carismah | SafeChurch

POLICY AND PROCEDURES · 2026 EDITION

SafeChurch Abuse Prevention Policy

Required of everyone who serves at Carismah Church: staff, ordained leaders, and volunteers.



Approved by the Council of Carismah Church · November 2026

Versión en español: carismahchurch.org/safechurch

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Initials

Purpose

Carismah Church recognizes its **spiritual, moral, and legal** responsibility to provide a safe environment for all children and teens (under 18) and vulnerable adults who take part in the ministries and programs under the church's authority. **Everyone who serves is required to follow this policy.**[1]

Our first goal is to **protect minors and vulnerable adults from every form of abuse**. We also want to:

- give those who serve clear rules that guide and protect them;
- ensure a fair process for everyone involved when there is an allegation;
- have the church act transparently and be accountable to God, to families, and to the authorities.

We want the church to remain a true **place of refuge**. Every form of abuse must be condemned, reported, and rooted out. That is why we train to recognize its signs, respond appropriately, support those who have suffered it, and hold one another accountable. The terms used in this policy are defined in Appendix A.

The essentials

- **Always two responsible people,** at least one of them 18 or older. Never alone with a minor without the parents' written permission.
- **If you have reasonable suspicion, report it immediately** to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), 1-800-252-5400. If someone is in danger, call 911.
- **Then also tell** the Pastor or the SafeChurch Team. Telling them does not replace your report.
- **Do not investigate** or question the minor.
- **If you or your child suffered abuse,** read section 8: you may go to the authorities without asking anyone's permission.

1. Who must follow this policy

This policy applies in full to all paid church staff, all ordained leaders (pastors, elders, and deacons),[2] and all volunteers, especially those who work with minors or vulnerable adults.

Requirements for serving with minors or vulnerable adults

Before starting, every person must:

- complete the application form approved by the Council and provide references;
- authorize in writing a criminal background and sex offender registry check, and receive a satisfactory result (see the box);[3]
- have attended Carismah Church regularly for at least **six (6) months** before serving in the nursery, children's ministry, Christian education, or youth ministry;
- be under the authority of the church Council.

Background checks

- **For everyone:** a national (United States) check. **Also international** for anyone who has lived outside the country after turning 18.
- **Every year:** a new sex offender registry search, together with signing this policy.
- **Every three years:** a new full criminal background check.[4]

Every team leader must be **18 or older**. Helpers who are 16 or 17 serve under the direct supervision of an adult and with their parents' permission. People serving in ministries **not involving minors or vulnerable adults** may start after **two (2) months** of regular attendance, as long as they do not hold leadership roles.

Everyone who serves in a church ministry (staff, ordained leaders, and volunteers) will sign the **Commitment to Comply** at the end of this document and renew it **every year** with the annual edition of this policy. If the person is under 18, a parent or guardian also signs. Failing to follow this policy will

1 The Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) does not require every congregation to have a written policy, but synod has strongly recommended one: Synod 2010 asked every council to review its abuse prevention policies and liability insurance each year, and Synod 2014 set the goal that every church have a written Safe Church policy. This document follows the model of Safe Church Ministry (now part of Thrive). Church Order citations refer to the official 2026 edition; a Spanish translation is also available.

2 In the CRCNA, the offices are minister of the Word, commissioned pastor, elder, and deacon (Church Order, Art. 2). All officebearers must uphold the standards of the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders (Art. 5-b and Supplement 5-b, Synod 2024), which includes the duty to report abuse of minors and vulnerable adults to the authorities. Synod encourages councils to apply the Code to staff and to volunteers who lead ministries as well.

3 Public sources: Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) conviction search, Texas Government Code §411.135; the Texas sex offender registry (Code of Criminal Procedure art. 62.005); and the national registry. No Texas law requires churches to screen their volunteers, except for youth camps (25 TAC §265.12) and licensed child-care facilities (Human Resources Code §42.056). Carismah Church requires it by its own decision, as Safe Church Ministry recommends.

4 If a consumer reporting agency runs the check, federal law requires a written notice in a document that consists only of that notice, the person's signed authorization, and, before turning someone down because of the result, a copy of the report and a chance to respond (Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. §1681b(b)(2) and (3)). The church applies this to volunteers as well.

lead to measures in proportion to the failure, from a warning or more training to no longer serving.

Spouses and other relatives may serve together, as long as another trained adult who is not a family member is also present.

2. Training

Every new staff member, volunteer, or ordained leader will complete the **initial SafeChurch training**, led by a qualified person. It covers abuse prevention, its signs, legal duties, how to report, ministry responsibilities, the digital communication rules, and the reference and background check requirements.

In addition, **every year** everyone will complete a refresher training to review this policy and renew their knowledge about protecting children, youth, and vulnerable adults.[5]

3. Discipline in children's and youth programs

Discipline teaches, corrects, and guides in a way that reflects the love and character of Christ. It always seeks **to correct and form, never to punish**, and must never cause physical, emotional, or spiritual harm.

Allowed forms (only these)

- Redirect the minor's attention to another activity or to more appropriate behavior.
- Separate the minor from the group for a short time, always in view of another trained adult. With young children, a time-out will not last longer than **one minute per year of age**.
- Limit or suspend the minor's participation in future activities, when necessary.

Always prohibited

- **Physical punishment of any kind:** slapping, hitting, shoving, pinching, pulling hair, twisting arms or ears, shaking, or using objects (paddles, sandals, spoons, belts, books, sticks, or others).[6]
- **Verbally abusive discipline:** yelling in anger or to intimidate, insulting, humiliating or shaming in public, ridiculing, threatening, using obscene or degrading language, or deliberately ignoring the minor as a punishment. Raising your voice to warn of danger is not abusive discipline.
- Manipulating with threats or bribes, or asking the minor not to tell what happened or to hide an injury.

Discipline becomes abuse when it causes pain, injury, marks, humiliation, fear, or emotional harm, or when it is excessive or out of proportion.

Principles

- Expectations and discipline must fit the minor's age, maturity, and understanding. Remind minors clearly of the expected behavior; with older children and teens, it may be put in writing.
- If you feel you are losing your patience or control, ask another adult for help right away before going on.
- Before each ministry season, everyone will receive guidance on appropriate forms of discipline.

Parents and incidents

Inform and involve parents or guardians when behavior calls for more than a minor warning, when there is a pattern of misbehavior, or when the team believes further intervention is needed. Tell the ministry leader about any concern regarding a minor's behavior or how discipline was applied. If the problem continues, bring in another adult, leader, or parent for support. If you see another server disciplining abusively, step in calmly to protect the minor and tell the ministry leader; if the person doing it is the leader, tell the SafeChurch Team.

4. General rules for children's and youth programs

Always two responsible people

Whenever minors are present there will be at least **two responsible people: one 18 or older and another 16 or older**, under the first person's direct supervision. If the second leader is missing, tell the hall monitor, who will stay or combine the class with another one. If no one can, the activity does not begin, unless, as an exception, a teacher 18 or older leads it with written permission from all the parents.

5 Synod 2010 encouraged councils to train every year, and synod has since recommended that councils complete Safe Church Ministry training and that those entering ministry receive training on abuse of power.

6 Texas law allows parents and those acting with their consent to use some non-deadly force (Penal Code §9.61), but this policy prohibits all physical punishment in church programs. A physical injury that causes substantial harm can be abuse (Family Code §261.001(1)(C)) and, if the child is 14 or younger, the crime of injury to a child (Penal Code §22.04).

One-on-one contact

- **One-on-one meetings:** a planned, private meeting with a minor requires notifying the parent or guardian and their written permission, and inside the church another volunteer or staff member must be able to see it. **If a minor comes to you to tell you about abuse, listen** (Appendix C) without asking for permission, in a visible place.
- **Transportation:** normally two volunteers travel together, or the minor travels with a parent or guardian. If that is not possible, the parents' written permission is needed for one adult to transport the minor. Every driver must have a valid license and auto insurance.[7]

Check-in and pick-up

Every program will keep a check-in and check-out record of the children, with the people authorized to pick them up. A child is released only to an authorized person. If no one comes to pick a child up, two adults stay with the child and call the parents; one adult is never left alone with the child.

Restroom assistance

If the child does not need help, the adult waits outside. If the child does need help, it is given with the door partly open and, whenever possible, with another adult nearby. If there is only one adult with the group, the helper goes with the child or the hall monitor is called; the adult never leaves the group alone. Encourage children to use the restroom before and after class.

Appropriate affection

Signs of affection take place in public places and are limited to a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, a pat on the back, a handshake, a brief touch on the forearm, or a greeting with a kiss on the cheek, unless the person says they do not like it. A young child who is crying may be held or comforted, always in view of others. **Any minor, youth, or leader may refuse any sign of affection, and their decision will be respected.**

Digital communication and social media

The same transparency rules apply online. Those who serve with minors:

- **Messages:** use ministry groups or channels, or copy the parents or another leader. They do not send private messages to a minor without the parents' knowledge or use apps with disappearing messages.
- **Hours and content:** they do not communicate with minors between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., except for emergencies or matters about an activity in progress, and they discuss only ministry matters, with no sexual, offensive, or inappropriate content.
- **If a young person tells you by message about abuse or about thoughts of self-harm,** do not copy the parents: follow section 7. If there is a risk of suicide, call or text **988** (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, also in Spanish) or 911.
- **Social media:** they do not send friend or follow requests to minors from their personal accounts, and in every online interaction they keep the same rules as in person.
- **Photos and videos:** they are posted only with the parents' written permission, from official church accounts, and without full names or details that identify or locate the minor. They are never taken in restrooms or changing areas and are not kept on personal devices.
- **Inappropriate content:** if they receive sexual images or messages from or about a minor, they do not forward, copy, or show them to anyone: they immediately notify the police or DFPS and the SafeChurch Team, and follow their instructions.[8]

Hall monitor

During worship services and Christian education classes, the SafeChurch Team will assign a **hall monitor**, who will regularly walk through the classrooms and nursery, check that this policy is followed, and help when another adult is needed.

5. Specific programs

A. Nursery

- Each shift will have **two assigned people**, and the person in charge will be 18 or older. Those under 18 serve only as helpers and with their parents' permission.
- A child leaves the nursery only for a legitimate reason: restroom, illness, emergency, or another reasonable need. If there is a significant medical problem, notify the parents or guardian immediately.
- Parents will be told that the nursery and classes during services are not a state-licensed child-care service.[9]

7 The law that protects volunteers of a charitable organization from civil liability does not cover operating a motor vehicle (Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code §84.004(d)).

8 Producing, possessing, or distributing sexual images of a minor under 18 is a felony in Texas, even if it is to show them as evidence (Penal Code §§43.25 and 43.26), and so is soliciting a minor online for sexual acts (§33.021). Online sexual exploitation of minors can also be reported to the CyberTipline of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

9 Programs offered while parents are in a worship service or religious instruction class, at the church or nearby, are exempt from state licensing only if they are not

B. Christian education, Sunday school, and weekday programs

- Teachers will be 18 or older, and helpers 16 or older.
- If only one student attends, the class may be held only with written permission signed by the parent or guardian, or it will join another class.
- Children leave the classroom only because of illness, to use the restroom, or for another important reason, and always under the supervision of an authorized adult.
- Doors must allow a view inside. If they have no window, they will stay partly open during class.
- Before opening a weekday program without parents present, the Council will check whether it needs a state license.

C. Youth ministry

- **One-on-one meetings:** only with written permission from the parent or guardian, in a public or visible place, and with another adult nearby.
- Youth activities will not be held with only one leader. This includes retreats, outings, trips, and every activity away from the church.
- It is **never** appropriate for a youth leader to have a romantic or dating relationship with a member of the youth group, regardless of the age difference.[10]

D. Camps and overnight activities

- Every overnight activity will have adults of both sexes when minors of both sexes take part, sleeping areas and showers separated by sex and age (adults separate), and a written permission and medical form for each minor.
- The church will not hold a camp of **4 days or more with 5 or more minors** without a state youth camp license, unless it takes place at a camp that already has one.[11]

The discipline policy applies fully in all these programs, and the hall monitor can help when needed.

6. Deacon ministry and vulnerable adults

Deacons and anyone who visits homes, delivers assistance, or transports people also protect themselves with these rules:

- **Visits and deliveries in pairs** when the person is a vulnerable adult, lives alone, or is of the other sex, or when money is delivered. If that is not possible: tell the coordinator beforehand, go during the day, stay in common areas, and record the visit. If only minors are at home, do not go in.
- **Assistance is never conditioned** on attendance, favors, or personal treatment. Two people approve and deliver financial assistance, with a receipt.
- **Transporting vulnerable adults:** tell the coordinator when you leave and arrive, and record it.

Abuse, neglect, or exploitation, including financial exploitation, of a vulnerable adult is reported immediately to DFPS, at the same number, just like the abuse of a minor (section 7).[12]

7. How to report suspected abuse

Every sign, reasonable suspicion, or thing a minor tells you is taken with complete seriousness (the signs are in Appendix B). Many minors never tell because of fear, shame, or threats; that is why we must all stay alert. **The minor's protection always comes first**, before any other consideration. If you have reasonable cause, report. If you only have doubts, talk with the SafeChurch Team that same day, or call DFPS anyway: they decide.

What to do if you suspect abuse

1. **Protect the minor.** If there is immediate danger, call **911**.
2. **Report immediately to DFPS:** Texas Abuse Hotline, **1-800-252-5400** (24 hours, Spanish available). Use txabusehotline.org only if it is not urgent.[13] If you suspect a church volunteer or employee, **also notify the police**.
3. **Then tell** the Pastor, the elder on the SafeChurch Team, or the Council vice president. Telling them does not replace your report, and **no one may stop you or pressure you not to report**.
4. **Write down** what you saw or heard, with the minor's exact words, the date, the time, and the DFPS report number, and give it to the SafeChurch Team.
5. **Do not investigate** or question the minor.

advertised as a child-care facility and they inform parents that they are not licensed by the state (Texas Human Resources Code §42.041(b)(3)).

10 In addition, sexual conduct with a minor under 17 is generally a crime in Texas (Penal Code §21.11 and §22.011), as is soliciting a minor online for sexual acts (§33.021).

11 A camp with at least 5 minors for 4 days or more is a youth camp that needs a state license (Texas Health and Safety Code §§141.002(5) and 141.003). Its staff and volunteers must pass an approved course on child sexual abuse, valid for two years (§141.0095), and the camp must have a written policy for reporting abuse (§141.0111).

12 In Texas, anyone who has cause to believe that an adult 65 or older or a person with a disability is being abused, neglected, or exploited must report it immediately to DFPS (Human Resources Code §48.051); failing to do so is a Class A misdemeanor (§48.052).

13 Online reports are only for situations that do not require immediate attention and may take more than 48 hours to process; urgent cases must be reported by

The legal duty

In Texas, **anyone** who has cause to believe that a minor has been abused or neglected **must report it immediately**.[14] If you hold a **state license or certification** and work with minors (for example, a school teacher or nurse), you also may never take longer than **24 hours** or ask someone else to report for you.[15] DFPS shares reports with the police when appropriate.[16]

Anyone who witnesses a sexual or violent offense against a minor must help the child or immediately notify the police, if they can do so safely.[17] The internal procedures in this policy apply to what happens in programs approved by the Council or involves those who serve in them; **the duty to report, however, applies to any suspicion, wherever it happens.**

If the person involved is in leadership: independent channels

Any leader (pastor, elder, deacon, administrator, or the Council itself) can abuse their power, and the Church Administrator works under the Pastor's direction. That is why this policy provides **channels outside the authority of the local church that no one in the church can block**.[18] If the suspicion involves someone in leadership or a relative of theirs, or if you do not feel safe going to them, use any of these:

- another member of the SafeChurch Team or the Council vice president;
- **Classis Rocky Mountain** (interim committee);
- **Safe Church Ministry**, the CRCNA office (part of Thrive) that handles abuse concerns: 1-877-272-6206, crcna.org/SafeChurch;
- and always, directly, **DFPS** (1-800-252-5400) or the **police**.

No one will face retaliation

No one who reports in good faith, has been a victim, or cooperates with an investigation will face retaliation, pressure, or exclusion, and anyone who retaliates will be disciplined. **A report that is not confirmed is not therefore false.**

Dignity for all, regardless of immigration status

The church does not ask about or record anyone's immigration status when applying this policy. Every person bears the image of God, and a child's protection does not depend on anyone's papers. Reporting abuse is everyone's duty: if you feel afraid or unsure, the SafeChurch Team will go with you to make the report.[19]

Sexual behavior or abuse between minors

If a minor assaults, touches sexually, or seriously intimidates another: separate them, supervise both, tell the SafeChurch Team and both sets of parents, and report to DFPS when there is reasonable cause. Exposing a child to abuse by another child can be neglect.[20]

Do not investigate

No volunteer, staff member, or ordained leader will investigate on their own. Their responsibility is to protect the minor, document what they received, and follow this procedure. DFPS and the police carry out the investigations. Also tell the ministry leader or the SafeChurch Team about inappropriate behavior that does not rise to the level of abuse.

8. If you or your child suffered abuse

If you, your child, or someone in your care suffered abuse in a church program or by someone who serves in the church:

phone (DFPS). Since 2023, DFPS does not accept anonymous reports: you must give your name and a phone number (Family Code §261.104, as amended by HB 63). Your identity as the person reporting is confidential (§§261.101(d) and 261.201).

14 Texas Family Code §261.101(a). The duty also applies to clergy, with no exception for confidential or privileged communications (§261.101(c)). Failing to report is a Class A misdemeanor (§261.109); a person who reports in good faith is immune from civil and criminal liability (§261.106); knowingly making a false report is a felony (§261.107).

15 Family Code §261.101(b), as amended by SB 571 in 2025, which shortened the deadline from 48 to 24 hours for "professionals": people licensed or certified by the state, or employed by a state-licensed facility, who have direct contact with children in their duties.

16 Family Code §261.103 and §261.105.

17 Texas Penal Code §38.17.

18 The Church Order recognizes that "the imbalance and misuse of power" is a key dynamic in abuse of office, and that the power of the office is a sacred trust (Supplement, Art. 83); it also states that no officebearer shall lord it over another (Art. 85). The church must notify the classis when there is an allegation against a church leader (Supplement, Art. 42-b).

19 Synod 2010 of the CRCNA reaffirmed that the church should treat every person as an image bearer of God "regardless of ethnicity, background, or legal status," and encouraged congregations to welcome immigrants and advocate for their dignified treatment (Acts of Synod 2010, pp. 875–79; CRCNA Office of Social Justice). The Church Order charges deacons with promoting ministries of "mercy, justice, and reconciliation" (Art. 25-c).

20 Family Code §261.001(4)(A)(ii).

- **You may go directly to DFPS (1-800-252-5400) or the police**, without telling or asking permission from anyone at the church.
- If you wish, you may write to the SafeChurch Team (safe@carismahchurch.org) or talk with any of the people in section 7. They will explain what happens next and who will keep you informed at each step.
- The church will offer pastoral care and help you find professional, trauma-informed counseling, such as a Children's Advocacy Center. Your pace and your decisions will be respected.
- **You will never be asked to forgive, reconcile, or meet with the person involved,** and the church will not use mediation in abuse cases.[21]
- The confidentiality this policy requires of those who serve **never prevents you or your family from talking about what you went through, seeking help, or going to the authorities.**

9. If the person accused serves in the church

The Council applies this section. If you are a volunteer, your part is to report (section 7) and keep it confidential. The goal is to protect the possible victim and, at the same time, give the accused person a fair process.

Immediate measures

- **Within 24 hours,** the Pastor or the Council president (the vice president, if the accused is one of them) removes the person from all contact with minors and vulnerable adults, from the SafeChurch Team and the files, and from all contact with the person who reported. No vote is needed.
- **Within 72 hours,** the Council, without the accused, decides the measure and which duties the person keeps. An officebearer is placed on **administrative leave without prejudice**, meaning it implies no guilt;[22] a **minister of the Word** keeps full salary and benefits. An employee who is not an officebearer remains paid, unless the Council issues a written, reasoned decision under the employment policy. A volunteer is removed from their duties.
- The Council clerk notifies the classis interim committee, which appoints church visitors to advise, and Safe Church Ministry within **7 days**.[23] The measure is reviewed at least **every 60 days** and recorded in separate confidential minutes.

These measures are **preventive, not a declaration of guilt.** They will be coordinated with the authorities so as not to interfere with any investigation by DFPS, the police, or another authority.

A fair process

- **Recusal:** the accused, the person who reported, and their spouses, relatives, or witnesses do not deliberate, vote, or receive the file. If fewer than three elders remain, the church will ask the classis for help.
- **Right to respond:** when the authorities allow it, the accused will learn the general nature of the allegation (never who reported) and may respond before any decision, with a support person. **The victim will never have to face the accused.**
- **Church process:** while the authorities are acting, no one at the church investigates. Afterward, the Council, advised by the church visitors, decides the process. An allegation of sexual abuse or abuse of a minor against a church leader goes through the **advisory panel** process, in consultation with Safe Church Ministry.[24]
- **Communication:** the congregation will be told only that there is a leave without prejudice for a confidential matter, without naming the offense or the people, and the outcome will be announced to the same extent.[25]
- **Separate pastoral care** for the victim, for the accused, and for their families: whoever supports one side does not support the other. If the accused is the Pastor, the classis regional pastor will be asked for support.

Outcome

- **Ruled out:** if there is evidence that it did not happen, the person is fully restored, and this is communicated to the same extent as the leave.
- **Not confirmed:** if what happened could not be established, returning to serve with minors or vulnerable adults requires a risk assessment, consultation with Safe Church Ministry, and **telling the victim and their family beforehand**. The Council decides in writing within 30 days.

21 The Church Order warns that mediation and restorative justice practices "are not necessarily appropriate" for charges of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Supplement, Art. 30-c).

22 Church Order, Supplement, Arts. 82-84(a): administrative leave is imposed "without prejudice," compensation and benefits continue, and it is always temporary. It is not the suspension of Article 82, which is special discipline and requires the concurring judgment of the neighboring council.

23 Church Order, Supplement, Art. 42-b (Synod 2009, amended in 2022). The church visitors' report is confidential.

24 Supplement, Art. 30-c and the "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" (Synod 2010, updated in 2022). There is no time limit for allegations of sexual abuse.

25 Synod's confidentiality guidelines ask that public announcements not mention the sin (Supplement, Arts. 78-84(d)).

- **Confirmed:** CRCNA discipline applies: for members, discipline by the consistory (Articles 78–81); for officebearers, special discipline of suspension or deposition (Articles 82–84), decided by the Council with the concurring judgment of the neighboring council and, for the deposition of a minister, with the approval of classis and the synodical deputies.[26] There may also be legal consequences.

Anyone who, according to the authorities or the Council, has abused a minor or a vulnerable adult, or knowingly covered it up, **will not serve with them again**. Other violations of this policy will have proportionate measures. Reinstatement to office is governed by Article 84 and its supplement.[27]

10. New programs

Every new program is subject to this policy. Before it starts, the SafeChurch Team will confirm that it meets the policy's protection standards, has adequate supervision, and has trained staff and volunteers, and the Council will approve it.

11. Liability insurance

Every year the Council will review the church's liability insurance policy, so that the coverage fits its activities and all ministries meet the insurer's requirements.[28]

12. Confidentiality and records

All information the SafeChurch Team receives, obtains, requests, or prepares is **confidential to the extent the law allows**. It is shared only with the authorities, with those the law requires, with the Council as needed to decide, with the classis church visitors, with Safe Church Ministry, and with the church's attorney and insurer. Those who serve and take part in a report or investigation will keep it confidential. This **never prevents** anyone from reporting to the authorities or consulting an attorney or counselor, nor the victim and their family from telling their own story.[29]

Where each record is kept

SafeChurch records are electronic. These rules apply to the records and to the area of the church's SafeChurch system, at three levels:

- **Operational** (check-in and pick-up records, parent permissions, photo permissions, and deacon visits): in the carismahchurch.org system, visible only to authorized roles. Medical information is stored encrypted.
- **Background checks:** done by a specialized provider on its own platform, where the person signs the authorization. **The church never keeps Social Security numbers or background reports;** only the result, the date, and the provider reference, encrypted.
- **Case files** (report notes, DFPS report numbers, confidential minutes, and church visitors' reports): **only in storage separate from the website,** accessible only to the Church Administrator and the Council clerk, except for temporary access authorized for a case. The website system shows only that the person may not serve, without the reason.

Protecting digital records

- **A personal account** for each person, never shared, with two-step verification.
- **Encryption** of sensitive data in transit and at rest, including backups.
- **A log of every view, change, or download.** The Council may review it.
- **Always two administrators:** the Church Administrator and the Council clerk, or whoever the Council designates. Whoever technically administers the church's servers or accounts has no access to the case files; any exceptional technical access triggers a notice to the Council clerk.[30]

- **If a person with access is accused,** even the Church Administrator or the Council clerk, the other administrator immediately disables their account, ends their sessions, removes them from the case storage, changes shared passwords, and records it. The Council designates a temporary replacement. Access is restored only by decision of the Council (section 9). If the accused is a member of the SafeChurch Team, an elder designated by the Council replaces them on the Team.
- **Paper:** anything signed on paper is scanned, checked for legibility, and the original is shredded, recording who did it and when. **Handwritten notes and any paper from a case**

26 CRCNA Church Order, Articles 78–84 and supplements. Excluding a member requires the approval of classis. Sexual misconduct is grounds for special discipline (Supplement, Arts. 82-84(b)), and abuse of power is abuse of office (Supplement, Art. 83).

27 Supplement, Art. 84 denies reinstatement to office to anyone guilty of sexual misconduct against a minor, against more than one victim, in more than one community, or together with other related ungodly conduct; in other cases it first requires the advice of legal counsel and of a Christian licensed psychologist.

28 As Synod 2010 asked. In Texas, volunteers of a charitable organization are not civilly liable for acts within the scope of their duties, except for operating a vehicle and intentional or reckless conduct (Civil Practice and Remedies Code §§84.004 and 84.007(a)); the church's liability limits require the insurance described in §84.007(g).

29 Under Texas law, the identity of the person who reports is confidential (Family Code §261.201).

30 If the person who technically administers the church's Google account is the Pastor, the Council will designate a second technical administrator.

are not destroyed, because they may be evidence: they are scanned and the original is kept in a locked, fire-resistant cabinet in the church office, with only **two original keys** and no copies: one held by the Church Administrator and one by the Council clerk.

- **Retention:** case files and check-in and pick-up records are kept indefinitely, unless the attorney and the insurer advise otherwise;[31] applications, background check results, and permissions are kept at least seven years after the person stops serving. **Nothing is deleted automatically:** every destruction is approved by the Church Administrator, recorded, and final.

13. Security cameras

Where cameras are in operation, visible signs will state that the area is under video recording. Only an authorized member of the SafeChurch Team will review recordings when an incident requires it. Recordings are kept at least 30 days; **after any report they are preserved** and handed over to the authority that requests them.[32]

Installing cameras is prohibited in restrooms, changing areas, showers, or any area where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.[33]

14. Anti-harassment policy

Carismah Church is committed to an environment free from every form of harassment. Harassment based on race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed or religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age, sexual orientation, or any other condition protected by law is prohibited.[34]

Prohibited conduct

- **Verbal:** offensive jokes, insults, derogatory comments, unwanted sexual advances, inappropriate invitations or gestures.
- **Visual:** offensive or sexually explicit posters, photos, cartoons, drawings, or images, and obscene gestures.
- **Physical:** assault, unwanted physical contact, blocking another person's movement, or interfering with their work or ministry because of a protected characteristic.
- **Sexual coercion:** demanding sexual favors to keep a job, a ministry role, or assistance, promising benefits in exchange for them, or threatening someone who refuses.
- **Retaliation** against anyone who makes a complaint, takes part in an investigation, or cooperates with the SafeChurch Team.

How to report harassment

1. Make your complaint, verbally or in writing, as soon as possible, with what happened and the names of the people involved and of possible witnesses. The Team will help you record it.
2. Give it to the ministry leader or directly to the SafeChurch Team. Every complaint is forwarded to the Team right away. If the accused is the Pastor or a member of the Team, use the channels in section 7.
3. The Team will conduct an impartial, objective, confidential, and thorough investigation and recommend measures to the Council, which decides. For officebearers, section 9 applies.

Depending on the seriousness, measures may include a warning, suspension, removal from ministry duties, termination of employment, or a ban on serving as a volunteer. The person who complained will be told that measures were taken, within the limits of confidentiality the law allows.

The church will not take or allow retaliation for a complaint made in good faith, whether from the Council, staff, volunteers, leaders, or anyone else connected with Carismah Church, and will follow up to confirm the measures are effective.

Appendix A · Definitions

Physical abuse. Any intentional, non-accidental act that causes pain or injury to a minor, whether or not it leaves marks: slapping, shoving, shaking, punching, kicking, biting, choking, hitting with or without objects, burns, or wounds from weapons or objects. It may be a single incident or a pattern.

Neglect. Failing to provide a person in our care with adequate food, clothing, supervision, medical care, hygiene, or protec-

31 A civil lawsuit for child sexual abuse may be filed up to 30 years after the victim turns 18 (Civil Practice and Remedies Code §§16.0045 and 16.001), and some crimes have no statute of limitations (Code of Criminal Procedure art. 12.01).

32 Recording conversations without the consent of at least one of the people taking part can be illegal interception (Penal Code §16.02). That is why the cameras record video only.

33 Recording someone without consent in a restroom or changing room is a state jail felony (Penal Code §21.15).

34 In Texas, the prohibition of sexual harassment in employment applies to every employer with at least one employee, with no religious exemption (Labor Code §§21.141 and 21.142). This list does not limit the church's rights as a religious organization, which may prefer members of its own faith in hiring (§21.109; 42 U.S.C. §2000e-1).

tion. It can affect their physical, emotional, and intellectual development.

Sexual abuse. Any sexual exploitation of a minor or sexual activity imposed on them for another person's gratification, with or without physical contact. Without contact: exposing private parts to them, showing them pornography, producing sexual photos or videos, obscene calls or messages, spying on them in private, or asking them for sexual acts. With contact: sexual fondling, touching breasts, buttocks, or genitals, and any form of sexual intercourse. A minor cannot consent.

Emotional abuse. Controlling a minor's life through threats, intimidation, humiliation, rejection, manipulation, isolation, or withholding affection. It destroys their self-esteem and leaves them feeling helpless and dependent on the abuser.

Bullying. Aggressive, unwanted, and repeated behavior among minors, or behavior likely to be repeated, involving a real or perceived imbalance of power: greater strength, popularity, embarrassing information, or social influence. It has long-term effects on both those who suffer it and those who do it.

Minors (children, teens, and youth). People under 18.[35]

Vulnerable adult. A person 65 or older, or an adult with a disability that limits their ability to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.[36]

Volunteer. A person who serves without pay, especially those who work with minors or vulnerable adults.

Staff. People paid by the church.

Ordained leader (officebearer). A pastor, elder, or deacon duly ordained by the church.

Council, consistory, and classis. The Council is made up of the pastor, elders, and deacons. The consistory is the pastor and elders. The classis is the regional assembly of CRCNA churches; its interim committee and church visitors advise the church in these cases.

Leave without prejudice. A temporary removal from duties while an allegation is clarified, without implying guilt.

Advisory panel. A Safe Church Ministry process of the CRCNA for hearing and evaluating abuse allegations against a church leader.

DFPS. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the state agency that receives and investigates reports of abuse and neglect of minors and vulnerable adults.

SafeChurch Team. The group that oversees how this policy is applied and coordinates the response to allegations or violations. Its members are the Pastor, the Church Administrator, an elder, and a representative of the Carismah Church congregation. Whenever possible, it will include both men and women.

What Texas law considers abuse and neglect

In addition to the cases above, the law defines as **abuse**:[37]

- mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the minor's growth, development, or psychological functioning;
- physical injury that results in substantial harm, or the genuine threat of it;
- sexual conduct harmful to the minor, compelling or encouraging the minor to engage in it or in prostitution, and photographing, filming, or depicting the minor in an obscene or pornographic way;
- drug use by a caregiver that harms the minor, or causing the minor to use drugs;
- child trafficking and forced marriage;
- failing to make a reasonable effort to prevent any of these.

And as **neglect**: abandonment; leaving the minor in situations beyond their maturity that expose them to injury or immediate danger; failing to provide medical care, food, clothing, or shelter; exposing them to sexual conduct or to the abuse of another child; refusing to let them return home; and negligence by the staff or volunteers of a program.

Appendix B · Signs and symptoms of abuse

There is rarely a single indicator, and many symptoms may come from normal stages of development or other experiences. A minor may also have suffered abuse without clear signs. **Several indicators over time weigh more than one alone.** No sign by itself is proof of abuse. If you have reasonable cause, report (section 7); if you only have doubts, talk with the SafeChurch Team that same day and write down what you observe.

Infants and preschool children

Behavior: going back to behaviors from earlier stages (baby talk, thumb-sucking, bed-wetting again), excessive crying, sudden changes in behavior, unusual aggression, withdrawal.

Physical: wetting or soiling themselves again, urinating very often, headaches or stomachaches, trouble breathing, frequent sore throats with nausea, unusual stains on underwear.

35 Some sexual offenses in the Texas Penal Code define "child" as under 17 (§§21.11 and 22.011(c)(1)); this policy protects everyone under 18.

36 Based on Texas Human Resources Code §48.002.

37 Texas Family Code §261.001(1), subdivisions (A)–(M), and §261.001(4)(A) for neglect.

Fear: intense fear of a relative or acquaintance, or of certain places or objects; rejecting physical contact, diaper changes, or help in the restroom.

Sexualized: sexual language or behavior inappropriate for their age; attempts at sexual behavior with other children or adults.

Injuries: unexplained bruises or wounds, or ones always blamed on accidents; several bruises from a single incident; injuries on the back, abdomen, head, or buttocks; burns; marks shaped like an object (buckles, etc.); injuries at different stages of healing.

Other: insulting or intimidating other children, emotional withdrawal, fascination with fire, playing with matches or lighters.

School-age children (in addition to the above)

Physical: pain, irritation, or redness in the genital or anal area; smearing feces on walls or objects; repeated injuries; pain with no reasonable explanation.

Emotional: intense fear of certain people or places, trouble concentrating, an excessive need to please, extreme perfectionism, self-harm, uncontrolled anger, destroying things.

Sexual: compulsive or public masturbation; sexual behavior inappropriate for their age or with other children or adults.

Social: a need to control others, intimidation, distrust of adults, sudden mood swings, irritability, frequent lying, stealing, aggression.

Other: frequent school absences, low self-esteem, always being on alert, being easily startled, an obsession with setting fires.

Teenagers

Health: eating disorders, excessive use of laxatives, sudden weight changes, changes in sleep (sleeping during the day, insomnia).

School: a drop in grades, loss of interest, trouble concentrating.

Emotional: perfectionism, excessive self-criticism, a need to please, overreacting to criticism, depression, withdrawal, avoiding family or friends, not showing emotions.

Sexual: sexualized behavior inappropriate for their age, or a strong rejection of sexuality and of the changes of adolescence; persistently seeking adults' attention.

Risk behaviors: alcohol or drugs, self-harm (for example, cutting), fascination with weapons, suicide attempts or threats, skipping school, cruelty to animals, bullying.

Relationships: very few friends or frequently changing friends, low self-esteem, difficulty trusting.

Other: teen pregnancy, persistent neglect of hygiene, rectal or vaginal infections, always being on alert, being easily startled.

Signs of neglect

Looking malnourished, frequent hunger, low weight for their age; begging for, stealing, or hoarding food; lack of supervision or minors caring for other minors; school absences and unmet educational needs; lack of medical or dental care; persistent poor hygiene and body odor; in infants, failure to thrive.

Parent or family behaviors

Attitudes: little interest in the child, constant criticism, hurtful or degrading words, frequent threats, ridiculing the child in front of others.

Expectations: calling the child a failure, always comparing them with siblings, saying they always disappoint, considering them lazy or incapable.

Inappropriate relationship: talking about the child in a romantic way, treating them like an adult, idealizing them in an unhealthy way.

Environment: hostility, social isolation, not allowing visitors, not taking part in the community, constant excuses, often saying that "things aren't going well at home."

Other factors: abuse by older siblings, dependence on alcohol or drugs by one or both parents, sudden and severe financial changes.

Appendix C · When a minor tells you about abuse

The adult's response can deeply affect the minor's recovery and the investigation.

What to do

- Listen carefully, take what they say seriously, and let them tell it in their own words. If needed, use only brief, open questions such as "Do you want to tell me more?"
- Stay calm and show empathy and respect.
- Tell them they did the right thing by telling and that what happened **is not their fault**.
- Tell them honestly what will happen: "I need to tell people who can help you."
- Take notes right afterward, only of what the minor said, and follow section 7.

What not to do

- Do not doubt their account or suggest they dreamed or imagined it.
- Do not show extreme surprise, anger, or disgust.

- Do not promise to keep it secret or offer rewards for telling.
- Do not press for details or ask questions that suggest answers.
- Do not ask them to show injuries covered by clothing.
- Do not confront the person involved. If it is a family member, do not tell the family: DFPS will do that.
- Do not investigate or tell them they "have been abused" before the authorities investigate.

After the conversation

Keep showing interest in their well-being: greet them, encourage them, remind them that the church cares about them, and offer spiritual and emotional support, always without interfering with the investigation.

Appendix D · How to respond to parents

All church leaders will act with prudence, compassion, and objectivity.

- **If the abuse may have happened at church,** a person designated by the SafeChurch Team will promptly inform the parents, unless the authorities say otherwise. **If a family member is suspected,** they are not told: DFPS does that.
- **Stay calm,** do not judge, and listen respectfully. It is normal for them to feel disbelief, sadness, anger, confusion, or denial; respond patiently and avoid unnecessary confrontation.
- **Do not reveal who made the report,** unless expressly authorized or legally required.[38]
- **Do not reveal confidential information.** If the minor named a parent, guardian, or relative, do not share with that person what the minor said; limit information to what the authorities allow.
- **Do not investigate:** do not try to convince them that the abuse did or did not happen, do not discredit the minor, and do not conduct interviews or look for more information.
- **Do not make promises** about the outcome of the investigation, the authorities' decisions, or disciplinary measures.
- **Listen and document** any additional information, and pass it on through the reporting procedure.
- **Do not minimize** the seriousness of the abuse or its emotional, spiritual, or psychological impact.
- **Explain confidentiality:** information will be shared only when necessary to protect other minors, comply with the law, or cooperate with the authorities.
- **Offer pastoral support** when appropriate: ask before praying with the family, offer to walk alongside them, and recommend trauma-informed professional resources, Christian or not.

Appendix E · Contacts and forms

Emergency: 911.

Abuse of minors or vulnerable adults: DFPS, 1-800-252-5400 (24 hours, Spanish available), or txabusehotline.org if it is not urgent.

Crisis or suicide risk: 988.

Carismah Church SafeChurch Team: safe@carismahchurch.org. The current list of its members and of the hall monitor is at carismahchurch.org/en/safechurch.

Classis Rocky Mountain (interim committee).

CRCNA Safe Church Ministry (Thrive), for abuse concerns: 1-877-272-6206, crcna.org/SafeChurch.

The forms are electronic and available at carismahchurch.org/en/safechurch: application to serve; parent permission for one-on-one meetings, transportation with one adult, or a class with one student; photo and video permission; check-in and pick-up record; overnight activity permission and medical form; and deacon visit and delivery record. The background check authorization is signed on the provider's platform, and the report notes sheet is provided by the SafeChurch Team. Anyone without digital access may request printed copies at the church office.

Closing statement

Carismah Church believes that every person has been created in the image of God and has a dignity given by God.[39] That is why we commit to keeping an environment where children are protected, youth are guided with love, vulnerable adults are cared for, volunteers serve with integrity, leadership is accountable, and Christ is honored in every part of ministry. **Protecting vulnerable people is a spiritual, moral, and legal responsibility of the whole church.**

38 Texas law protects the confidentiality of the person who reports (Family Code §261.201(a)).

39 Genesis 1:27.

Commitment to Comply

I have read the SafeChurch Abuse Prevention Policy of Carismah Church (version 2026-1), I understand it, and I commit to follow it. I understand that failing to follow it is grounds for no longer serving, and that I have a personal duty to report immediately any suspected abuse or neglect of a minor, even if I also tell church leadership. I will renew this commitment every year, with each edition of the policy.

Person signing

Full name

Ministry where you serve

Signature

Date

Parent or guardian (only if the person signing is under 18)

Parent or guardian's name

Parent or guardian's signature

Date

Sign after reading the whole document and initialing every page. Keep a copy. If you have questions about this policy, contact the Carismah Church SafeChurch Team.