



SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY (VERSION MAY 2021)  
CHRIST OUR ANCHOR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
ANNAPOLIS MD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Responsibilities
- III. Background Checks
- IV. Guidelines for Maintaining a Safe Environment
- V. Reporting
- VI. Training
- VII. Property and Personal Safety

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church (COA) is committed to ensuring that everyone, both children and adults, involved in church ministries and activities may participate in an environment of safety and security. In that light, in 2011, we joined other local churches to develop and implement policies and procedures to protect the children (from birth through age 17) in our care. These policies and procedures have been revised and updated periodically since that time and were expanded in 2020 to include all safety issues. This is now a more comprehensive plan for safety of all at COA and should be read in its entirety.

**II. RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Session's Administration Elders have the responsibility and oversight of this policy. The Administration Elders will work in close cooperation with the Session's Christian Education Elders. Christian Education is responsible for all educational activities for both children and adults at COA, including Anchors A Wee Preschool. All members and volunteers of COA, whether Elders or not, have the responsibility of ensuring the safety and well-being of everyone involved in any COA sanctioned activity.

**III. BACKGROUND CHECKS**

Background checks are one of the most important tools in ensuring the safety of our children.

**A. Paid Staff Members:** All staff members are required to complete a criminal background check, at the expense of COA, and complete Safe Sanctuaries training before they will be permitted to participate in children's activities. Any additional required training (including updates to this policy) will be done in conjunction with the annual evaluation. The background check includes a full state and FBI check.

1. All staff members/applicants must present a satisfactory background check dated less than one (1) year prior to employment with COA. Applicants/Staff members living outside of Maryland for an extended period of time during the five (5) years prior to their application for employment may also be asked to secure other appropriate criminal background checks for that state.

COA has been granted permission by the State of Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services' Criminal Justice Information Systems (CJIS) to receive background checks for specified positions. Presently, these positions include the Pastor, Music Director, Assistant Music Director, Office Manager, Christian Educator, and Youth Director. If COA adds other paid positions to its staff, COA must apply for and be granted permission to conduct background checks for those specific positions prior to initiating the background check. Contract Media personnel are not paid staff but will have the same background checks as volunteers. Independent contractors such as the cleaning crew are not covered under this policy.

2. In 2019 COA entered into an agreement with Mid-Atlantic Regional Investigations located in Annapolis MD to conduct these background checks on paid employees. COA may, at its discretion and with Session approval, contract with another investigation company without the need to revise this policy. A designated Administration Elder will receive the confidential results of the background checks and they will be maintained in a secure location with limited access
3. New employees of COA and Anchors-A-Wee Preschool will immediately initiate a background check, preferably prior to starting actual employment. Prior to receiving the background check results, the new employee will not be allowed to be alone with children.
4. Background checks on paid employees will be conducted every five (5) years. If there is a break in employment of longer than six(6) months, a new background check must be conducted.
5. An applicant/staff member who has been convicted of an offense involving children and/or involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, or indecency will not be permitted to work with children at COA. What constitutes a disqualifying offense will be determined by the Pastor and/or the Session Administration/Christian Education Elder on a case-by-case basis.
6. Any person who will transport children on COA sponsored/sanctioned activities/events must provide proof of insurance, a valid driver's license, and sign a waiver of liability.

**B. Volunteers:** Our volunteers are crucial to the success of COA and are used in many ways. All volunteers who work with children will submit a completed volunteer package. They will

also undergo both a limited background check and Safe Sanctuaries training. This pertains to those who volunteer for any COA sanctioned activity involving children, or while on church property when Anchors A Wee is in session. These activities include, but are not limited to: “Fun-Day” School (a/k/a Sunday School), Youth Group meetings and mission trips, Nursery, Vacation Bible School. Exceptions can be made for individuals who are coming for a specific purpose, such as providing a program for AAW or making a repair to the building on a case-by-case basis. Such persons will never be allowed to be alone with a child not related to them.

1. Background checks on volunteers will be conducted as needed. Each volunteer will be required to renew their personal information on an annual basis for purposes of maintaining a volunteer database.
2. Volunteers must have attended COA for a six-month period or be associated with Anchors-A-Wee prior to becoming involved with children. The Administration and/or Christian Education Elders may grant a waiver on a case-by-case basis.
3. Any volunteer who has been convicted of an offense involving children and/or involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, or indecency will not be permitted to work with children at COA. What constitutes a disqualifying offense will be determined by the Pastor and/or the Session Administration/Christian Education Elder on a case-by-case basis.
4. Any person who transports children on COA sponsored/sanctioned activities/events must be over 21, provide proof of insurance, a valid driver’s license, and sign a waiver of liability.
5. Teen volunteers under the age of 18 who assist with children’s activities at COA must also complete a Teen Volunteer Package and follow the following guidelines:
  - a. Teen volunteers must be under the supervision of an adult Volunteer or Staff Member.
  - b. Teen Volunteers and the children they are working with must remain in public, accessible places.

### **C. Anchors-A-Wee Preschool:**

Anchors-A-Wee Preschool is a mission and integral part of COA. Anchors-A-Wee personnel follow the state guidelines for licensed preschools regarding background checks, which is currently every five (5) years. COA Christian Education Elders have the responsibility of ensuring that these checks are conducted and documentation maintained as required by the State of Maryland. This policy is consistent with current Anchors-A-Wee policy. If Anchors-A-Wee is required to change their policy due to changes in state guidelines they will notify Session.

#### **IV. GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

These rules shall be adhered to by all paid staff and volunteers, including those affiliated with Anchors-A-Wee.

All activities with children will be conducted in spaces that are public and easily accessible.

- Children will be supervised at all times.
- Parents are encouraged to share responsibility for maintaining a safe environment by escorting preschool and elementary age children to and from any activity, picking up and dropping off children on time, dropping off children only when staff/volunteers are present, and never leaving children alone in the parking lot, on the church sidewalks or playground.
- A sign-in/sign-out procedure will be maintained in the COA nursery during all staffed hours.
- Sunday School children will also be signed in and out. Parents may do this prior to the beginning of the service. If children have been signed in but choose not to attend, parents will note this on the sign in/out sheet.
- Classroom doors should remain open unless there are windows in the door. The door must remain unlocked whenever there are children in the room.
- Windows internal to classrooms may never be covered.
- The doors to the main restrooms used in conjunction with Sunday School will remain propped open.
- Paid Staff or Volunteers should never be alone with one child in a bathroom with a door closed and should never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child.
- There should be at least two adults with completed background checks in any room where there are children. If only one adult is present, the door shall remain open.
- No adult should be alone with one unrelated child in any building or on any grounds of COA. The only exception is when one on one pastoral services are being provided. In those cases, counseling must be either outside or in a room with a window in the door.
- Every effort will be made to have at least two adults and/or one adult and/or youth volunteer present in the nursery or Sunday School classes.
- Youth (6<sup>th</sup> grade or older) shall always be in groups of three or more when no adult is present and when appropriate, the door shall remain open.
- Children who are not yet in 6<sup>th</sup> grade should never be left unaccompanied.
- Children with the following symptoms should not participate in COA activities: fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours, eye or skin infections, or other symptoms of other communicable or infectious disease. If the staff or a volunteer determines that the child is ill, the child will be separated from the other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to pick up the child.
- For overnight activities on-site or off-site:
  - There shall be a one to five ratio, gender-specific, of adults to children.
  - Three or more children should be assigned to a room.

- There shall never be one adult and one child in an overnight room together.
- When physically possible, sleeping areas for adults should be separate from children.
- Chaperones will monitor hallways when necessary or appropriate.
- Any person, staff or volunteer, who transports children on COA sponsored/sanctioned activities/events must be over the age of 21, provide proof of insurance, a valid driver's license, and sign a waiver of liability. Staff has the discretion to make exceptions for family members who wish to transport their own children.
- There shall be three or more people in each vehicle when children are present. This does not include transportation of children to/from AAW.
- Parents or guardians of COA children participating in field trips, mission trips, retreats, or other overnight events must sign permission slips that include medical authorization and contact information .
- There must be a minimum (5) five-year age difference between the oldest child and the person responsible for the class or activity unless an adult approved by the Administration Committee is present.
- Photographs of minors will not be posted on any church websites or social media pages without a Media Release Form signed by the parent or guardian. If a Media Release Form is not signed, it is assumed that permission has not been given to post a photo of that child.

## **V. REPORTING**

### **A. SUSPECTED CHILD MALTREATMENT**

Ensuring the safety of our children is an obligation shared by all citizens and organizations and has the responsibility of protecting children and reporting SUSPECTED child maltreatment, whether it be physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect of a child to the proper authorities. It is not the responsibility of COA to investigate suspected maltreatment, but to ensure that the concerns are reported to the Anne Arundel County Child Protective Services.

If abuse or neglect is witnessed, suspected, or reported to you by a child, the following steps shall be taken:

- If a child is in immediate danger or in need of immediate medical attention, call 911.
- Immediately report the incident to the Pastor or Christian Educator. If neither are available reports may be made to the Office Manager or Christian Education/Administration Elder.
- Call the Anne Arundel County Child Protective Services at 410-421-8400. If possible have the following information available:
  - Reason for concern
  - Name of child
  - Address of child

- Date of Birth of child
- Any known sibling(s) and their age(s)
- Name of parent(s)
- Phone number of parent(s)
- If the Pastor has not already been informed, ensure that the Pastor is aware of the concern and the report.
- DO NOT DISCUSS the issue with anyone other than the appropriate COA staff, CPS or law enforcement.

Prior to any travel with minors outside of Anne Arundel County, the person responsible for the trip will obtain local Department of Social Services phone number(s) prior to departure.

#### B. NEGATIVE INFORMATION REGARDING STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

1. Negative information regarding the Pastor or other COA staff will be handled in compliance with Presbytery guidance.
2. Paid staff are “at will” employees. Negative information will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Administration Elders and Pastor and, if necessary, Session. Negative information does not automatically preclude employment if it is not related to the work performed for COA. Actions taken may include but are not limited to training or termination.
3. Negative information on volunteers will also be reviewed by the Administration Elders, Pastor, and an Elder from the appropriate committee if the volunteer is involved in those activities. It should be clearly understood that volunteering is a privilege not a right and that safety of children is our paramount concern.

### VI. TRAINING

Safe Sanctuaries training will be provided to all staff and volunteers who are interacting with children. This training will include instruction on the policies and procedures set forth in this policy as well as procedures on how to report incidents of suspected child abuse. All staff and volunteers must have this training prior to working with children and/or youth.

### VII. PROPERTY AND PERSONAL SAFETY

#### A. FIRE

1. A map of the building and all Exit Routes, including the location of fire alarms and extinguishers are posted in each classroom, hallway and in the sanctuary.
2. The Pastor, Session, Deacons, Ushers and paid church staff will be trained on safety procedures required in case of evacuation due to fire.

3. Anchors-A-Wee, a mission of Christ Our Anchor and occupant of the church building, will follow state guidelines regarding fire drills and documentation of those drills. Anchors-A-Wee staff will be trained in those guidelines. COA will hold a fire drill annually for the congregation.
4. In case of fire, pull the nearest alarm. Alarms are located in three locations in the church building.
5. In case of evacuation the parking lot of the Harbour School is the designated meeting place.
6. In the event of fire:
  - a. Locate staff/volunteers to begin evacuation procedures.
  - b. Locate and pull the nearest fire alarm.
  - c. Call 911 to report the fire.
  - d. Direct individuals to Harbour School.
  - e. One person to remain behind in Church parking lot to provide first responders with known facts as to location/cause of fire and designated meeting place.
  - f. At least one volunteer or staff member to remain in designated meeting place to reunite children with parents or other family members and all individuals have been dismissed or reunited with family (no child is to be left behind and unattended).
  - g. With the help of staff member complete any documents/incident reports as may be required for insurance purposes.
  - h. Anchors-A-Wee will follow their procedures for evacuation during a fire.
  - i. A Knox box has been installed to ensure quick entry for the Anne Arundel County Fire Department. These boxes are standard across the country. They are extremely secure and ONLY the Fire Department can open it.

B. LOCKDOWN/SHELTER IN PLACE – Christ Our Anchor/ Anchors-A-Wee will go into lockdown or shelter in place if Broadneck High School has been advised to do so, if the immediate area around the church has been notified of a dangerous situation including, but not limited to, an active shooter or weather event, or if a Christ Our Anchor or Anchors-A-Wee staff member perceives an immediate threat. COA and AAW designated staff have signed up for both phone and text messages from Anne Arundel County for a variety of potential hazards and threats. All doors will be immediately locked and not unlocked until an all clear is given by first responders or Christ Our Anchor/ Anchors-A-Wee staff.

1. If Anchors-A-Wee is in session, parents must be notified as soon as possible pursuant to Anchors-A-Wee policy and procedures.
2. The lockdown/shelter in place will be lifted as soon as possible, but only when appropriate authorities have determined it is safe to do so.
3. We cannot force an adult to stay inside the building during a lockdown; however, once a person exits the building they will not be allowed back inside.
4. No minor child is permitted to leave the building during a lockdown situation unless accompanied by their parent or other authorized person.

5. Christ Our Anchor has windows around the entire building so staying away from windows is difficult. The safest places in case of lockdown or shelter in place are the bathrooms and other rooms with no windows. AAW has a policy regarding where children will go and teachers have a Go Bag with snacks and other necessary items. If possible, cover as any windows and doors as possible for protection.

### C. SECURITY PROCEDURES

1. Personal Safety. Neither the Pastor nor the Office Manager should be alone in the building with counseling clients or others seeking assistance. It is strongly recommended that when groups are using the building after hours that all doors remain locked.

2. The last person to leave the building will ensure all doors and windows are locked.

D. USE OF FACILITIES BY OUTSIDE GROUPS Outside groups will follow all COA's Safe Sanctuaries rules while on COA property. They will be provided with a copy of this policy and will sign a statement saying that they understand and will comply. Failure of outside groups to comply with COA's Safe Sanctuaries rules while on COA property will result in loss of access to the facility by that group. If children are involved in outside group activities, they must include insurance and background check information when requesting use of the facility.

### EFFECTIVE DATE

This policy, and any amendments thereto, will be effective upon approval of Session following a review by an attorney and COA's insurance company. Those who are already working with children at COA when the policy is adopted must read and sign the policy to continue in their positions.

### SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

I have read the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church of Annapolis, Maryland (Version May 2021) and agree to be bound by its terms.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_