

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Adopted by Church Leadership Team on 13 February 2020

COMMITMENT

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.

PURPOSE

The Church has adopted the *Safe Church 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);
- to create an environment so that all people can confidently be and feel safe;
- implement the 10 Child Safe Standards;
- provide a framework to inform the provision of safe environments and programs for all whom we have contact with, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults; and
- meet our legal obligations in relation to:
 - Work, Health and Safety.
 - staff and volunteers engaged in Child-related Work (or, in ACT, Regulated Activities); and
 - reporting matters, including Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct, and Reportable Conduct involving a Child, to government authorities.

The *Safe Church 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;
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Church Officers

The Church Leadership Team is to exercise due diligence to ensure the church complies with its general obligations under the WHS Act and Safe Church requirements including consultation, reporting, training and responding to information regarding incidents, complaints, hazards and risks.

Due diligence includes taking reasonable steps:

- to acquire and keep up-to-date knowledge of work health and safety matters, including changes in regulations and best practice;
- to gain an understanding of the nature of the hazards and associated risks associated with the ministries of the church and generally;

- to ensure that the church has appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimize risks;
- to ensure that the church has appropriate processes for receiving and considering information regarding incidents, hazards, complaints and risks, and responding in a timely way to that information
- to ensure that all church members and participants have access and trained in the process and procedures
- to ensure that the church maintains proper records for the required period

WHS Officers

The Work Health & Safety (WHS) Officers at Georges River Life Church are responsible for the implementation of this policy and associated programs. They will look at WHS issues as they arise and be involved in the development, monitoring, and periodic review of any WHS management programs or procedures at GRLC.

Staff, Volunteers, and Contractors

A worker is someone who carries out work for the church, such as: staff, a volunteer, a student gaining work experience, a contractor or sub-contractor, an employee of a contractor or sub-contractor, an apprentice or trainee, an outworker

Workers must ensure as far as reasonably practical that they:

- comply with GRLC's WHS and associated WHS programs and procedures:
- ensure their own health and safety;
- ensure that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons; and,
- Identify, prevent and report any unsafe act, hazard or behaviours that put themselves and/or others (including visitors and congregation members) to the WHS and/or Church Officers.

It is also the responsibility of contractors and sub-contractors to conduct risk assessments in accordance with WHS Legislation and recommended practices for all tasks, jobs or activities. Failure to comply with the above may be considered a breach of the contract and could be sufficient grounds for termination of the contract.

Church Participants

Participants in church activities are expected to take measures to protect their own safety and comply with reasonable instruction of Church officers.

ORGANISATION

The Senior Pastor is responsible to the CLT for the enactment of this policy, but may delegate the execution, but not accountability, of specific duties to a staff members.

The following teams are to be formed:

Safe Church Team consisting of at least one male and one female to provide oversight of the church's Safe Church Program, including Safe Church Policy and procedures and to provide oversight of the management of Safe Church/Child Protection Concerns and reports. The roles and

responsibilities of this team are at Annex A.

WHS Team to provide oversight of the church's Work Health and Safety program, including policy and procedures. The roles and responsibilities of this team are at Annex B.

1. ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AT THE CHURCH

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

1.1. Church Leadership are to:

- 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 where 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 when appropriate.

1.2. Safe Church Team are to:

- a) talk with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to be safe, 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); and
- b) ensure their contact details are accessible to children.

1.3. Staff and volunteers:

- a) listen to children and take seriously what children are saying;
- 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 and activities they would like to be part of their group.

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

- a) The church will undertake appropriate screening processes for all staff and volunteers
- b) The church will engage in fair and transparent selection processes for all staff and volunteers
- c) The church will provide appropriate induction for all staff and volunteers
- d) All staff and volunteers are to be recruited, selected and inducted in accordance with the *GRLC HR Manual*.

2.2 Training and Resourcing of Staff and Volunteers

- a) The church will ensure that staff and volunteers develop the knowledge and skills to create safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
- b) The church will 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.
- c) The church will support staff and volunteers with adequate resources to enable them to maintain and promote safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
- d) The church will implement the *GRLC HR Manual*

2.3 Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

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

3. CONFLICT, COMPLAINTS, INCIDENTS AND CONCERNS

3.1. Responding to Child Protection Concerns

- a) The church will 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*.
- b) The church will ensure that all child protection concerns and complaints will be reported to the relevant government departments and, if necessary, Police as soon as possible and in accordance with legislative duties.

3.2. Complaint Handling

- a) The Church will respond to complaints in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*.
- 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, the Church will treat the allegation as a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* and respond in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*.
- c) 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 Resolving Conflict*.
- d) Incident and Hazard Reporting. All accidents and incidents are to be reported to the Church WHS Officer as soon as reasonably practical and investigated to identify causes. See *Procedure for incident reporting and investigation*

4. SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

4.1. Physical Environments

- a) The Church will ensure that physical and online environments promote safety and well-being and minimise the opportunity for all people, particularly children and young people to be harmed.
- b) The Church will comply with Work, Health and Safety requirements.
- c) The Church will consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk to all people, particularly children and vulnerable people.
- d) The Church will identify and address risks arising from the physical environment in which programs and activities take place.
- e) If the Church has any residential property that is identifiable as being church property then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property obtain and hold WWCC or WWVP clearance for the duration of their residence.
- f) The Church will consider whether any ministries it supports, including overseas ministries, have appropriate child protection practices in place? (This includes consideration of whether supporting orphanages overseas is appropriate)

4.2. Online Environments

The Church will promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication. The details are in the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 Risk Assessments

- a) The Church will 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.
 - for special activities the Ministry Leader or Safe Church Team will complete a risk assessment.
- b) The Church will 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. Risk Assessment are to consider all factors and are to reduce to the risk to as low as reasonably practical. If the risk cannot be reduced to an acceptable level the activity is not to occur.
- c) The Church will store risk assessment forms in a secure location for a period of at least 45 years.

5.2 Persons of Concern

The Church will manage any person identified as a Person of Concern in accordance with *An Australian Baptist Response to Persons of Concern*.

6. THIRD PARTIES AND AFFILIATED ENTITIES

- a) The church will 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.
- b) The church will ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with Child Safe Standards including annual reports to the governance body regarding child safety.

7. RECORDKEEPING

7.1 Storage of Records

- a) The Church will retain all written records for a minimum of 45 years, in hard copy and/or electronically in a secure manner.
 - Where records contain, or may contain, sensitive information, they will be kept in a manner that protects confidentiality and will only be accessed by a limited number of authorised persons.
 - Where records are kept in hard copy, they will be held in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and physical conditions.
 - Where records are kept electronically, they will be monitored to ensure security and ongoing accessibility.
- b) Records to which this item applies includes, but is not limited to:
 - Ministry Information Sheets
 - Staff and Volunteer files
 - Attendance (sign-in/sign-out) sheets
 - Risk assessment forms
 - Safe Church Register
 - Safe Church Concerns forms and any contemporaneous notes regarding reporting decisions
 - Annual Safe Church commitment by third parties and affiliated entities
 - Dated copies of any *Safe Church Policy, Procedure, Form* or associated document in force at any time

Please see the *Privacy Policy* for more detail.

8. REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY

8.1 Internal Review

The Church will review this policy annually.

8.2 External Accountability

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager in relation to any Reportable Conduct, Child Protection Concerns and/or Complaints against Accredited or Recognised Ministers in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*.

DEFINITIONS

In the *Safe Church Policy* and associated documents, unless the context otherwise requires:

Church means the local church which adopted this *Safe Church Policy*, as indicated on the cover of the Policy.

Complaint includes any allegation, suspicion, concern or report of a breach of the Church's *Code of Conduct* or the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (where applicable). It also includes disclosures made to an institution about any child protection concern.

Creating Safe Spaces means Creating Safe Spaces training offered by the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT or alternative training that is Safe Church Training Agreement approved and has a face-to-face component.

Disclosure means a process by which a person conveys or attempts to convey that they are being or have been abused or neglected.

Governance Body means the body designated by the constitution of the church to be responsible for the management of church affairs – Church Leadership Team (CLT)

Mandatory Reporting Legislation means

In NSW, the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*

In the ACT the *Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT)*].

Pastoral Staff means any pastor or any accredited or recognised minister or any paid or unpaid staff member of the Church who is engaged in pastoral ministry through the Church.

Reportable Conduct Legislation means

In NSW the *Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW) / Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW)*

In the ACT the *Ombudsman Act 1989 (ACT)*].

Safe Church Register means the register required to record information relating to:

In NSW, staff and volunteers who are engaged in Child-related Work and their relevant details in accordance with section 9A of the WWCC Legislation.

In the ACT, staff and volunteers who are engaged in a Regulated Activity and all relevant WWVP clearances.

Vulnerable means the state of being unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason, and includes those that suffer disadvantage such as social and financial hardship.

WHS Legislation means Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)

WWCC Legislation means the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW)*.

WWVP Legislation means the *Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 (ACT)*.

Young Person means a person who is 16 or 17 years old.

ANNEXES

- A. Safe Church Team Duties
- B. Work Health and Safety Team Duties

A. SAFE CHURCH TEAM DUTIES

A person appointed as a Safe Church Team Member should be a mature Christian who has been recruited according to the Procedure for Staff and Volunteers, have a current WWCC / WWVP clearance and have attended a Creating Safe Spaces workshop in the last 3 years. One of the team members is to be designated as the accountable leader. Close and direct liaison with the Senior Pastor / Senior leader and an ability to maintain confidentiality is essential.

Safe Church Team Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Safe Church Team under the direction of the Team Leader include:

- to provide oversight of the church's Safe Church program, including *Safe Church Policy* and procedures.
- management of Safe Church/Child Protection concerns/reports.

Specific Roles:

1. Oversight of Safe Church Policy and Procedures

- Preparing Safe Church Policy and Procedures for the church in line with legal responsibilities and Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT recommendations
- Implementing *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Promoting awareness of and adherence to *Safe Church Policy* and procedures (including ensuring that staff and volunteers have completed National Police Checks, WWCC/WWVP clearances and Creating Safe Spaces training)
- Maintaining records related to *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Preparing regular reports for Church Leadership Team meetings
- Analysing data to identify areas requiring management attention
- Reviewing *Safe Church Policy* and procedures annually or more often if required due to changing legislation
- Receiving feedback from church leaders, children, families and communities regarding *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Overseeing the completion of the 'Safe Church Health Check' every 3 years

2. Management of Safe Church/Child Protection Concerns and Incidents

- Receiving reports of child protection concerns from church staff, volunteers, ministry leaders and/or church members
- Providing support in following the procedure for responding to child protection concerns and incidents
- Contacting the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager to discuss action plan/appropriate action
- Making any reporting calls (to Police, Government agencies) as required
- Ensuring reporting in line with relevant Reportable Conduct Legislation
- Ensuring child protection concerns and subsequent responses have been appropriately documented
- Ensuring adequate follow-up and pastoral care of all persons involved in a child protection concern/incident
- Assisting with legal, procedural and risk management issues related to a child protection concern/incident
- Keeping records, filing complaints and reports of investigations in a secure file, in accordance with the record-keeping procedure

B. WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAM DUTIES

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) Team will consist of (ideally between 2-4 people with an accountable leader.

Every member of the WHS team, and all paid pastoral staff, are to complete WHS training sufficient so that they can competently undertake their responsibilities.

The responsibility of the Work Health and Safety Team includes:

- To provide oversight of the church's Work Health and Safety program, including policy and procedures

Specific Roles:

- Develop and implement appropriate WHS policy and procedures including the following:
 - Evacuation and Emergency responses
 - Safe Manual Handling, Visual and Auditory Care
 - Risk Assessments
- Address health and safety concerns within one month of the concern being raised.
- Report to senior leadership team meetings regarding work health and safety and provide reports as appropriate
- Ensure Risk Assessments are completed for all church ministry programs (both onsite and offsite)
- Ensure incident report documents are completed and stored, and that serious or dangerous incidents are notified to Baptist Insurance Services (or relevant insurer) as required.
- Ensure that all incidents are properly investigated
- Undertake a safe environment audit of the church site a least once a year, or more regularly for high risk areas, ensuring that any concerns are appropriately rectified.
- Ensure the conduct of WHS Education and training program for the church
 - Each member of the WHS team, and all paid pastoral staff, should complete WHS training.
 - WHS teams should undertake the free online WHS training offered by Baptist Insurance Services and are encouraged to make use of the many other resources provided by Baptist Insurance Services on their website to assist local churches in general risk management and church specific risk management.
- Build and foster a WHS culture in the church
- Any other tasks as advised in the Baptist Insurance Services Risk Management Guide for Churches.