



# Family Ministry Policy Manual

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## ***Article One, Family Ministry Overview***

### **Section 1. Ministry Divisions**

Clause 1. The Family Ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church (hereby the church) consists of three departments with one mission, one vision, and a unified curriculum scope and sequence:

- a) Preschool Ministry (newborn to 5 years of age)
- b) Elementary Ministry (kindergarten through 6th grade)
- c) Youth Ministry (6th through 12th grade)

### **Section 2. Mission & Biblical Foundations**

Ultimately, we want to glorify God in everything we do. Our mission explains how we seek to reach that end. This mission can be expressed in five core values. Each value is integral to what we strive to accomplish.

#### Clause 1 Value One: Partnering with Parents

We recognize that parents are primarily responsible for teaching biblical truths to their children. Therefore, we partner with parents by providing support and encouragement (Ephesians 6:4).

#### Clause 2. Value Two: Teaching the Whole Bible

All Scripture has been inspired by God (2 Tim 1:16–17). Therefore, we will make the whole counsel of Scripture known to children (Deuteronomy 6:6–9). To teach the whole Bible is to teach Christ because the gospel is at the heart of every text (Luke 24:27; Romans 1:16–17; Colossians 1:28). In addition, we shall teach them that the glory of God is the chief end of their lives (Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 2:12).

#### Clause 3. Value Three: Relying on the Holy Spirit

Our children need our prayers. God works through His Word and His Spirit. Therefore, we plead with God to regenerate the hearts of our children, at a young age, through our prayers and the faithful teaching of His Word (Romans 10:17; Ephesians 2:4–10).

#### Clause 4. Value Four: Modeling the Christian Life

Our children are best served when they see models of Christian living. We aim to live faithfully before them, modeling how Christians are called to respond to God, love one another, and minister to the world around us (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

#### Clause 5. Value Five: Stewarding Children and Families

It is a great privilege to minister to children and families. God has, for a season, put them in our care. We see this as a stewardship that must not be taken lightly (1 Corinthians 4:1–2; Acts 20:35).

### **Section 3. Vision for Ministry to Children & Families**

The following Old and New Testament passages are foundational in our desire to see the next generation raised to understand and follow Jesus Christ. The Hebrew saints instruct us to think not merely in terms of individuals, but in terms of generations. We are aiming, therefore, for “Generations of Godliness.” More than that, these texts emphasize the need for parents to pass along what they have learned to the next generation. Our vision is to see entire families equipped to do just that.

Clause 1. *One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. (Psalm 145:4–7)*

Clause 2. *He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. (Psalm 78:5–7)*

Clause 3. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4–9)*

Clause 4. *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...” (Matthew 18:2–5)*

## **Article Two, Child and Youth Worker Protection Policy Overview**

### **Section 1. Terms Defined**

Clause 1. *Volunteers/Workers:* those assigned responsibility for children or youth during any regularly scheduled service time, or any church-sponsored ministry event, including chaperones for off-campus events.

Clause 2. *Teachers:* carry the same responsibility as a worker/volunteer but, additionally, are responsible for teaching from an assigned curriculum.

Clause 3. *Caregivers*: a general title that applies to all who are supervising children or youth at any given time. This may include, but is not limited to, workers/volunteers, teachers, coordinators, and other staffed positions.

Clause 4. *Coordinator*: a volunteer/worker or staff person who is the first point of contact for a teacher or volunteer/worker. This individual is responsible for immediate supervision of a group, i.e. preschool, elementary, or youth teachers, Sunday or Wednesday childcare workers, etc.

Clause 5. *Children's Ministry Director*: A full-time staff person who provides direct oversight for the Preschool and Elementary Ministries.

Clause 6. *Associate Pastor/Equipping*: A full-time staff person who provides pastoral oversight for the Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry.

## **Section 2. General Guidelines**

Unless otherwise noted, these policies apply to the entire Family Ministry (age 0-12th grade). The children's physical safety and well-being are of utmost concern, therefore we shall:

Clause 1. Screen all workers.

Clause 2. Require initial training for all workers, and additional training as needed when policies and procedures are updated.

Clause 3. Utilize child check-in/check-out policies for Preschool and Elementary Ministry (see Family Ministry Procedure Manual).

Clause 4. Schedule child-to-caregiver ratios that optimize safety (see Article 6, Section 2).

Clause 5. Equip each area with a first aid kit and inform parents/guardians of any injury or problems related to their child or youth;

Clause 6. Educate our workers on how to recognize child abuse and report any known or suspected abuse to the authorities and/or church officials.

Clause 7. Adhere to a "well child" health policy for admittance to preschool and elementary classes as well as routinely sanitize toys, tables, etc. in preschool areas.

Clause 8. Adhere to a policy of at least two workers per room, one of whom shall be a woman; and ensure that workers are not in isolated settings with children or youth.

## ***Article Three, Protecting Children Before They Arrive***

### **Section 1. Teacher & Worker Requirements**

To ensure safe and quality care, all workers shall meet the following criteria in order to work with our children:

Clause 1. Be a member in good standing at the church for at least three months and be approved by the Children's Ministry Director and Associate Pastor/Equipping.

Clause 2. Successfully complete a criminal background check authorization form and appropriate references, a criminal background check, and abuse awareness training. If there are any reservations about a worker's suitability to work with children, the elders shall be consulted. The privilege to work with children may be denied if it is in the best interest of the congregation as a whole. In such an event, the person shall be encouraged to participate in a more suitable ministry of service.

Clause 3. Have reviewed the policies contained in this manual and the procedures contained in the Family Ministry Procedure Manual and submitted a signed form indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, agrees to comply with the requirements, and agrees to report all violations of these policies and procedures to their immediate coordinator or staff person.

Clause 4. Have completed the orientation session. Further training sessions may be required as needed.

Clause 5. Never be alone with a child or youth. For Preschool and Elementary Ministry, there must be two approved adult workers in each classroom at all times, one of whom shall be a woman.

Clause 6. Never serve exclusively with a spouse or relative. When there are only two workers in a class, they may not be husband-wife pairs, or other family relations (father, daughter, etc.).

Clause 7. Be eighteen years of age or older. The Children's Ministry Director, in consultation with the Associate Pastor/Equipping, may approve children ages eleven to seventeen to help in the preschool or elementary halls with two authorized adult workers. These approved children are not considered workers when calculating the worker/child ratio.

### **Section 2. Application Denial and Volunteer Dismissal**

Clause 1. Mount Vernon reserves the right to reject any applicant for volunteer service or dismiss an existing volunteer for any reason, including, but not limited to, refusing or failing to complete screening; failing to provide requested information; providing information that is subsequently determined as false or

misleading; sin or suffering issues that compromise the applicant's or volunteer's ability to care for children; any criminal report or charge; obtaining information from references or criminal record checks that suggest that the applicant is not suitable to help with children.

Clause 2. Any volunteer, helper, deacon, staff, or elder (or any Mount Vernon member) who learns of or has knowledge of misconduct by an applicant must report that knowledge to the Children's Ministry Director and/or the Associate Pastor/Equipping. He or she also must be personally responsible for any legal obligation that he or she may have to disclose such information to the authorities.

### ***Article Four, Parent/Guardian/Child Requirements***

#### **Section 1. Parent/Guardian Presence**

Preschool and elementary children shall have a parent or guardian on-site during regularly scheduled classes and activities. A Parent/Guardian must be present when dropping children off at a classroom.

### ***Article Five, Protecting Children as They Arrive and Depart***

#### **Section 1. Sign In**

Any parent/guardian who would like his/her child to participate in a Preschool or Elementary Ministry activity shall sign the child in to the appropriate classroom when he/she arrives, granting permission for the child to participate. Workers shall be ready to receive children 15 minutes prior to the start of any class/service. Once signed in, children may not be received unless there are two approved adult workers present in the classroom, one of whom must be a woman.

#### **Section 2. Medical Services/Allergies**

The sign-in process shall authorize the church to secure medical services for the child in the event of an accident or injury if the parents or legal guardians are unavailable. The parent should also use this opportunity to note any allergies or special needs the child may have.

#### **Section 3. Desk Volunteers and Hall Monitors**

Desk Volunteers shall be present on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings to assist teachers with check-in/check-out and restroom procedures. A Hall Monitor shall be present during the Sunday Morning service to assist the Preschool Desk Volunteer. Desk Volunteers and Hall Monitors are qualified workers who provide extra security and assistance during activities and events.



#### **Section 4. Staffing**

For the safety and protection of our children, classrooms must be properly staffed at all times in accordance with posted child-to-caregiver ratios (see Article 6, Section 2).

#### **Section 5. Departure**

Clause 1. Parents/Guardians shall pick up their children no later than ten minutes after the conclusion of the class/service.

Clause 2. Workers cannot leave a classroom until all children have been picked up. If there are more than two workers in a classroom, only one woman and another adult volunteer are required to stay through pick-up.

#### **Section 6. Divorce/Separation/Custody/Visitation**

Clause 1. In a situation with divorced or separated parents/guardians, the worker, unless otherwise notified, shall release the child(ren) to the parent who brought the child(ren). If the unauthorized divorced parent attempts to check the child(ren) out, the teacher or caregiver shall contact the police immediately and ask for their presence. The caregiver shall ask the police to wait until all necessary parties are present before releasing the child(ren) to the police, or the parent/guardian approved by the police.

Clause 2. Should a parent come in with a court order for visitation/custody demanding that we release the child(ren) to him/her, the police must also be present, and we shall still release the child(ren) into police custody.

Clause 3. In either circumstance, the workers shall also immediately contact the Children's Ministry Director who will in turn contact the Associate Pastor/Equipping as well as the parent who first brought the child(ren) to church.

### ***Article Six, Protecting Children While They Are in Our Care***

#### **Section 1. Reducing Isolation**

Clause 1. For the Preschool and Elementary Ministry, two qualified workers (two adults 18 or older) shall be present in each classroom at all times. One caregiver shall be an adult female. When permitted by the Children's Ministry Director, children ages 11-17 may assist, but only when working with two authorized adults.

Clause 2. Parents shall not leave children if there is only one approved worker in the classroom.

Clause 3. All rooms shall have open doors (full or half) or windows in doors to ensure visibility.

Clause 4. For Youth Ministry, no worker shall be alone with an individual youth in any room unless prior approval is obtained from the youth's parent/guardian and the Associate Pastor/Equipping.

## **Section 2. Child-to-Caregiver Ratios**

In addition to having a minimum of two workers present, the following ratios (Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 591-1-1-.32) are maintained during the three, regularly-scheduled weekly meetings of the church:

Clause 1. Children age birth-1: 1 worker for every 6 children

Clause 2. Children age 2-3: 1 worker for every 10 children

Clause 3. Children age 4-6: 1 worker for every 18 children

Clause 4. Children age 7 and up (including youth): 1 worker for every 25 children or youth

## **Section 3. Restroom Procedures**

Clause 1. Preschool: Parents/guardians should take their children to the restroom and/or change dirty diapers before class.

Clause 2. All children and workers using or assisting in the restroom shall wash their hands with soap and water when finished.

Clause 3. Workers shall wear gloves when assisting children (nursery age only) with anything other than clothing.

Clause 4. When assistance is needed in the restroom, children shall be assisted by women only.

Clause 5. Elementary: Children shall be sent to the appropriate restroom on their own. A desk volunteer shall be available for supervision outside the restroom, as needed.

Clause 6. Youth: Youth shall use the appropriate restroom on their own. No worker or other youth shall accompany him/her.

## **Section 4. Appropriate Discipline**

Clause 1. All workers are responsible for providing a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which children can learn, play, and interact with others. Workers shall set and maintain high standards, thus modeling the goodness of God and godly authority. We expect children (beginning with the 1's) to begin learning to listen during story time, share, take turns, and treat others with respect. We expect workers to be obeyed.

Clause 2. For Preschool and Elementary Ministry specifically, this atmosphere shall be maintained by the following guidelines:

- a) Being well-prepared and praying for the children.
- b) Giving brief yet firm directions.
- c) Directing children, proactively and positively, towards acceptable activities.
- d) Reminding children of appropriate biblical truths that will direct them and teach honor and respect for authorities.
- e) Workers shall discuss appropriate consequences for behavior with parents as they partner to direct the child.
- f) Workers shall report significant and/or ongoing behavioral issues to the child's parent/guardian and the Children's Ministry Director.

Clause 3. Workers shall never yell at, spank, or hit a child. If behavior is uncontrollable or the child does not respond to the discipline measures above, the parent/guardian and Children's Ministry Director shall be notified. In addition, parents/guardians shall be informed of any significant or ongoing incidents.

Clause 4. Youth are expected to show respect toward their peers and those in authority over them. Any youth who displays rude or disrespectful behavior shall be given a verbal warning/admonition. If the behavior continues, the youth shall be asked to leave and the parent/guardian shall be notified. An elder will be called if necessary.

Clause 5. At no time shall weapons, alcohol, illegal or unauthorized drugs, tobacco products, or inappropriate literature, pictures, music, or videos be allowed (this includes digital literature and images). Any child or youth possessing such items shall be removed from the room and the parent/guardian will be notified. An elder shall be called if necessary. Any worker possessing such items shall be immediately removed from the room and the appropriate coordinator, staff, and elder will be notified. Disciplinary action will proceed based on the nature of the violation, which may include following the procedures defined in Article 10 of this policy manual. While cell phones are allowed, youth may only use them for emergency purposes or Bible access during class. All other electronic devices are prohibited during class time.

### **Section 5. Physical Touch Policy (Caregiver-to-Child)**

While appropriate physical contact with children can be an effective means of aiding in communication, redirecting attention, calming restlessness, or of showing godly love and care, it can also be easily misinterpreted. The following policy is therefore in place, because we would afford no opportunity for the Gospel or our workers to be compromised in this area:

Clause 1. Always remain in open sight of other adults.

Clause 2. Appropriate physical contact will vary according to the age of the child. What is appropriate for nursery children (holding, rocking, sitting in laps, diapering, assisting in the restroom, etc.) will not be appropriate for grade school children.

Clause 3. In the preschool, men may not change diapers except for their own children, and only females shall take children to the restroom and/or assist in the restroom.

Clause 4. Sitting on laps is only appropriate for ages 0 through pre-K. In some situations, a man will need to limit physical contact more than a woman in the same situation, especially when working with older children.

Clause 5. All workers shall refrain from the following activities: roughhousing, wrestling, and giving shoulder or piggyback rides.

Clause 6. All workers shall use care and discernment when hugging a child. Brief side-hugs when greeting or comforting a child are generally appropriate. Prolonged, frequent, or frontal hugs are not appropriate. In older classes, workers shall not initiate hugs, particularly towards children of the opposite sex; if an older child initiates a hug, the worker shall redirect them to a more appropriate contact, such as a brief side-hug or a gentle "high-five," etc.

Clause 7. All workers shall only touch children in "safe" areas and for brief times, with no rubbing or massaging. "Safe" areas generally include hands, arms, shoulders, upper back, or gentle pats on the top of a child's head. A worker shall never touch a child on or near any region that is considered private or personal, unless changing diapers or assisting nursery children in the restroom. A worker shall never touch a child out of frustration or anger.

## **Section 6. Physical Touch Policy (Child/Teen-to-Child)**

Children are vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Younger children are particularly vulnerable to abuse by older children. Therefore:

Clause 1. No male and female under 18 shall ever be alone together. To encourage compliance and to protect our children from being in isolated areas of the church, the doors to the Elementary Ministry Area and the Youth Area shall remain locked, except during normally scheduled class times.

Clause 2. No inappropriate touching of any kind shall be accepted (e.g., physical displays of affection)

Clause 3. Hitting and kicking will not be tolerated. Children engaging in such behavior shall be verbally warned and, if the behavior persists, be dismissed from class and placed into his or her parent's care.

Clause 4. Fighting will not be tolerated, and any child participating in violent action shall be dismissed from class and placed into his or her parent's care. A pastor will be called if necessary.

Clause 5. No bullying or physical intimidation of any kind will be accepted. If a child persists in such behavior, he or she shall be dismissed from class and placed into his or her parent's care. A pastor will be called if necessary.

### **Section 7. Nudity**

Staff and volunteers should never be nude in the presence of the youth or children in their care.

### **Section 8. Sexually Oriented Conversations**

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children or youth and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities with any child or youth. From time to time, Youth Ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex, and human sexuality. These lessons will convey the church's views on these topics.

### **Section 9. Intoxicants**

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while on church grounds, while traveling with children or youth, or while working with or supervising children or youth.

### **Section 10. Use of Technology**

Clause 1. Volunteers and helpers will only use technology that has been previously approved by the Children's Ministry Director or the Associate Pastor/Equipping. Out of respect for parents and their personal decisions related to technology, volunteers and helpers will refrain from any use of unauthorized technology in the classroom.

Clause 2. Volunteers are prohibited from photographing or taking videos of children while serving in children's ministry. This is for the protection of children and privacy of families.

### **Section 11. Personal Items**

Clause 1. Volunteers working in the Preschool or Elementary hallways must put any excess items onto labeled shelves in their assigned classroom. This includes items such as purses, backpacks, or laptop bags. Our intention is to ensure that young children will not be able to get into a volunteer's personal belongings.

Clause 2. Volunteers serving in Family Ministry, whether that be with children or with youth, are not permitted to carry weapons of any kind, including but not limited to:

- Firearms of any kind
- Knives of any length
- Pepper spray
- Tasers
- Any other self-defense devices

Clause 3. If a volunteer is not sure whether their item is a self-defense device, they should consult with the Children's Ministry Director, Associate Pastor/Equipping, or the Operations and Facility Director for approval.

## ***Article Seven, Food/Drink Policy***

### **Section 1. Food Allergies**

Preschool and Elementary Ministry, parents/guardians shall provide written notice to MVBC concerning any allergy conditions their child(ren) may have and shall provide immediate notice to the church regarding any changes in these allergies.

### **Section 2. Church Provided Snacks & Allergies**

Clause 1. The only snacks/drinks that may be served in the preschool are those provided by the preschool or those brought by parents/guardians for children with allergies.

Clause 2. Teachers in Preschool and Elementary Ministries shall check with the appropriate coordinator prior to giving any non-church-provided snacks/treats/drinks to the children (special occasions, celebrations, teacher treats, etc.).

## ***Article Eight, Well Child Policy and Universal Precautions***

### **Section 1. Communicable Diseases**

Clause 1. The church is dedicated to preventing the spread of communicable diseases among children and workers. Parents/guardians and workers shall, therefore, be familiar with and abide by the Well Child Policy and Universal Precautions.

Clause 2. Workers have the right to refuse a child on the basis of symptoms as listed in the Well Child Policy. In addition, MVBC reserves the right to request clearance by a family physician before allowing a child to return to care.

Clause 3. Children with infectious diseases should be kept home until they are no longer contagious. If a child is exhibiting symptoms of illness such as fever, diarrhea, open skin lesions or blisters (as in chicken pox), or persistent nasal discharge, the parent should keep the child home.

Clause 4. A child in the Preschool or Elementary Ministry shall not be placed in care when any of the following exist:

- a) Fever higher than 100 degrees (orally) or 99 degrees (axillary), vomiting, or diarrhea. (Note: Children should be free of a fever, vomiting or diarrhea for 24 hours before coming back to church.)
- b) Any symptom of scarlet fever, German measles, mumps, chicken pox, whooping cough, or hand, foot, and mouth disease.
- c) Common cold – from onset of symptoms and one week thereafter.
- d) Thick green, yellow, cloudy, or constant nasal discharge.
- e) Sore throat.
- f) Productive (wet) cough or croupy (barking) cough.
- g) Any unexplained rash, or open skin lesion.
- h) Any skin infection--boils, ringworm, impetigo, etc.
- i) Pink eye, or any other eye infection or drainage.
- j) Any infestation (such as lice).
- k) Any other communicable disease.
- l) Looks or acts unusually tired, pale, irritable, or restless.

## **Section 2. Sick Children/Response**

Clause 1. Children who appear ill while in care shall be removed from class and placed with the Desk Volunteer while the parent/guardian is located.

Clause 2. If a child appears to have contracted an illness while attending a Mount Vernon event, parents should inform the Children's Ministry Director so other parents can be notified if necessary. If a child contracts an illness and has been in contact with other children while at MVBC, parents/guardians have the responsibility to notify the Children's Ministry Director.

Clause 3. Neither workers nor church staff shall give any medication to any child. The only exception of supervisors/workers are those who have been instructed by a parent of a highly allergic child in need of an Epi-pen.

Clause 4. Parents/guardians of children with special needs shall contact the Children's Ministry Director in order to make appropriate accommodations.

Clause 5. Because there is no foolproof way to determine who may be a carrier of an infectious disease, we shall employ Universal Precautions in dealing with all human body fluids and items coming into contact with them. By treating all bodily fluids as if they are infected, any infections or contaminants can be avoided at all times, providing a safer and healthier environment for workers and children alike. In order to comply with Universal Precautions, workers shall:

- a) Wash/sanitize hands before and after any contact with bodily fluids, including wiping noses, changing diapers, cleaning vomit or restroom accidents, and treating blood spills.

- b) Always wear disposable gloves (latex or vinyl) when dealing with any bodily fluids.
- c) Use Body Fluid Kits for any accidents involving bodily fluids (e.g., vomit, blood spills, large urine accidents, etc.) Kits shall be located on each floor; instructions are included in kits. Gloves must be used.
- d) Blot urine with paper towels, and spray the area thoroughly with approved sanitizer and dispose of paper towels in a covered garbage can.
- e) Treat all soiled linens (i.e. sheets, clothing, burp cloths) as potential infectious agents.
- f) Remove toys that children have mouthed from the general play area until washed in hot soapy water or disinfected with approved sanitizer.
- g) At the end of the session, disinfect the room (toys, changing tables, tables, highchairs, etc.) with the approved sanitizer solution. Allow toys to air dry and wipe down tables, high chairs, etc. with paper towels. Disinfected toys may be placed back on shelves.

## ***Article Nine, Child Abuse Response Plan***

### **Section 1. Definitions**

Clause 1. *Child neglect* is failure, whether intentional or not, of the person responsible for the child's care to provide for the child's basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, medical and dental care, supervision, education, or the failure to protect the child from harm.

Clause 2. *Child abuse* is any recent act or failure to act resulting in imminent risk of harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual harm or exploitation of a child by a parent or a caretaker who is responsible for the child's welfare.

Clause 3. *Sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult* is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child and an adult. This includes activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or child. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered to be forced whether or not the child consents to it.

Clause 4. *Sexual abuse perpetrated by a child* is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between children, with or without the consent of either child, when one child has power or perceived authority over the other child. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children.

Clause 5. *Sexual exploitation* includes forcing a child or soliciting a child for the purposes of prostitution or using a child to videotape or photograph pornography.



Clause 6. *Child sexual abuse* is any form of sexual contact with a minor, non-touching offenses, or sexual exploitation of a minor. This is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they cannot be personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Clause 7. *Child spiritual abuse* is the use of spiritual authority (the Bible or church authority) to emotionally, physically, and/or sexually abuse a child.

## **Section 2. Prevention**

Mount Vernon takes protection against and reporting of neglect and abuse very seriously. In an effort to prevent abuse and neglect, we:

- a) Educate and equip staff, elders, deacons, and volunteers about neglect and abuse.
- b) Adhere to the procedures and guidelines as set out in this policy manual. Many of the policies are written to protect children, including the two adult rule, visibility guidelines, and diaper and bathroom policy.
- c) Train and screen volunteers prior to contact with any children. Screening includes filling out an application, getting feedback from references and requiring a criminal background check.
- d) Require all full-time staff to submit to a criminal background check within a month of joining staff.
- e) Repeat screening procedures and criminal background checks for full-time staff and volunteers every five years.
- f) Require volunteers and staff to be members for at least three months prior to serving in children's ministry.

Any instance of suspected or observed abuse or neglect should be handled with the following guidelines.

## **Section 3. Reporting Abuse**

Clause 1. In Georgia, church employees, workers and volunteers are required to report incidents of child abuse, (with the exception that clergy are not required to disclose privileged communications [O.C.G.A. section 24-9-22], though they will normally fall into "mandatory reporter" status as "child service organization personnel"). As such, workers are to report to the supervisor any instances in which the caregiver "has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused." Therefore, in the event of suspected child abuse:

- a) The worker shall verbally report the incident to the Children's Ministry Director and/or the Associate Pastor/Equipping as soon as possible after the incident;
- c) The Children's Ministry Director or Associate Pastor/Equipping shall document this information and notify child protective services (DFCS report line in Fulton County at 404-699-4399 or Georgia DFCS

report line at 1-855-422-4453), the Senior Pastor, Elder Chair, and Associate Pastor/Administration.

d) The Associate Pastor/Administration shall notify MVBC's insurance carrier and seek legal counsel.

Clause 2. Anyone who suspects, witnesses, or has any reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be neglected and/or harmed or threatened with abuse in any form should contact the Children's Ministry Director and/or Associate Pastor/Equipping. This reporting includes questionable behavior (overly flirtatious behavior, shoulder massages or other intimate acts, etc.) and/or possible offenses (volunteers observing actual abuse or possible evidence of abuse like abrasions, lacerations, etc.). The Children's Ministry Director and/or Associate Pastor/Equipping are required to report all credible allegations and/or eye-witness accounts to the Senior Pastor, Elder Chair, and Associate Pastor/Administration.

Clause 3. In the event a worker observes an incident that may be abusive, the worker should immediately intervene to protect the child, follow up immediately with the Children's Ministry Director and/or Associate Pastor/Equipping, write a report about the incident within 48 hours, and act in accordance with all reporting laws.

Clause 4. The church will seek professional assistance when deemed appropriate. Notification will be limited to those who need to know about the allegation and to those who can provide assistance in responding to neglect or abuse. The church may:

- a) Report suspicions or firsthand accounts or any knowledge of abuse to civil authorities. Full cooperation must be given to civil authorities.
- b) Notify church disciplers, counselors, or medical personnel in order to obtain ongoing care for the victim(s) and victim's families.
- c) Notify an insurance agent, denominational leaders, or any other outside officials.
- d) Notify and consult with a church attorney.

Clause 5. Allegations of neglect or abuse reported to the Senior Pastor, Elder Chair, and Associate Pastor/Administration, admission of child abuse, or criminal conviction of abuse by staff, elder, deacon, volunteer, helper, or any member of MVBC should:

- a) Be reported to MVBC's elders. This disclosure of abuse is to be done regardless of the source of the information and should be conveyed to the elder board ideally within 48 hours of the allegation being made or the admission of child abuse or criminal conviction.
- b) Immediately result in removal of the alleged perpetrator or criminal offender from any activity or program involving children, until this temporary prohibition is released by the elders of MVBC.

#### **Section 4. Documentation**

The Children's Ministry Director and/or Associate Pastor/Equipping shall document the allegation with the assistance of the worker who noticed the offense. This documentation shall include:

- Clause 1. The name, age, gender, and address of the victim(s).
- Clause 2. The name, age, gender, and address of the alleged perpetrator/offender(s).
- Clause 3. The nature, frequency, date(s), and location(s) of the abuse alleged to have occurred.
- Clause 4. The relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator.
- Clause 5. Other evidence that supports the allegation (eyewitnesses, medical exams, confessions, etc.).

#### **Section 5. Confidentiality**

The church, as well as mandatory reporters, will maintain confidentiality to the extent that it deems appropriate for the care of its members and consistency with applicable law. Allegations and suspicion should be reported only to the persons specified in this policy manual.

#### **Section 6. Caring and Thorough Response**

MVBC will seek to provide a caring response to all victims of child abuse/neglect. Every allegation of neglect or abuse will be taken seriously. Proper guidelines for handling such complaints will be followed diligently and exhaustively. The victim(s) and victim's family will be cared for by the church in whatever way is available. Situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect for all parties' privacy and confidentiality.

#### **Section 7. Church Discipline**

In the event that a member of MVBC has been found either guilty by the state or in a state of unrepentant sin, the elders shall recommend to the congregation, in accordance with the MVBC Constitution, church discipline including, but not limited to, excommunication.

### ***Article Ten, Sexual Offenders in the Church***

#### **Section 1. When An Alleged Perpetrator or Convicted Offender Attends MVBC or a MVBC Related Activity**

Clause 1. If MVBC's elders or family ministry staff learn in advance that an alleged perpetrator or convicted sexual offender wants to attend a MVBC service:

- a) The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, and Associate Pastor/Equipping must decide whether to admit him or her to church services or MVBC related activities. Admission of the offender will be based on factors such as extent of prior convictions and his or her willingness to follow guidelines set out by this policy. This is not a comprehensive list of admission criteria.
- b) The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, or Associate Pastor/Equipping (or a designated member of MVBC) will contact the offender letting him or her know that he or she must be accompanied at all times while on MVBC's property or anywhere in MVBC's buildings.

Clause 2. If an alleged or convicted sexual offender participates in any MVBC related activity or public service that has the possibility of children being present:

- a) The Associate Pastor/Equipping, children's ministry staff, deacon of security, desk volunteers serving on that day, and hall monitor should be notified.
- b) The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, and Associate Pastor/Equipping may designate MVBC members or staff that will accompany the alleged perpetrator or criminal offender at all times while he or she is on MVBC's property or anywhere in MVBC's buildings.
- c) He or she will not be allowed beyond the first floor of the church and the West Hall in the basement. He or she must stay away from the Preschool and Elementary hallways in the basement, where the nursery and children's classes meet.
- d) The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, and Associate Pastor/Equipping will work with members to come up with guidelines for MVBC related activities that are not on church property, but elsewhere.

## **Section 2. When A Convicted Offender Attends Regularly**

Clause 1. If he/she chooses to attend regularly:

- a) The elders will be notified.
- b) The congregation will be notified in a public service of the church, most likely the members' meeting. MVBC reserves the right to forbid someone from coming to the church for worship services, programs, or activities. When participating in church activities outside of the church building, the same guidelines apply.
- c) The sexual offender should provide the Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, or Associate Pastor/Equipping with the name of his/her probation officer. The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, or Associate Pastor/Equipping will contact the probation officer and find out 1) more about the underlying offense – offenders tend to minimize their offenses, and 2) the specific terms of the probation in order to make sure the offender stays in compliance while at the church.

### **Section 3. When A Convicted Sexual Offender Seeks Membership at MVBC**

Clause 1. If the offender seeks membership at MVBC, the elders retain a right to refuse to recommend him or her for membership. If the elders recommend an offender for membership, it will be conditional on his or her agreement to:

- a) Verify the history of offenses, convictions, and adjudication of sexual offenses and disclose them to the MVBC elders.
- b) The Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, or Associate Pastor/Equipping contacting his/her probation officer to find out the underlying offense and the specific terms of probation.
- c) The Children's Ministry Director doing a thorough criminal background check. If the information provided by the offender differs from the information given by the probation officer or gathered by the Children's Ministry Director, that will be grounds for refusing to recommend him or her for membership.
- d) Disclosure of information to parents and the congregation. The information released to the church is at the discretion of the elders. A letter detailing this information will be sent directly to all member parents.
- e) Refrain from any form of communication (including phone, IM, texting, email, social media, or any type of technology), social fellowship, physical contact, mentoring, babysitting, or coaching with children or youth or participate in any activities or programs related to children or youth both inside and outside of the church.
- f) Any restrictions that elders determine, including the Elder Chair, Senior Pastor, and Associate Pastor/Equipping designating MVBC members or staff who will accompany the alleged perpetrator or criminal offender at all times while he or she is on MVBC's property or anywhere in MVBC's building or in attendance at any church related services, activities, or gatherings that have the possibility of children being present.
- g) Permission to notify the leadership, congregation, and parents of anything that the elders deem significant for these groups to know.
- h) A warning that the church will report any suspected activity to civil authorities.
- i) A warning that any violation of the code of conduct (including allegations or suspicion of abusive behavior) can result in discipline and banning from the church facilities or any church related programs and activities.
- j) Sign a written document that details all of these items, plus anything else that the elders deem important to include.

### **Section 4. Other Guidelines about Sexual Offenders**

Clause 1. If a convicted sexual offender applies for a volunteer or staff position, he or she will be denied by the Senior Pastor or elders. Exceptions may only be made upon the approval of the elders, full disclosure to the congregation, and a congregational vote.

Clause 2. If a sexual offender does not disclose a former allegation, conviction, or adjudication, and it is revealed later, the offender will be removed from any paid or volunteer position immediately and may be removed from membership as well.

Clause 3. If a sexual offender is a minor, the church reserves the right to bar that minor from any children or youth activities and will follow the guidelines set out above for any sexual offender who seeks participation in church-related public services, programs, or activities.

Clause 4. If a sexual offender leaves MVBC (as a member or regular attender) and begins attending another church, the elders will disclose allegations, self-admission, or criminal conviction of neglect or abuse to the leadership at the next church.

## ***Article Eleven, Emergencies***

### **Section 1. Calling 911**

In an emergency situation (security, fire, medical situations needing police, fire department, doctor, ER, and/or EMS, etc.) the appropriate coordinator shall call 911.

### **Section 2. Accidents and First Aid**

Clause 1. The Children's Ministry is equipped with basic first aid kits and a defibrillator (with illustrated instructions) is located outside the gym opposite the Elementary Hallway.

Clause 2. In the event of life-threatening injury or illness, emergency medical services (911) shall be called first, then the parent/guardians shall be notified immediately. The appropriate supervisor shall assist in summoning available medical assistance and parent/guardian.

Clause 3. Workers shall complete an Incident Report Form for all injuries, whether minor or major.

Clause 4. Neither workers nor church staff shall give any medication to any child, with the exception of staff/teachers who have been instructed by a parent of a highly allergic child in the need for, and use of, an Epi-pen.

### **Section 3. Weather-Related Emergencies**

Clause 1. In the event of a tornado or severe weather alert, everyone in Preschool to Youth ministries shall move into the ground floor interior hallways.

Clause 2. The Preschool shall move to the Bridal hallway (the long hallway connecting the Preschool to the Worship Center Foyer), the Elementary students shall stay on the Elementary hallway, and the Youth shall move to the hallway by the gym between both side exits.

Clause 3. All doors must be closed to prevent injuries from exterior window damage.

Clause 4. Children shall be checked out to the care of their parent/guardian as quickly as possible, under the direction of the coordinator on duty. Until then, workers shall keep children seated on the floor and as quiet as possible.

### **Section 4. Fire/Emergency Evacuation**

Clause 1. In the event of a fire and/or fire alarm, 911 shall be called and all persons shall immediately evacuate the building.

Clause 2. Parents/guardians shall not report to the Preschool or Elementary wings in case of an immediate all-church evacuation. Workers & teachers shall get children to safety, and parents/guardians may claim their children once they can be checked out in an orderly fashion.

Clause 3. Fire evacuation signs are located in every room. All workers shall be familiar with evacuation routes.

### **Section 5. Lock-Down Procedures**

Clause 1. Any person appearing suspicious or out-of-place shall be reported to the appropriate coordinator on duty.

Clause 2. The appropriate coordinator shall call 911 and give the nature of the threat.

Clause 3. If shots have been fired, the coordinator shall tell police we have an "Active Shooter." Police nationwide are trained specifically to respond to an active shooter. The coordinator shall inform responders of the general location of the shooter within the building.

Clause 4. Wherever possible, a coordinator shall close/lock the appropriate security doors (in the Preschool, the doors by the main Preschool counter and at the farthest end of the hall, and in the Elementary hallway, the entry doors shall be closed and locked).

Clause 5. Children shall lie or sit on the classroom floor away from the door, or a designated area, and be kept calm and quiet. If possible, workers shall barricade doors with furniture and/or heavy objects. The children and workers shall remain in place until a coordinator, elder, or police instruct them to come out.

Clause 6. Classroom lights shall be turned off.

Clause 7. The immediate coordinator shall decide whether evacuation to an outside area or to another part of the building is necessary. Evacuation shall be executed only if the threat is far enough away for the children to safely exit. In the event that evacuation appears to be the safest option, the children shall be directed to the appropriate fire exit and seek security away from the building.

## ***Article Twelve, Other Important Policies***

### **Section 1. Field Trips and Transportation Guidelines (Staff and Volunteers)**

Staff and volunteers may, from time to time, be in a position to provide transportation for children or youth. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when staff and volunteers are involved in the transportation of children or youth:

Clause 1. Children and youth should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child or youth in transport.

Clause 2. Staff and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children or youth while in vehicles.

Clause 3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving vehicles owned or rented by the church, unless in an emergency.

Clause 4. No drivers under age 25 may drive church owned or rented vehicles carrying children or youth.

### **Section 2. Play Areas**

Clause 1. When children and/or youth are playing together in the church or on the front lawn, if Church organized supervision is not provided, they shall be under the supervision of their parents/guardians.

Clause 2. Children and youth are not permitted to run through the church unsupervised. In order to protect the elderly in the church and reduce risk that comes from isolation, children shall be instructed to walk in the hallways and remain in supervised areas. Parents/guardians shall take responsibility for their own children during these times.



### **Section 3. Childcare for Special Events**

Clause 1. Special events are defined as any one-time event or on-going meeting where church facilities are used outside of the regular Sunday and Wednesday corporate gatherings. This includes, but is not limited to Bible studies, choir practice, weddings, etc. Anyone wishing to arrange childcare for a special event shall consult with the church administrator and comply with the existing church policies in place for childcare.

Clause 2. Individual groups meeting in private homes are responsible for making their own childcare arrangements independent of formal church involvement. The church's guidelines are commended to such groups, but these groups are not bound by them. Each group bears the responsibility of overseeing the care of their own children.

Clause 3. Parties using church facilities for non-church sponsored events do so at their own risk and are responsible for maintaining a safe and healthy environment for children. The church is not liable for incidents occurring at non-church sponsored activities.

### **Acknowledgements**

Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, KY and Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C. have graciously allowed us to borrow from their policy manuals.