

Safer Church Covenant and Policy (updated October 2020)
Edina Morningside Community Church, United Church of Christ

COVENANT OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, & SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

Edina Morningside Church creates and sustains a spiritual community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn, socialize, and work together in a respectful and caring atmosphere. Trusting that God is present in all, we covenant to respect the bodies, emotions, intellects and spirits of all. Through every church interaction, with reverence and humility, we honor the full humanity of every person, striving to serve God in others and ourselves.

WHAT THE COVENANT REQUIRES

Edina Morningside Church presumes that all people engaged in activities sponsored by EMC will adhere to the Safer Church Policy below. This policy is a living document, and expectations will change as needed to reflect evolving understandings. Such expectations will be applied consistently among those ministering at any given time.

All members and friends are ministers in the congregation while serving as clergy, staff members, volunteers, or elected/appointed lay leaders. As ministers of God’s loving care, we oppose sexual exploitation and harassment, ageism, racism, and any aggression or belittling that results in harm to another. Living out the Covenant above, we prohibit such behavior in EMC’s Safer Church Policy.

THE SAFER CHURCH POLICY

I. VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer opportunities fall into either the *general* or the *high-access* category. Please refer to Appendix A to determine the category for a given activity. As our volunteer opportunities change, Appendix A will be amended if needed to reflect new categories.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR GENERAL VOLUNTEERS

General volunteers read and sign this covenant and Safer Church Policy annually, receiving training every two years to maintain a safer church for all who participate in EMC activities.

III. REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH-ACCESS VOLUNTEERS (with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults)

Some ministry opportunities give clergy, staff, and volunteers high access to vulnerable populations or single individuals. Such opportunities include (but are not limited to) overseeing a nursery, children’s or youth classroom; delivering meals or other assistance to a homebound person; providing pastoral care; or otherwise participating in one-on-one situations with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. Minnesota statute 626.5572 defines a *vulnerable adult* as a person 18 years or older who receives services from a qualified provider and/or possesses physical, mental or emotional infirmity or dysfunction.

- A. High-access volunteers read and sign this covenant and Safer Church Policy, receiving training every two years in maintaining a safer church.

- B. Before beginning their work, those who wish to serve with children, youth, or vulnerable adults are recognized as Members or Friends of EMC for at least six months, and submit a completed disclosure form (Appendix B). They are interviewed and recommended by at least two people in the church who have done similar work to that which is proposed.
- C. Before beginning their duties, those who wish to serve with youth or vulnerable adults are background-checked for their sex offender status and criminal history verification. Background checks are paid for by the church if a sufficient alternate background check is not available. They are performed annually for employees, and biannually for those continuing to volunteer in a high-access capacity.
- D. Volunteers, clergy, and staff serving with children, youth and vulnerable adults complete boundary training as outlined by this policy (Appendix C). Training requirements are updated as needed, and consistently applied among those ministering at any given time.
- E. A person chaperoning an event that requires driving minors participates in an annual check of their driving record, paid for by the church if needed.
- F. Any person (volunteered or paid) who has access to the church's financial software or access to information about individual's financial contributions or status will be required to have an annual background check and Safer Church Boundary Awareness training every two years.
- G. The church prefers that two unrelated adults be present whenever ministering to children, youth or vulnerable adults. In situations where a single adult must be alone with a vulnerable person, we prefer that adult to be a background-checked employee of the church. Youth aged 14 years or older may volunteer in the nursery with an unrelated adult, with the recommendation that youth volunteers take a babysitting course. Adults who are alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult will report the incident within 72 hours (Appendix D, or online form when developed).
- H. Written consent of a parent or guardian of a minor is required for all activities beyond church property or involving an overnight stay.

IV. HOW WE HONOR OUR COVENANT

Trusting that God is present in all, we keep covenant by respecting the bodies, emotions, intellects and spirits of all. We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner which conveys mutual consideration and respect. In every interaction, we honor the full humanity of each person, guided by these principles:

- A. To keep covenant is to value the inherent worth and dignity of every person, creating a safe and nurturing environment that protects children, youth and adults from harm, and promotes each person's spiritual growth.
- B. We honor justice, equity and compassion in our relationships. We recognize differing personal boundaries and varying degrees of comfort with physical contact. We are

sensitive to each person's needs in this, asking for and offering clarity when boundaries appear to have been crossed.

- C. Adults bear responsibility to maintain clear, appropriate boundaries with children and youth, whether virtually or in person. Adults will have the consent of at least one parent or guardian of a minor if a friendship extends beyond church-related activities. Electronic communication between an adult and a minor will include the youth's parent(s) or guardian(s), copied on texts, emails or other virtual communications.
- D. We ask children and youth to keep the same standard of covenant with each other as adults do. Therefore, we help youth recognize appropriate boundaries, and develop interpersonal skills that foster compassion and empathy. We honor each person's worth by correcting disruptive behavior, including (but not limited to) hazing, cyberbullying, sexual abuse, and physical, verbal or relational bullying.
- E. We value communication that enhances connection, deepens faith sharing and broadens relationships. We also recognize that digital communication is shared easily, so we follow practices that protect the dignity and privacy of all individuals. For example,
 - a. Emails about church business will generally blind-copy recipient groups.
 - b. Photos that identify church members and friends at church-sponsored events will not be disseminated electronically unless in the church's private social media groups, or with the prior consent of those who are identifiably pictured.
 - c. Each individual monitors personal data and chooses who has access to it.
 - d. Personal information such as home address, email address, or phone number will not be listed on the public church website without prior written approval.
 - e. Printed church directories will be handled with discretion, reserving their contents to use by congregation members and friends for church purposes.
 - f. Each individual may opt out of having personal information appear on internal programs such as financial software or internal databases.

V. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

At the core of our faith is mercy, forgiveness and grace. When in our humanness covenants are broken, we will work toward healing by communicating honestly, listening deeply, praying faithfully, and seeking assistance or intervention when needed. The following procedures guide such efforts to repair covenant.

- A. The Safer Church Covenant Team is a subcommittee of the Vision Council and has at least three members, of differing gender identities and including the church Moderator. The names of those serving on the team are posted in highly visible areas on all levels of the church building. Members of the Team complete training consistent with the standards for high-access volunteers and employees.
- B. As we live out our covenant, there may be occasions when an individual or group will ask the Safer Church Covenant Team to investigate and address concerns. The Team is responsible for assessing and acting on concerns about the safety of children, youth, and

adults in order to determine the proper course of action. The Team considers the full personhood of all parties involved in a complaint. Investigations rely on a “restorative redemption” process (see Chris Hazell, [“Restorative Justice: From Retribution to Redemption”](#), in *Viewpoint*, Feb. 19, 2019), and seek the loving education and healing of all parties. Those seeking redress are not required to resolve the matter face-to-face with those who are perceived to have caused harm. In severe cases where a resolution cannot be found, and after consultation with the Pastor and Moderator (or Associate Moderator if necessary), one party may be asked to leave the church.

- C. We honor each member and friend of the church, and strive to see the sacredness in each other. We also practice a ‘believe-and-report’ response regarding alleged abuse. As a faith community under Minnesota law, we must report any perceived child abuse, neglect or sexual abuse within 24 hours of becoming aware of it. The employee or volunteer who reports possible abuse to public authorities also notifies the Safer Church Covenant Team and Pastor, keeping the well-being of all parties as the paramount concern.
- D. We expect our pastor(s) to abide by the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry and the UCC Ministerial Code, which acknowledge that clergy are the recipients of automatic trust, and comment directly on the issues of clergy misconduct that abuses the trust of the congregation. Following these guidelines, our clergy agree not to exploit the power inherent in their roles. Where possible safety violations involve clergy, the Safer Church Covenant Team contacts the staff of the Minnesota Conference, United Church of Christ. The Committee on Ministry of the Minnesota Conference may mandate a formal fitness review of a pastor, recommend legal actions, and/or revoke ministerial credentials that authorize a pastor’s call to serve the congregation. The Safer Church Covenant Team, in consultation with Minnesota Conference staff, will follow appropriate methods of communicating such actions and their results within the congregation and community.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Edina Morningside Community Church, UCC, continues to be a living, breathing body imbued with the presence and compassion of God. Keeping covenant with God and each other, we respect all people and trust that our relationships will be guided by God’s all-encompassing love.

Volunteer Categories

	<i>General Volunteer</i>	<i>High Access Volunteer</i>
What is it?	Activities that are generally large group, and have very limited individual contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults.	Serving youth, children and vulnerable adults. Volunteer activities require extensive contact with our most vulnerable community members, and require more extensive vetting
Examples of church activities or roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church cleanup • Advent Workshop • Music ministries • Ushering • Coffee Hour • Counting church offerings • Community outreach groups (Easter egg roll, Beacon, etc) • MTC performance volunteers (day of) • Landscape Design • Archives • Liturgical Arts Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery attendant • Sunday school teacher/assistant • <i>Our Whole Lives</i> facilitator • Youth group leader • Meals on Wheels driver • Theatre Camp staff and volunteers who work with youth • Preschool staff • <i>Families Moving Forward</i>
Safer Church Policy Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed covenant annually • Safer Church Boundary Awareness Training every two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed covenant annually • Safer Church Boundary Awareness training every two years • Member or friend of EMC for at least six months • Interview with two from EMC who have done similar work in the past • Online boundary training courses (completed as assigned) • Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form (Appendix B)

Authorized Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form

Name—Last:	First:	Middle:
Address—Street:		
City:	State:	Zip Code:
Phone: (cell)	(home)	
Email:		

I have been a friend/member of this church since _____.

Personal References (unrelated to you):

Name	Phone
Email	Address:

Name	Phone
Email	Address:

I have received and understand the Edina Morningside Community Church Safer Church Covenant and Policy. I also understand that Edina Morningside Community Church will perform a background check of Criminal History Verification and Sex Offender Registry. If there is additional information I would like the church to know, I will attach an explanation to this application.

Name _____ Date _____

- Reference inquiries completed on _____.
- Personal interview conducted by _____.
- Church member or friend for minimum 6 months _____.
- Safer Church Boundary Training completed on _____.
- Criminal History Verification and Sex Offender Registry completed on _____.

Completed requirements signed off by _____
 Staff Member _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Online Boundary Training Modules for **High Access Volunteers** completed every **three** years in the first six months after becoming a High Access Volunteer (effective December 2020). Course requirements subject to change.

Who?	Training Modules
All High Access Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Sam • Social Media Safety • Duty to Report Mandated Reporter • Preventing Bullying
Additional training for working with Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing Sexual Activity Between Young Children
Additional training for working with Vulnerable Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing Abuse and Exploitation in Elder-Serving Programs
Additional training for Morningside Theatre Camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping Your Camp Safe
Additional Training for All Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing Sexual Harassment: Employee Edition

Online courses are part of **Armatus Free Online Training** program, in partnership with Praesidium. See EMC Church Administrator for user name and password to access these program modules.

EVENT DISCLOSURE FORM
Edina Morningside Community UCC Church

Adults who are alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult use this form to report what happened.

Your name:	
Name and date of event:	
Name(s) of child, youth and/or vulnerable adult:	

Please give a brief explanation of the event in the area provided.

Signature	
Today's Date	

Please return completed form to EMC Church Administrator.