



Northside Community Church

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Adopted by the Elders on 3rd March, 2020

Statement of Commitment to Safety

The Church is committed to providing places, services and programs that promote physical, emotional and spiritual health and safety and model the love of Christ to all whom we have contact with, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults.

All people, including children and vulnerable adults, have the right to be respected and valued and to feel emotionally, physically and spiritually safe at all times. We are committed to providing a safe, respectful, welcoming and positive environment for children and adults from all backgrounds.

We have a posture of zero-tolerance regarding abuse and will adopt, implement, and maintain systems, policies, and procedures to protect people from all forms of abuse. This includes in the recruitment and management of our people, both staff and volunteers.

We will ensure that vulnerable people are informed about their rights and participate in decisions affecting them. We commit to empowering children and actively listening to them. We are committed to respecting diversity and promoting equity. We will receive allegations and concerns regarding abuse very seriously and will respond with respect and compassion.

Purpose

The Church has adopted the *Safe Church Policy* (the Policy) to:

- help us live out our biblical mandate to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30-31);
- provide a framework to inform the provision of safe environments and programs for children, young people and vulnerable adults; and
- meet our legal obligations in relation to:
 - implementing the ten Child Safe Standards
 - staff and volunteers engaged in child-related work (or, in ACT, regulated activities); and
 - reporting matters to government authorities, including making reports to police, making mandatory reports and making notifications about reportable conduct.

The Policy outlines the commitment of the church to principles in various areas. More detail regarding the practical implementation of these commitments is available in the relevant procedures and guidelines.

Scope

This Policy applies to:

- all Church Leadership, staff and volunteers; and
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs.

1. Activities and Services for Children at the Church

As a church, we commit to providing places, services and programs that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

1.1 Church Leadership:

- a. recognise that children and young people are an integral part of the Church and talk about this in services, sermons, training events and meetings;
- b. involve children and young people in the routine of church life as appropriate
- c. consider the needs of children and young people when they make decisions about budgets, buildings, renovations, use of property, décor, or catering; and
- d. encourage children and young people to have input in decisions that affect them by including them in church forums and meetings as appropriate.

1.2 Safe Church Team:

- a. talk with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to feel safe, to be listened to and to have their views respected (including discussing what they should do and who they should approach if they feel unsafe or hurt, or they suspect that someone else is unsafe or hurt);
- b. Ensure the congregation is aware of who the Safe Church Team is and how they can be contacted;
- c. Ensure the *Safe Church Policy*, the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*, the *Procedure for Conflict Resolution* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns* are promoted and accessible to the congregation;
- d. Promote the process outlined in the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* in a child-friendly manner in church spaces, including where children's ministry is conducted; and
- e. ensure their contact details are accessible to children and their caregivers.

1.3 Staff and volunteers:

- a. listen to children and take seriously what they say;
- b. talk with children and young people about the kinds of behaviours, attitudes or 'culture' that they would like to promote in their group;
- c. encourage children and young people to have input regarding the content of programs and types of activities they engage in.

Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

2. Staff and Volunteers**2.1 Screening, selection and induction of Staff and Volunteers**

The Church **will**:

- a. undertake screening processes for all staff and volunteers;
- b. engage in fair and transparent selection processes for all staff and volunteers;
- c. provide an induction for all staff and volunteers; and
- d. recruit, select and induct in accordance with the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*.

2.2 Training and Resourcing of Staff and Volunteers

The Church **will**:

- a. ensure that staff and volunteers develop the knowledge and skills to create safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people;
- b. ensure that staff and volunteers have access to information about creating safe spaces and that they all undergo appropriate training regarding the available

- procedures, guidelines and forms referred to in this Policy;
- c. support staff and volunteers with adequate resources to enable them to maintain and promote safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people; and
- d. implement the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*

2.3 Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

The Church **will**:

- a. provide spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe;
- b. require all staff and volunteers to uphold the *Code of Conduct* which includes expected standards of behaviour for those who engage in ministry with children and/or vulnerable people; and
- c. expect staff and volunteers to follow *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*.

The *Code of Conduct* will be reviewed by the Church Leadership on a bi-annual basis.

Please see the ***Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*** and the ***Northside Application Screening Form*** for more detail.

3. Conflict, Complaints and Child Protection Concerns

3.1 Responding to Child Protection Concerns

The Church **will**:

- a. ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all child protection concerns and any complaints relating to child sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child in accordance with the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*; and
- b. ensure that all child protection concerns and complaints will be reported to the relevant government departments and, if necessary, police as soon as possible.
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3.2 Complaint Handling

The Church **will**:

- a. respond to complaints in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*; and
- b. where there is a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has engaged in abuse, including child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct involving a child, treat the allegation as an allegation relating to a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* and respond in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*.

3.3 Resolving Conflict

- a. In the event of receiving a complaint that relates to a minor breach of the Code of Conduct or a grievance, the Church may determine to respond to the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Conflict Resolution*.

4. Safe Environments

4.1 Physical Environments

The Church **will**:

- a. Appoint a Work, Health and Safety Team to assist the Church to comply with Work, Health and Safety requirements.
- b. consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk to children and vulnerable people;
- c. identify and address risks arising from the physical environment in which programs and activities take place (see Risk Assessment and Safe Church Risk Management Plan section below).
- d. consider whether any ministries it supports have appropriate child protection practices in place;
- e. If the Church has any residential property that is identifiable as being Church property (e.g. a manse adjacent to the Church building) then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property obtain and hold Working With Children Check (or a Working with Vulnerable Persons) clearance for the duration of their residence;
- f. take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable people when it provides direct support to overseas ministries (that is, not via the relevant Australian entity of the overseas ministry), in accordance with ACNC External Conduct Standard 4. (This includes consideration of whether supporting orphanages overseas is appropriate).

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4.2 Online Environments

The Church **will**:

- a. Ensure that online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed; and
- b. promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication.

Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

5. Risk Management

5.1 Persons of Concern

The Church will manage any person identified as a Person of Concern in the Persons of Concern Policy.

5.2 Risk Assessments

The Church **will**:

- c. ensure that ministry leaders complete and make a record of a risk assessment in relation to any program or activity undertaken at, for or with the Church.
 - for regular activities, the risk assessment will be conducted at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in the program activities, attendance or location
- a. for special or 'one-off' activities, a risk assessment to that 'one-off' activity will be completed

- d. ensure that appropriate and reasonable precautions are adopted to address risks identified as part of a risk assessment. When considering what measures are appropriate, the Church will consider the likelihood of an incident occurring, the seriousness of the consequences and the difficulty of avoiding the risk;
- e. at least annually, ensure that the Work Health and Safety Team reviews risk assessments and gives appropriate feedback to each ministry area;
- f. store risk assessment forms in a secure location for a period of at least 45 years (preferably 100 years).

5.3 Safe Church Risk Management Plan

The Church will:

- a. as a part of the annual risk assessment process outlined in section 5.2, specifically consider risks to children and vulnerable adults;
- b. at least annually, ensure that the Safe Church Team reviews the part of the risk assessments relating to risks to children and vulnerable adults and gives appropriate feedback to each ministry area;
- c. require staff and volunteers to abide by the Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People;
- d. carefully consider and address any disclosures received on the Screening Questionnaire; and
- e. ensure that any staff or volunteer in child-related work who poses a serious risk to children will be removed from their role in accordance with the Failure to Protect provisions outlined in Section 43B of the NSW Crimes Act 1900 (or Section 66A of the ACT Crimes Act 1900)

6. Third Parties and Affiliated Entities

The Church will:

- a. require any third party (tenant or external party using Church property) that provides services to children and/or young people to provide written confirmation of their compliance with the Child Safe Standards at least annually; and
- b. ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with the Child Safe Standards including annual reports to the governance body regarding child safety.

7. Recordkeeping

- a. The Church will retain all written records for a minimum of 45 years (preferably 100 years), in hard copy and/or electronically in a secure manner.

Record Type	Required Approach
Sensitive information	The records will be stored in a manner to protect confidentiality and only accessed by a limited number of authorised persons (For example Screening Questionnaires, Safe Church Concerns forms, or incident reports).
Hard copy	The records will be stored in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and the physical condition of the records.
Electronic	The records will be stored in a manner to ensure security and to

	allow for ongoing accessibility.
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Records to which this item applies includes, but is not limited to:

- a. operational records such as ministry information forms, attendance records, staff/volunteer rosters, position descriptions, risk assessments;
- b. staff and volunteer records (as outlined in the Procedure for Staff and Volunteers);
- c. general child safety records such as the Safe Church Register, the annual safe Church commitment by third parties and affiliated entities, dated copies of this Policy and the relevant procedures, forms and guidelines from time to time; and
- d. specific child safety incident records such as any completed Safe Church Concerns Forms, any other document relating to reporting an incident or handling a complaint and any contemporaneous notes regarding reporting decisions.

Please see the *Privacy Policy* for more detail.

8. Review and Accountability

8.1 Internal Review

The Church will review this and the Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers policy annually.

8.2 External Accountability

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the Churches of Christ in NSW & ACT and / or its Insurance Company in relation to any safety and wellbeing incident that relates to a police report, mandatory report, reportable conduct allegation, legal claim, work safe report and/or any complaints against Endorsed Ministers,

Please see the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns* for more detail.