family Services, May 2000.

"Creating Safer Places for Ministry", Vol. 4, UCC Insurance Board, Cleveland, OH, 2013.

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"Making Our Churches Safe for All. Abuse-Prevention Resources for Local Churches". UCC Insurance Board, Gaithersburg, MD, 2013.

"Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pub/PreventingChildAbuse.html>

"SafeConduct Policy and Procedure," Insurance Board, Cleveland, OH, 2012.

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