

# Creating a Safe Church Environment Policy

First Mennonite Church  
902 W Springfield Avenue  
Urbana, IL 61801

Adopted 2005 / Revised 2015

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

PURPOSE..... 3

SCOPE ..... 3

DEFINITIONS..... 4

WORKER ENLISTMENT REQUIREMENTS ..... 5

GUIDELINES FOR ROUTINE IMPLEMENTATION..... 7

WORKER TRAINING..... 8

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY ..... 8

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION REPORTING..... 9

INSURANCE..... 9

CONCLUSION..... 9

APPENDIX A: SCREENING FORMS..... 10

    A.1. Screening Form for Adults..... 10

    A.2. Screening Form for Teens..... 11

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND CHECK PROCEDURES ..... 12

    Appendix B.1. Volunteer Background Check ..... 12

    Appendix B.2. Employee Background Check ..... 13

APPENDIX C: POLICY ADMINISTRATION AND TRAINING SCHEDULE ..... 14

    C.1. Policy Administration ..... 14

    C.2. Training Schedule ..... 14

APPENDIX D: PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT ... 15

    D.1. Illinois DCFS ..... 15

    D.2. First Mennonite Church Recommended Procedures ..... 15

    D.3. Conference and Other Resources ..... 16

## **PURPOSE**

First Mennonite Church affirms the Mennonite Church USA Vision: “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” We seek to provide a safe and secure environment for all people to give and receive God’s love. This policy regarding child abuse and neglect intends to protect preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire church family at First Mennonite. This concern for the safety and support of the church community also reflects our concern for those who offend and are in need of healing and hope. We do not absolve offenders from the ongoing responsibility of working to change their behaviors. Neither do we deny that past actions have consequences that limit their options with children today. Finding common ground in the tasks of restoration will serve us all, as together we seek to live in healthy relationship with God and one another.

## **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, full and/or part time, on and/or off church facilities, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of preschoolers, children, and youth.

## DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. “Preschooler,” “child,” “children,” “youth,” and “minor” shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. “Adult” shall be defined as an individual at least eighteen (18) years of age (and whose mental capacity is that of an adult).
3. “Worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors and all paid staff.
4. “Child Abuse” shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, minor, or anyone whose mental capacity is that of a minor.
5. “Child Sexual Abuse” shall be defined as any sexual activity with a child whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting or church or any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.
6. “Child Neglect” shall be defined as the failure to provide for a child’s or youth’s basic needs. Young children should never be left alone.
7. “Church Program or Activity” shall be defined as any activity or ministry sponsored by First Mennonite Church.

## WORKER ENLISTMENT REQUIREMENTS

1. All adult volunteers intending to work with minors will be required to submit a signed Screening Form (Appendix A), submit to a Volunteer Background Check (details outlined in Appendix B.1), and attend annual training opportunities (Appendix C).
2. All paid employees of First Mennonite Church will be required to submit a signed Screening Form (Appendix A), submit to an Employee Background Check (Appendix B.2), and attend annual training opportunities (Appendix C).
3. Youth age 13-17 may serve as workers in childcare, activities, studies, or programs for children ages 0-12, provided the youth is accompanied by at least one adult (age 18+) who satisfies the worker enlistment requirements. Prior to serving, teen workers (13-17 years of age) should complete the Screening Form for Teens (Appendix A.2) along with the requisite annual training (Appendix C). Teen workers are not required to submit to a Volunteer Background Check.
4. Each new worker will be given a copy of this policy and required to provide signed acknowledgement of receipt and intended compliance.
5. After the Screening Form is received, prior employment and volunteer service and personal references may be checked. If checked, a written memorandum will be made of the contents of those telephone conversations.
6. Any prospective worker who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse or child neglect will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where he/she would have contact with minors.
7. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the criminal background check or by any other means, the following criminal charges can automatically disqualify a worker from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with minors: Criminal homicide; Aggravated assault; Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs, alcohol, or controlled substances; Sexual abuse; Sexual assault (rape); Aggravated sexual assault; Injury to a child; Incest; Indecency with a child; Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; Possession or promotion of child pornography; The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; Employment harmful to children; Abandonment or endangerment of a child; Kidnapping or unlawful restraint; Public lewdness or indecent exposure; Enticing a child; Solicitation, conspiracy or attempt to commit any of the above enumerated offenses. All criminal charges and convictions for any crimes not listed above will be considered in the application process.
8. Worker files will be reviewed periodically (see Appendix B). Any file may be reviewed at any time.
9. All volunteers desiring to work with minors must be a participant of the church for a

minimum of six (6) months.

10. Contract childcare providers from outside the congregation are expected to complete a Screening Form (Appendix A), Volunteer Background Check (Appendix B.1), and sign a copy of this Policy indicating familiarity and consent. Contract workers are expected to follow the “two-worker rule.” Efforts should be made to hire childcare workers who are known to some in the congregation and who bring relevant experience and certifications (e.g., teachers, certified childcare providers, etc.).

## GUIDELINES FOR ROUTINE IMPLEMENTATION

1. Whenever possible, we will strive to have at least two unrelated adults in a room with children or youth, with a reasonable ratio of adult workers to provide adequate care and supervision of children and youth. This is called the “two worker rule.”
2. Church staff and volunteer directors will strive to supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time. Parents should be encouraged to visit classes or other program sites at any and all times.
3. In counseling sessions with minors, efforts should be made to secure parental permission prior to a minister/worker meeting privately with a minor. In the instance that parental permission cannot be obtained, consideration will be given to including a second unrelated adult, though in a crisis this may not be possible.
4. Parental permission should be obtained prior to a minister/worker providing transportation for a minor. Parental permission may be granted to cover an extended period of time during which transportation assistance is anticipated.
5. Lists of workers who have satisfied this Policy’s requirements for working with minors should be posted in at least two locations on the First Mennonite Church premises. Staff should take care to update the lists periodically.
6. Even occasional volunteers are expected to satisfy the Worker Enlistment process outlined in this Policy.
7. Any door without windows is to remain open at all times.
8. Children kindergarten and younger should be released only to a parent, designated other adult, or designated older sibling. Implementation of a formal “check-in / check-out” procedure is advisable for guests and visitors.
9. During unstructured events (e.g., potlucks, social gatherings) or transition times (e.g., after worship, after Sunday school) parents of children of all ages are responsible for their own children.
10. Electronic communication, including but not limited to email, social media, texting, and cell phone conversations, provides a unique challenge and opportunity for those working with children and youth. Adult volunteers are encouraged, whenever possible, to limit one-on-one electronic communications by using public social media pages, cc’ing parents or other adults on emails, and keeping parents apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations.

## **WORKER TRAINING**

Anyone working with minors at First Mennonite Church is expected to attend an annual training event and periodically required to review and sign this policy (see Appendix C for details). Everyone at First Mennonite Church, including those who may not work with children or youth, should be encouraged to participate in the annual training and be familiar with this policy.

## **SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY**

The following acts or omissions are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and should be immediately reported to a church minister or the First Mennonite Church Spiritual Leadership Team after assuring the safety of the child, children, youth, or minor involved:

1. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
2. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
3. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.
4. Infliction of physically abusive behavior, bodily injury, or mental or emotional injury of a minor.
5. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of First Mennonite Church.
6. The presence, possession, or abuse of any illegal or illicit substances.
7. Physical neglect including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of First Mennonite Church.



## **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION REPORTING**

Any person with cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect should make a report in accordance with Illinois state law and the procedures suggested by First Mennonite Church. These are outlined in Appendix D.

Pastors are mandated reporters and required to report any suspected abuse to law enforcement or the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services. Although Illinois law does not consider volunteers mandated reporters, First Mennonite Church expects all church participants, especially those working with children or youth, to be vigilant in maintaining child safety and in reporting suspected instances of abuse or neglect.

## **INSURANCE**

The church maintains a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the church should have the levels of coverage that are required for limited immunity.

## **CONCLUSION**

First Mennonite Church desires to be "a church that cares" through the implementation of the above policy. Adoption of these provisions will enable First Mennonite Church to provide a more safe and secure environment for each individual of our church family and its guests.

## APPENDIX A: SCREENING FORMS

### A.1. Screening Form for Adults

This form is to be completed by any adult, paid or volunteer, intending to supervise or care for minors at First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana.

Name: (last) \_\_\_\_\_ (first) \_\_\_\_\_ (middle) \_\_\_\_\_

Any previous/maiden names: \_\_\_\_\_

ID or Driver License Number: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

If other addresses in the past five years:

Previous Address 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Address 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been arrested for, charged with, under probation for, or convicted of either sexual or physical abuse?  Yes  No If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide three personal references:

Name	Address	Telephone	Email	Relationship

*I affirm that the above information is true and complete and I understand that misrepresentation and/or withholding of information may result in the rejection of this application. I give consent for First Mennonite Church to contact references and conduct additional background screening as described in the document "Creating a Safe Church Environment Policy." I understand my right to request full disclosure of the nature, scope, and results of background screening.*

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**A.2. Screening Form for Teens**

This form is to be completed by any teenager (ages 13-17), paid or volunteer, intending to supervise or care for minors at First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana. Teen childcare workers must be at least 13 years of age and always be accompanied by at least one adult worker (ages 18+).

Name: *(last)* \_\_\_\_\_ *(first)* \_\_\_\_\_ *(middle)* \_\_\_\_\_

ID or Driver License Number (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide three personal references:

Name	Address	Telephone	Email	Relationship

*I affirm that the above information is true and complete and I understand that misrepresentation and/or withholding of information may result in the rejection of this application. I give consent for First Mennonite Church to contact references and conduct additional background screening as described in the document "Creating a Safe Church Environment Policy." I understand my right to request full disclosure of the nature, scope, and results of background screening*

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Signature of Teen Worker \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*I do not know of any reason why my child should not serve as a teen worker with minors.*

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Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND CHECK PROCEDURES**

Background screening is completed by the Policy Administrator, a role assigned to one of the pastors; at least two paid employees of FMC, preferably pastors, should be equipped to complete the background screening process. Any questions about an applicant's fitness for work with minors should be documented and addressed with the Spiritual Leadership Team (for volunteers) or the Pastoral Support Committee or other hiring committee (for employees).

Standard procedures will utilize the screening services provided by First Advantage, the background screening vendor recommended by FMC's insurance provider, Church Mutual. If any changes to First Advantage, Church Mutual, or their services require a modification of these procedures, the Spiritual Leadership Team of FMC will recommend and initiate the necessary procedural modifications.

### **Appendix B.1. Volunteer Background Check**

All adult volunteers (ages 18+) intending to work with minors are required to submit to a background screening process. This includes, but is not limited to: nursery care providers; Sunday school teachers and helpers; youth sponsors; special events childcare providers; program directors; mentors; elders.

The following screening procedures are required of all potential adult volunteers:

- First Advantage National Criminal File Search PLUS, which searches a proprietary national criminal records database and the National Sex Offender Registry
- First Advantage SSN Verification, which verifies any identities and addresses associated with an individual's reported Social Security Number
- Manual search of the Illinois Sex Offender Information database (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/sor/>)

Other background screening options are available and should be applied at the discretion of the Policy Administrator:

- First Advantage Motor Vehicle Record, recommended for potential adult volunteers who intend to provide motor vehicle transportation for minors (for example: youth sponsors; mentors)
- Manual personal reference checks, recommended for potential adult volunteers whose role anticipates extended one-on-one interaction with minors (for example: mentors)
- First Advantage Manual County and Federal Criminal Courthouse Searches
- Illinois State Police UCIA Name Based Criminal Background Check
- Illinois State Police UCIA Fingerprint Based Criminal Background Check
- Manual search of Illinois Missing Sex Offenders (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/missingsor/missingsor.cfm>)
- Manual search of Illinois State Police Murderer and Violent Offender Against Youth Registry (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/cmvo/>)

## Appendix B.2. Employee Background Check

All paid employees of First Mennonite Church are required, prior to employment, to submit to the following background screening procedures:

- First Advantage National Criminal File Search PLUS, which searches a proprietary national criminal records database and the National Sex Offender Registry
- First Advantage SSN Verification, which verifies any identities and addresses associated with an individual's reported Social Security Number
- Manual search of the Illinois Sex Offender Information database (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/sor/>)
- Illinois State Police UCIA Fingerprint Based Criminal Background Check

Other background screening options are available and may be applied at the discretion of the hiring committee (likely the Pastoral Support Committee):

- First Advantage Motor Vehicle Record
- First Advantage Manual County and Federal Criminal Courthouse Searches
- First Advantage financial Credit Report
- First Advantage Education, Employment, and Work History Verification Reports
- Manual search of Illinois Missing Sex Offenders (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/missingsor/missingsor.cfm>)
- Manual search of Illinois State Police Murderer and Violent Offender Against Youth Registry (<http://www.isp.state.il.us/cmvo/>)

## APPENDIX C: POLICY ADMINISTRATION AND TRAINING SCHEDULE

### C.1. Policy Administration

The Spiritual Leadership Team assists the policy administrator. The policy administrator (currently the Associate Pastor) collects screening forms and background checks, reviews references when appropriate, and maintains a working document containing two lists: (1) Active Workers are all FMC adults currently cleared for work with minors according to the Worker Enlistment expectations; (2) Inactive Workers are all FMC adults whose clearance for working with minors has expired.

- (1) Active Workers have
  - a. Read and signed the Safe Environment Policy within the past year, preferably as a record of attendance at the annual training program (see next point); the signed copy is kept on file by the policy administrator.
  - b. Attended the most recent annual training program, with record of attendance kept on file by the policy administrator. In the event a worker is activated mid-year, a meeting with the Associate Pastor or other designated training officer is strongly recommended.
  - c. Completed a Background Check within the last three years.
- (2) Inactive Workers' records have expired in one or more areas noted in (1) above. It is not necessary to maintain everyone at the Active level, only those who expect to work with minors within the next twelve months. The most movement between the two lists will likely occur annually in the late summer, as new teachers and sponsors and mentors are assigned for the coming academic year.

Church staff are responsible for posting and maintaining at least two printed copies of the most up-to-date list of Active Workers.

### C.2. Training Schedule

The Spiritual Leadership Team is responsible for hosting an annual training event, with topics to cover a range of issues related to Safe Church, community responsibility, and the nature of an Anabaptist Christian commitment to caring for children and the most vulnerable among us. Topics might differ each year, and could include: child abuse and neglect; healthy sexuality; creating safe space for everyone in the congregation; and so on. Each year the program should include an introduction to the Safe Church Policy, especially an overview of "Routine Implementation" and the procedures for "Child Abuse Prevention Reporting." The annual training helps maintain a rigorous commitment to the Safe Environment Policy *and* celebrates the gift of safe and nurturing community. All Active Workers (see above) are required to attend the annual event in order to maintain Active status, but the whole congregation is highly encouraged to participate.

## **APPENDIX D: PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT**

This Policy intends to facilitate an environment where neglect and abuse do not occur. To do so requires clear and safe procedures for reporting suspected incidents. Any incident in which there is concern for the safety and well-being of a child or youth under the care or supervision of our church staff or volunteers must be taken seriously. FMC's Spiritual Leadership Team, comprised of the pastors, Council Chair, and church elders, is church's primary reporting body. Any suspicion or incident should be reported as soon as reasonably possible to a member of the Spiritual Leadership Team (see D.2. below).

### **D.1. Illinois DCFS**

The Illinois Department of Children & Family Services "has the primary responsibility of protecting children through the investigation of suspected neglect and abuse by parents and other caregivers in a position of trust or authority of the child.

"Call the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873 or TTY 1-800-358-5117) if you suspect that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed by abuse or neglect. If you believe a child is in immediate danger of harm, call 911 first" ([www.illinois.gov/dcfs](http://www.illinois.gov/dcfs)).

FMC pastors are strongly encouraged to study the Illinois DCFS "Manual for Mandated Reporters," available at the DCFS website ([www.illinois.gov/dcfs](http://www.illinois.gov/dcfs)).

### **D.2. First Mennonite Church Recommended Procedures**

Every allegation of abuse or neglect must be investigated promptly and thoroughly and reported to the church insurance company immediately. In the event of suspected child abuse or neglect, the following steps are a guide for individual and church-wide action:

1. If there is immediate danger, call 911.
2. Any suspicion of child abuse or neglect should be reported as soon as reasonably possible to members of the First Mennonite Church Spiritual Leadership Team (SLT) or one of the pastors. Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous.
3. The deliverer and recipient of the initial report should consult the other members of the SLT, who will together investigate the condition of the child and the facts reported. To the greatest extent possible, this should be done within 24 hours of when the first report was made.
4. All pertinent information, including names and addresses for all parties involved, should be obtained and recorded for reference.
5. Take every care to maintain confidentiality for the victim, victim's family, and any accused.
6. If the evidence suggests the probability of abuse or neglect, the suspicion should be reported immediately to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services Hot Line at (800) 25-ABUSE, or 217-524-2606.
7. Cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.
8. Suspend any accused from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation has been completed.
9. Inform the victim and the victim's family of the steps that are being taken, and continue

- to keep them advised of the status of the investigations.
10. In instances where child abuse is confirmed by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, the church will immediately dismiss the worker from that position.
  11. In instances where the evidence is inconclusive, the church will take appropriate action, attempting to honor the request of the victim's family with regards to safety for their child and insuring also the rights of the accused.
  12. Keep the congregation informed of the investigation with respect to matters which are not confidential, so that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the church.
  13. Promptly coordinate media relations, with special attention to the church's position on child abuse, its concern for the victim, and the steps the church is taking to address the present occurrence and to reduce the risk and to provide and maintain a safe environment for other children.

### **D.3. Conference and Other Resources**

It is important to highlight multiple reporting avenues. In the event a person is uncomfortable or unwilling to report within the structure of FMC, conference, denominational, and other resources are available. A brochure provided jointly by the Central District Conference and the Illinois Mennonite Conference is displayed prominently in the church building. It contains contact info for conference offices and Mennonite Church USA. Both conferences and denomination will direct inquiries to designated trained persons who can receive a report and guide next steps.

- Central District Conference: 574-534-1485 / 800-662-2264 or [office@mcusadc.org](mailto:office@mcusadc.org). Reports can be made directly to Margaret Sawatsky at 574-522-1806. <http://www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net/Misconduct>
- Illinois Mennonite Conference: 309-925-2111 or [imcinfo@mennonite.net](mailto:imcinfo@mennonite.net). Reports can be made directly to Joan Gerig at 312-590-7290 / [joangerig@sbcglobal.net](mailto:joangerig@sbcglobal.net) or Rachel Voth Schrag at 314-825-1787 / [rachel.voth.schrag@gmail.com](mailto:rachel.voth.schrag@gmail.com). <http://illinoismennonite.com/page69/index.html>
- Mennonite Church USA: Contact Nancy Kauffmann, MCUSA Denominational Minister, at 574-523-3054 / [nancy@mennoniteusa.org](mailto:nancy@mennoniteusa.org).

Other resources:

- [dovesnest.net](http://dovesnest.net)
- <http://resources.mennoniteusa.org/resource-center/resources/leadership-development-packets/sexual-misconduct/>
- <http://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/abuse-prevention>
- [illinois.gov/dcfs](http://illinois.gov/dcfs)



# Safe Church Highlight Reel

working with children & youth at FMC

The Safe Church Policy enacts safeguards for our young ones, encourages nurture, and enables community-wide accountability.



Safe Church is the responsibility of everyone

We all watch out for the well-being of the most vulnerable



Doors have windows or remain open; Parents are encouraged to come and go freely from classrooms and other program areas

At least 2 Safe Church cleared workers are present at all times



Parents supervise their own children during unstructured times; e.g., between worship and Sunday school

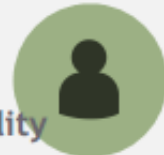
Adults driving minors seek parental permission



Youth workers limit one-on-one electronic communication with youth

All who are able participate in the annual all-church Safe Church discussion hosted by SLT

Safe Church is for individual accountability



Requirements for individuals working with children & youth

- 1 Attend FMC for at least 6 months
- 2 Fill out a screening form and give consent for reference & criminal background checks\*
- 3 Review the Safe Church Policy annually
- 4 Participate in the annual all-church Safe Church discussion hosted by SLT

\*To maintain active clearance, background checks are renewed every 3 years

If you have reason to suspect abuse or neglect, tell someone immediately. Concerns will be received with care and, if necessary, swift response.

The FMC Spiritual Leadership Team (SLT)

- Pastor Michael
- Pastor Deb
- Tammie Bouseman
- Sam Cox
- Sarah Lubinski

Illinois Department of Child & Family Services  
[Illinois.gov/dcfs](http://Illinois.gov/dcfs)  
1.800.25.ABUSE

[icons created by artists at flaticon.com]

Download a copy of the Policy at [fmc-cu.org](http://fmc-cu.org)

