Why Safe Church policies?

       Having Safe Church or abuse prevention policies in place shows that we value one another, especially the children and most vulnerable among us. Policies help create a nurturing environment to worship and grow in faith, while minimizing the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse.

Listen to Jesus:
       The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child, whom he placed among them. And he said: *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes a humble place—becoming like this child—is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me".*

       And He added, *"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were drowned in the depths of the sea".*
  --Matthew 18:1-6

Churches have Safe Church policies to:
- Reflect the high value that Jesus places on children. As his Church we reflect Him by honoring and protecting children (This is highly counter cultural, a chance to be salt and light in a world that does not value children.)
- Establish a safe and healthy environment at church, for everyone
- Protect children from potential abuse
- Protect staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse
- Create opportunities to talk about abuse and increase awareness; abuse thrives in silence and secrecy, we must not let it thrive at church
- To respond effectively with justice and compassion to situations of abuse
- To reduce risk and satisfy requests or requirements from insurance company or legal counsel

    Safe Church Ministry team members can provide resources to assist in creating an effective policy. Each church has unique needs and resources; therefore there is no one-size-fits-all safe church policy. Rather, a policy must be designed that fits each particular church community. Though the process of developing a policy will take time, there are benefits gained by engaging various members in the process, and in thinking about creating a safe environment. When completed, a policy should be reviewed by the church insurance carrier and/or legal counsel. Then it's a good idea to post an approved policy on your church website; this lets people know that this church cares about children and about preventing abuse. It's a powerful and positive message. It may also be a resource for other churches in creating their own policies.

Basic Elements of a Child Safety Policy

1. *Philosophy:* Why establish a child safety policy? What is the Biblical foundation for the policy? Who will benefit from this policy?

2. *Definitions of Abuse:* What type of abuse does the policy address?

3. *Volunteers/Staff Positions:* What volunteer and paid positions are impacted by the child safety policy?

4. *General Policies:* What programs do the policies cover? What will the church do to protect minors in its care?

5. *Discipline Policies:* What are acceptable forms of discipline?

6. *Supervision:* How do you hold volunteers and staff accountable for the situations they are in and for their behavior? What situations are highest risks?

7. *Transportation:* Are youth transported to and from church-sponsored events by volunteers and staff? If so, what precautions are taken to ensure safety?

8. *Screening:* What criteria will be followed to screen and select volunteers and staff? Who obtains and reviews the application/screening materials? Who makes the recommendation? Who approves the recommendations? After the screening process is completed, how are screening materials stored?

9. *Reporting:* How do staff and volunteers report suspected abuse? Consideration must be given for both outside and inside the church context.

10. *Responding to Alleged Incidents:*
    - Responding to an alleged victim at the time of a report
    - Responding to an alleged offender – Retention, dismissal, duty to warn
    - Responding to the congregation – Disclosure Policy

11. *Appendices:* What information compliments and enhances the policies?
    - Forms
    - Procedures for nursery and other programs
    - Counseling practices, rules for one-to-one meetings, and guidelines for interpersonal relationships
    - Local and denominational resources including phone numbers, crisis hotlines, counselors
    - Policies when an outside organization uses the facilities
    - Denominational procedures
    - Signs and symptoms of abuse