

PARISH PROTECTION PROGRAM HANDBOOK

- *Madison Christian Community* -

INTRODUCTION

Little children were being brought to Jesus in order that he might take them in his arms and bless them. And Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

- *Matthew 19:13-14*

On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect.

- *I Corinthians 12:22-23*

We take these words from the Bible seriously. We expect this congregation will be safe and loving, a place of care and security. We want children, youth and vulnerable people (C/Y/VP) to be treated as Jesus would treat them and seek to extend his will for wellbeing in all their lives. The Parish Protection Program (PPP) guides us in our ongoing efforts to create a safe, vital, healthy community through its screening and orientation process and by holding members of the Madison Christian Community (MCC) accountable to simple guidelines that offer safety and security for all. Together, we affirm the following values:

- We are called to love, care for, and protect all persons, especially C/Y/VP.
- We are called to provide safe places of justice and hospitality where all might gather to know and to be known in community and by God.
- We are called to celebrate C/Y/VP to work to protect those who are in danger and to heal those who have been hurt.
- Our church is a holy place of sanctuary where all can gather for worship, study and service knowing they are safe and secure in the community of faith.

DEFINITIONS

Abbreviations

- C/Y/VP:** Child(ren), youth and/or vulnerable person(s)
- PPP:** Parish Protection Program
- MCC:** Madison Christian Community
- PPC:** Parish Protection Committee
- MoU:** Memorandum of Understanding

Role Definitions

- Child:** a person aged 0 to 10 years
- Youth:** a person aged 11 to 17 years
- Adult:** a person aged 18 years and over
- Vulnerable Person:** In general, a vulnerable person is someone who, for physical or mental reasons, is unable to look after themselves.
- Leader:** a volunteer or paid staff member who has completed steps 1 and 2 of the onboarding process described later in this handbook
- Participants:** the C/Y/VP gathered for a given event

Minimum Required Ratios

- 0-5 years:** 2 leaders plus 1 additional for every 5 C/Y/VP beyond 10
- 6-8 years:** 2 leaders plus 1 additional for every 6 C/Y/VP beyond 12
- 9-14 years:** 2 leaders plus 1 additional for every 8 C/Y/VP beyond 16
- 15-18 years:** 2 leaders plus 1 additional for every 10 C/Y/VP beyond 20

STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

BASIC GUIDELINES

1) **Open Door Policy:** Activities should not take place in secret or behind closed doors. No one shall ask that activities be kept secret. Parents/guardians are welcome to observe classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, events, etc.

2) **Dual Supervision and Rule of Three:** At least two leaders will be present at all activities involving C/Y/VP. These leaders should not be related to one another.

If there are times where dual supervision may not be feasible, then the “Rule of Three” shall be honored. The Rule of Three indicates that there should always be at least three people present. Such situations (e.g, carpooling or during pick up/drop off) should be planned in advance and also confirmed with parents/guardians. For example, the last three people, including the staff person locking the door, will leave our facilities together to avoid situations where one adult and one child, youth and/or vulnerable person are left alone together.

If needed, private consultations between an adult and a child, youth and/or vulnerable person shall occur in a room with a window in the door with another adult in the general area. Individual contact between an adult and a child, youth and/or vulnerable person outside the church building shall occur only in public places and with prior consent of the child, youth and/or vulnerable person and their parent/guardian.

3) **Transportation:** During offsite events, all drivers will be adults, not high school students. One driver must transport two or more C/Y/VP together to avoid one-on-one situations. All one-on-one situations require prior written or verbal parental authorization.

BEHAVIOR AND RELATIONSHIPS

4) **Behavior Management Hazing, Harassment:** Leaders will reflect Christian values by using positive, constructive, respectful, and restorative practices to manage behavior. Leaders are encouraged to communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, give alternate choices, use mindfulness breaks, and to listen to the child or youth’s perspective about their needs for success.

Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insult, or shouting. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any form of physical or sexual punishment. Leaders will never withhold basic necessities, including but not limited to: snacks, water, or bathroom breaks.

Physical or verbal hazing and harassment are prohibited at all church activities. This includes the use of put-downs, excessive teasing, name-calling or assigning nicknames.

5) **Physical Contact:** Setting boundaries is the responsibility of the adults. Physical contact such as wrestling, horseplay, sardines or other high contact games are not appropriate for ministry settings. No adult leader will initiate or encourage physical or intimate contact with C/Y/VP. Furthermore, all participants and leaders are expected to remain with the group throughout activities.

No one will separate off from the group to other parts of the building or grounds without adult supervision.

6) **Sexual/Romantic Relations:** Adults will not date or be otherwise romantically/sexually involved with C/Y/VP. Additionally, all sexually abusive behaviors are prohibited. This includes sexual comments or jokes, the showing or making of pornographic material,

the exposure of sexual parts of the body, peeping, etc.

7) Names and Pronouns: Everyone should have control over what their name, pronouns, and/or nickname are. This should be honored and respected by all others. A person's chosen name and pronouns should be used at all times.

8) Bathrooms, Showers, Changing Rooms: We respect all people's personal privacy, especially while using bathrooms, showers and changing rooms. Leaders will assist C/Y/VP only insofar as health and safety require.

Group bathroom breaks are encouraged. If a single C/Y/VP must be accompanied to the bathroom, when possible two adults should be present and, if the bathroom has an outer door with stalls inside, the outer door of the bathroom shall be left open or ajar. If the bathroom is a single room, the adult(s) shall wait in the common space outside the closed bathroom door. When possible, adults should rotate through this task so the same adult is not repeatedly with C/Y/VP in the bathroom. Those C/Y/VP needing direct assistance in the bathroom should reach out to the CFM Director or program leader.

Participants and leaders will have access to bathroom and shower facilities affirming their gender identity. Shower schedules will be established so that everyone feels safe and comfortable. Use of cameras and/or recording devices is prohibited in all bathrooms, showers or changing rooms.

All participants and leaders must wear appropriate sleepwear while sleeping. All participants and leaders must wear appropriate swimwear while swimming.

9) Sleeping Accommodations: If an activity requires overnight sleeping accommodations, the gender identities of the adults present should be as representative as possible of the

gender identities of the students present. Sleeping arrangements will be made so all C/Y/VP feel safe and comfortable.

There should be at least three individuals in all rooms to honor the Rule of Three. One C/Y/VP shall not sleep alone in a tent, bedroom, hotel room, etc. with one adult unless the adult is their parent/guardian. Parents/guardians will be advised of the names of the leaders and notified of any changes in leadership as soon as possible.

10) Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco: Participants and leaders in any congregation-sponsored event relating to C/Y/VP shall not be under the influence of any illicit drugs, tobacco or alcohol (except for wine used for communion) nor using over the counter or prescription drugs for unintended purposes. Such use will result in disciplinary actions, including removal from the activity.

Adult leaders, in pairs only, have the right to search a minor's belongings if there is probable suspicion. Their parents/guardians will be notified of the misconduct and of any searches.

11) Nursery: The church nursery will have an identification system that links each child and their parents/guardians so that no unauthorized person may take the child without consent of the parents or legal guardians. The nursery is required to have two adults or one adult and one youth on duty at all times of operation. When possible, parents/guardians should be paged for diaper changes and bathroom trips.

12) Visitors On-site: The leaders serving our church shall be aware of who is visiting our facilities. Visitors from outside the community shall be accompanied on their visit to the areas frequented by C/Y/VP.

13) Digital Spaces and Communications: Parents/guardians should always be included in one-on-one communications with youth.

To honor the Rule of Three, group communications should always include two unrelated adults. When connecting over video, leaders should ensure their background and any objects in it are appropriate.

Friending/following on social media should be initiated by the youth and approved by the parents/guardians. Refrain from posting media including youth and vulnerable populations to personal accounts without prior permission. Those who do not wish to have media including them appear online may opt out.

14) Confirmation: Confirmation mentors are required to attend an additional training.

15) Reporting Responsibilities: Any inappropriate conduct or suspected violation of these standards shall be reported to the Parish Protection Committee (PPC) or a staff person. If you are unsure whether or not your suspected case would violate the standards outlined here, it is strongly recommended that you err on the side of caution and report your suspicion immediately.

ONBOARDING PROCESS

To participate as a volunteer, individuals must have **(a)** participated in the MCC for at least 6 months, **(b)** be at least 5 years older than those they wish to serve and **(c)** complete the application process detailed below.

Individuals may begin this process while they complete their initial 6 months of MCC participation, but the first two steps (application and memorandum of understanding) must be completed before they may be allowed to interact with C/Y/VP as an MCC volunteer. One-time or limited-time volunteers may forgo this process so long as they are always paired with an adult leader or staff member in compliance with this policy.

The PPC reserves the right to ask volunteers to re-do the entire process if circumstances warrant

it. If information is revealed in this process that draws the applicant's ability to work with C/Y/VP into question, refer to Addendum A: Handling Questionable Background Information

Step 1: Application

Applications will be sent to prospective volunteers; completed applications will be reviewed by a PPC member. The application will also include:

1. A background check.
2. Personal references contacted by a PPC member

Step 2: Memorandum of Understanding

Prospective volunteers must review the Parish Protection Program Handbook and sign the Memorandum of Understanding, indicating their agreement with our policies and procedures and their understanding of the importance of keeping C/Y/VP and our entire community as safe as possible.

Step 3: Orientation

Applicants who are approved will have 6 months to attend an orientation and training session, which are offered periodically throughout the year and as need arises. If all other requirements have been met, however, they are cleared to start working with C/Y/VP before attending the session.

The purpose of the Orientation is to share information and provide a forum for an open, guided discussion about the value of the Parish Protection Program for the health and vitality of our community.

Step 4: Compliance

1. Background checks will be conducted every three years for as long as the volunteer continues to be actively involved with C/Y/VP or as long as the staff member is employed.
2. Volunteers will complete a new Memorandum of Understanding annually.
3. Other training opportunities may be available or required as needed.

PARISH PROTECTION COMMITTEE (PPC)

Record Keeping

The following information will be maintained for each volunteer or staff member in a locked filing cabinet or within a password-protected database.

- a. application form
- b. results from the background check if it reveals any issues
- c. notes, etc. from interview if one is conducted
- d. notes, etc. from references
- e. proof of training participation
- f. signed Memorandum of Understanding
- g. information on any questionable cases and their resolutions.

Confidentiality

The credibility of the Parish Protection Program depends on confidentiality. All people involved with handling personnel records and discussing problem cases understand the confidentiality expectations and have signed a Confidentiality Statement to this effect. Confidentiality means that:

- a. Information is not shared from the application forms, references, or records checks with anyone other than those directly entrusted with reviewing this information.
- b. Information related to the Parish Protection Program is carefully handled and not left out in common view. Paperwork is kept in a locked file when not being used.

While the results of the records checks are legally public information, as a courtesy, they will be treated as confidential. If someone asks for the results of a check, they will be advised as to how they might get the information from the Department of Justice.

Parish Protection Committee Membership

The Parish Protection Committee consists of the staff member(s) directly responsible for C/Y/VP programming, one or both pastors, and representatives from each congregation. Congregational representatives to the PPC should have demonstrated experience in or commitment to the safety of vulnerable populations. In addition, they should comprehend the sensitive nature of the work and sign a confidentiality agreement. Committee members should be approved by the Leadership Team upon recommendation by the PPC. The committee meets at least four times a year.

Specific responsibilities of the PPC can be found in the PPC Policy.

Policy Review

This policy should be reviewed by the PPC every two years and revised as needed.

ADDENDUM A: Handling Questionable Background Information

Employers may only refuse to hire a qualified applicant because of a pending charge or conviction for an offense that is substantially related to the particular job. It is wise and ethical to apply this same standard to volunteers. A recommended list of criminal convictions that would prohibit one from working with C/Y/VP are those listed in Section 48.65 (lm) (g) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

Under this language, someone charged with sexually abusing children could be hired if there was an acquittal. Since a criminal case is “beyond a reasonable doubt,” this means someone who “more likely than not” abused children would nonetheless clear this fence. National youth serving organizations exclude those who have been charged with crimes against children because the risk is too high, and they want to err on the side of caution.

When a person's application form, references and/or records check indicate there may be reasons this person should not work with children or youth, further information will be gathered before a decision is made. What follows is our procedure for handling questionable applications to help ensure that all applicants are treated fairly.

- 1) An MCC pastor or authorized member of the PPC will be the only persons who will conduct background checks. Information is handled sensitively and there will be transparency around any information that pertains to C/Y/VP.
- 2) If questionable information is revealed, a pastor will contact the individual with the questionable background information and explain that there is something in the background information which may disqualify the individual from working with C/Y/VP.

- 3) If there was a criminal conviction, the pastor will ask for information about the nature of the crime in order to determine if the crime was one that would prohibit the individual from working with children or youth. This information will be requested only to determine if the conviction is substantially related to the position.
- 4) The pastor conducting the records check will also ask what type of rehabilitation efforts have been made by the individual and request written permission to consult with the individual's counselors, therapists, or other professionals who have helped in the rehabilitation process using the **Confidential Information Request Form**.
- 5) The pastor will contact the Insurance Company holding our building insurance policy if the questionable information being researched has to do with sexual misconduct.
- 6) The pastor will consult with the individual's additional references, which may include counselors, therapists, law enforcement officers, legal counselor, social worker, and with a lawyer for recommendations.
- 7) After the necessary information has been gathered, the pastor will make a presentation to the Parish Protection Committee.
- 8) The PPC will decide about the individual's ability to work with children or youth based on the information gathered, nature of the criminal conviction, goals of the program, the Recommended Standards of Behavior as well as other liability, and safety concerns. Successful rehabilitation does not guarantee a person the right to work with children or youth. The possible decisions regarding the individual's suitability to work with C/Y/VP are no, yes with restrictions, or yes.

9) The person will be informed of the decision made by the PPC.

ADDENDUM B: When Inappropriate Behavior is Suspected

If a volunteer or paid staff person is suspected of inappropriate behavior (i.e. physical, sexual, emotional, verbal abuse, threats or intimidation), the following procedure will be followed to evaluate the impact of this behavior on that person's suitability to work with C/Y/VP.

If anyone suspects inappropriate behavior toward children or youth on the part of MCC staff or volunteers, that person should speak to a member of the PPC as soon as possible following the incident and to submit an Incident Report Form (available at www.themcc.net). The PPC requires that an Incident Report Form be completed and submitted to them within 24 hours of the incident or knowledge of the incident whenever possible. All allegations will be handled with utmost concern for everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

If the incident involves a member of the PPC, the person in question will report to a different group member and the PPC member involved in the incident will not lead the incident's evaluation procedure.

If the person who suspects inappropriate behavior is not comfortable speaking to a member of the PPC they are urged to speak to either of the pastors, or a co-chair of the MCC.

A member of the PPC will notify the parents or guardians of the C/Y/VP involved in the allegation.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the following people or organizations may also be contacted: The Dane County Department of Health and Family Services (608) 261-4973 either by the person who witnessed or suspects the inappropriate behavior or by one of the pastors at

the MCC. (Under Wisconsin law Clergy are mandated reporters).

A member of the PPC may also contact our insurance carrier, seek legal counsel and contact the appropriate Ecclesiastical body – the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin (ELCA) and/or the Southwest Wisconsin Association Office (UCC) to notify them that an allegation has been made and is being reviewed.

The PPC will review the allegation to determine if it substantially relates to youth safety and/or the work the individual is performing using the Recommended Standards of Behavior and the Wisconsin Statutes as a basis for evaluation.

If the PPC finds that the behavior does not put C/Y/VP at risk or raise safety concerns, they will have a conversation with the individual whose behavior was called into question about steps to resolve the problem.

If the PPC finds that the behavior raises C/Y/VP safety concerns, the individual whose behavior was called into question will be suspended until the circumstances surrounding the allegation are reviewed. Other staff and volunteers will be notified of the suspension and ongoing process on a need-to-know basis. Utmost care and concern will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the C/Y/VP involved as well as that of the alleged perpetrator. Pastoral care will be provided to all parties.

After reviewing additional evidence gathered, if evidence shows there are child or youth safety concerns, the PPC may remove the individual or impose restrictions or conditions for future volunteering with C/Y/VP.

Other staff and volunteers will be notified of the person's removal or restrictions/conditions put in place on a need-to-know basis. Parents and guardians will be updated when a decision on the person's status is complete.

All PPC actions will be carefully documented using the Incident Report Form and Alleged Incident Follow-up Report Form.