

Safe Practices Policy

Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church Oak Park, Illinois

I. Purposes of this Policy

Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church is committed to protecting all children who participate in the programs sponsored by the congregation from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and harmful neglect. Fair Oaks also is committed to protecting the integrity of the people who are called to work with our young people. This Safe Practices Policy is intended and designed to meet those goals. It establishes standards and procedures for selecting, training, and overseeing youth leaders. It also sets forth the methods for effectively responding to matters of concern. The policy and the procedures set forth below are not based on a lack of trust in employees and volunteers, but are intended to protect our children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.

Fair Oaks' Safe Practices Committee will be principally responsible for assisting the Session in administering this Policy.

In keeping with Fair Oaks' goal to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth participating in church activities, the environment at Fair Oaks is to be free from any form of abuse. Church staff, volunteers and other leaders participating in Fair Oaks activities are required to conduct themselves according to the procedures described below. Additionally, the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education Ministries, Director of Music Ministries and certain other members of the church staff may have additional responsibilities as mandated reporters under Illinois state law, and those responsibilities are described in the Mandated Reporter supplement to this Policy, found as Attachment A. A copy of this Safe Practices Policy will be provided to all church staff as well as volunteers prior to starting work with the children and youth of the church, and each such staff member or volunteer must sign that he/she has received and read a copy of the Policy. ***Violation of this Policy shall be considered grounds for corrective action, pastoral counsel and/or possible legal action.***

This Policy governs conduct with children and youth as defined in Section II of this Policy.

II. Definitions

It is important to define certain terms used in a policy of this type to assure that persons guided and affected by the policy understand all of its provisions. It is difficult, however, to define some terms exactly without lengthy and technical writing. Accordingly, the users of this Policy should responsibly apply each term

defined in this Section and be guided by the context within which the term appears and by the purposes and goals of this Policy.

A. “Activity,” “event,” and “program” each mean, generally, a gathering of children sponsored by Fair Oaks and for which Fair Oaks has responsibility for, or oversight of, leadership staffing. These terms generally are used collectively in this Policy, but when one word is used separately for convenience, it is meant to be inclusive of the others.

B. “Adult” means a person 18 years old or older who serves as a Leader or in another volunteer capacity.

C. “Child” and “youth” are used interchangeably and refer to a person until that person reaches the age of 18 or graduates from high school, whichever occurs later. Additionally, if the person chooses to participate in youth activities after his/her graduation from high school or attainment of age 18, this policy is intended to cover that person’s participation in youth activities until the start of the next program year. The words also mean any person without regard to age who is specially challenged and requires special attention.

D. “Child Advocacy Team” means the group of persons designated by Fair Oaks’ Session from time to time to address reports of incidents and acts of child abuse. The Child Advocacy Team shall consist of the Senior Pastor of Fair Oaks, Fair Oaks’ Director of Christian Education Ministries, and one person currently serving on Fair Oaks’ Session, except as provided in Section X(B)(8), below. The Child Advocacy Team also may, in its discretion and from time to time, select from within or outside of the church membership other persons with special expertise, including, for example, a social worker, psychologist, or counselor with expertise in the area of child abuse, an attorney, or an insurance advisor.

E. “Incident” and “child abuse” mean a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child. “Child abuse” is injury to a child for which there is no reasonable explanation, which may include non-accidental physical injury, neglect, sexual molestation, and emotional abuse. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child abuse may be sexual in nature and such abuse includes behavior that involves touching and non-touching aspects.

F. “Leader” means any person, age 21 or older, who works with children in any activity, event or program sponsored by Fair Oaks and for which Fair Oaks has responsibility for, or oversight of, leadership staffing and meets the qualifications set forth in Section V. below. Volunteer and staff positions that are specifically excluded from the definition of “Leader” are set forth in Attachment B to this Policy.

G. “Leader Application” means the application form prepared by the Committee that must be completed by each person who wishes to be selected as a Leader.

H. “Member” means a member of the Fair Oaks congregation.

I. “Outing” means an activity that occurs away from Fair Oaks.

J. “Policy” means this Safe Practices Policy.

K. “Safe Practices Committee” and “Committee” mean the committee appointed by the Session principally responsible for implementing the provisions of this Policy. The Committee shall consist of at least the following: one member of the pastoral staff, the Director of Christian Education Ministries and one member of the Session. Each member of the Committee shall qualify as a Leader.

L. “Supervisor” means a person who qualifies as a Leader, who has been designated as an on-site supervisor for Sunday School, Logos, or a youth group, and who has the authority to act as a Supervisor pursuant to this Policy.

M. “Youth Assistant” refers to youth who are rising sixth graders to rising senior high school students (generally between the ages of 11 and 17) who may assist in leading Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and other programming directed at children in fifth grade and younger. Youth Assistants may work with children only when supervised by at least one adult. Youth Assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with, children and youth. Background checks cannot be conducted on youth under the age of 18, so Youth Assistants should be chosen with great care.

III. Applicability of this Policy

This Policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons, including all paid and unpaid adults, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Fair Oaks.

IV. Confidentiality

It is the intent of this Policy that all personal and sensitive information shall be held in confidence to the extent possible, with the understanding that such information may need to be shared with and reviewed by those persons having the responsibilities for administering and enforcing this Policy, law enforcement and other government agency personnel involved in investigating allegations of abuse and/or in securing the safety of a child, and personnel, or attorneys representing Fair Oaks. It also is the intent of this Policy that information shall be gathered and reviewed only as necessary to fulfill the purposes of this Policy or to comply with applicable law.

All information obtained in connection with the application or enforcement of this Policy shall be kept in a secure location and used only in connection with

administering and enforcing this Policy and for no other purpose. All information gathered about Leader applicants, including applications, reference and interview reports, background checks, and all related notes and information, shall be maintained in a secure location, with access managed by the Committee. All information relating to a report of an incident and the response to that report shall be maintained in a secure location, with access managed by the Child Advocacy Team. All third-party requests for information maintained by Fair Oaks pursuant to this Policy shall be referred to the Senior Pastor for handling and response.

The original of all information for Leaders who are not members of the church staff will be maintained by Fair Oaks for a minimum of five years after the person ceases to be a Leader, and copies will be maintained electronically indefinitely. The original of all information for Leaders who are members of the church staff will be maintained by Fair Oaks indefinitely.

V. Selection of Leaders

A. Leader Recommendations. Leaders shall be selected from among all of the qualified persons who have been recommended by representatives leading the applicable program (e.g., Logos Board) and confirmed as meeting the qualifications for Leaders in accordance with this Policy.

B. General Qualifications for Leaders. Each Leader shall have completed and submitted to the Committee a Leader Application. Except as specifically provided otherwise in this Policy, each Leader shall be:

1. At least 21 years old; and
2. A Member of Fair Oaks or the spouse or offspring of a Member of Fair Oaks for at least six months preceding service as a Leader OR an active participant at Fair Oaks for at least six months preceding service as a Leader.

For adults seeking to work with children and/or youth on a one-time or occasional basis, membership in Fair Oaks is not required. Examples of programs that fall under the “one-time or occasional basis” category include, but are not limited to: Vacation Bible School (VBS), Logos Kitchen Staff and parent chaperones for Mid High and Senior High Youth Group activities. Non-members seeking to work with children and/or youth, whether on a regular or one-time or occasional basis, will be required to undergo a background check before working with children. An adult seeking to work with children and/or youth on a one-time or occasional basis will be assigned to serve alongside an adult who meets the definition of Leader.

C. Leader Selection. An adult wishing to serve in a Leader capacity must comply with the following: (1) complete a Leader Application, (2) provide two personal reference checks, (3) submit to a background check to be performed with the assistance of the local police department and/or a private reputable credit reporting agency to determine any record of sexual assault, physical assault, sexual

abuse, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, or any other incident involving misconduct toward a child, and (4) submit to a personal interview.

The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education Ministries, or the person in charge of the activity for which the Leader applicant is applying shall interview at least two of the personal references (other than an employer or a relative) provided by the applicant, using the questions provided in the Reference Interview Form, generally in the form attached to this Policy, to substantiate the information set forth on the Leader Application.

The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor or Director of Christian Education Ministries shall review the results of the background check solely for the purpose of verifying that the applicant's background is consistent with the standards and goals of this Policy. If necessary, the results of the background check will be reviewed with the Senior Pastor or Director of Christian Education Ministries before further action is taken with respect to the Leader applicant's application.

The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education Ministries and/or the person in charge of the activity for which the Leader Applicant is applying shall interview the Leader applicant.

D. Annual Information Update. Each Leader must update her or his Leader Application annually so that Fair Oaks knows that all information in the Application, and the Leader's commitment to service, is current. It is not necessary that a Leader be reviewed annually, but instead the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor and/or Director of Christian Education shall undertake a review at any time when circumstances warrant such a review.

E. Subsequent Background Checks. Once a Leader is accepted into service, he/she will be required to submit to a background check as described in Section V(C) above every three years. A non-member volunteering on a one-time or occasional basis shall likewise be required to submit to a background check every three years.

F. Parents/Adult Chaperones. Any parent or other adult chaperone who attends an activity or outing (but who is not otherwise a "Leader" as defined in this Policy) may, at the discretion of the person in charge of the activity, Director of Christian Education or the Senior Pastor, be asked to undergo any or all of the screening procedures for Leaders described above.

VI. Leader Training

Each Leader must attend one Safe Practices training session each program year. The training session will be designed to teach Leaders (1) how to recognize the signs of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and harmful neglect in children, (2) what constitutes acceptable and appropriate behavior for youth helpers, (3)

when and how to report incidents, and (4) about the provisions of this Policy. Additional training will be provided on basic first aid as resources are available.

VII. Staffing

A. General Standard. Except as specifically provided in this Policy, each Discipleville class shall be led by two adult Leaders or one adult Leader and two Youth Assistant(s). Each Logos class and each Fair Oaks-sponsored youth group shall be led by at least two Leaders. Fair Oaks follows a “five-years-older” rule, under which all church staff and Leaders must be at least 60 months older than the oldest child participating in the activity.

In the event of a short-staffing situation, a class may be staffed by one Leader provided that a Supervisor or another Leader without specific responsibility is present in the building, visits the short-staffed class or event periodically, and is generally available to assist as needed. If a short-staffing situation involves a class or activity with just one child or youth, the child/youth shall be moved to another group activity.

B. Senior Highs Meeting at Fair Oaks. A group comprised mostly of senior high school-aged youth and meeting at Fair Oaks may be led by one Leader, if a second unrelated adult (otherwise qualified to be a Leader) is present in the building, visits the meeting area periodically, and is generally available to assist the group as needed.

C. Driving Youth Home. Transportation provided in connection with a Fair Oaks-sponsored outing shall comply with Section IX.B. of this Policy and shall begin and end at the church building. In general, parents are responsible for arranging transportation to and from church. However, simply as a convenience to parents when it would be substantially inconvenient or impossible for a parent to transport a child home, the parent may ask the driver to drive his or her child home if the permission slip for the outing expressly contains the parent’s permission, the driver leaves directly from the program or event with the purpose and intent to take the youth directly to their homes.

D. Nursery. Nursery helpers shall be governed by the Child Supervision Policy, generally in the form attached to this Policy.

E. Babysitting for Church Functions. For occasional congregational events that are limited in time, teams of two youth who are in sixth grade or older may be used as babysitters, so long as at least two unrelated adults (including one who is qualified as a Leader) are present in the building, those adults visit the babysitting areas periodically, and both adults are immediately available to assist the babysitters as needed.

F. Exceptions. Exceptions to this Policy may be made on a case-by-case basis by Fair Oaks' Director of Christian Education Ministries after consultation with the leader of the affected program or activity after all reasonable attempts to comply fully with this Policy are made.

VIII. Registration

Each child who will participate in Fair Oaks' Christian education programs must be registered by her or his parents annually. Fair Oaks will provide a registration form for that purpose, generally in the form attached to this Policy.

IX. General Guidelines and Standards

A. Supervisors. Fair Oaks will endeavor to have a Supervisor available during regular program hours for Sunday School, Logos, and youth group meetings to assist Leaders. Among other duties, the Supervisor will visit classrooms, restrooms, and hallways periodically.

B. Transportation Guidelines.

1. Each driver who drives youth in connection with an outing shall have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance providing acceptable limits. Drivers will be required to provide written proof of a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance. The driver must be between 25 and 70 years old.
2. The number of persons in a car shall never exceed the number of functioning seat belts in that car. Seat belts must be worn at all times.
3. The driver should have a cell phone. However, use of cell phones while driving, even where permitted by "hands free", is strongly discouraged. Drivers are expected to comply with state law requirements for cell phone use.
4. When driving youth to and from activities, the driver should not make stops or side trips. Youth should be driven directly back to church or home.
5. Leaders must do all driving, even if youth are licensed to drive.
6. When dropping off youth at home, the last youth in the car should call home to let his/her parents know that he/she is on his/her way.

C. Supervision for Outings and Overnight Activities.

1. Overnight activities conducted by Fair Oaks at the church building shall be supervised by at least two unrelated Leaders and sufficient

additional adult chaperones. The optimal student-to-adult ratio is 6 to 1, and a reasonable effort should be made to achieve that ratio for every event. If that ratio cannot be achieved, then a higher ratio is acceptable provided that the ratio shall never exceed 10 students to 1 adult.

2. Overnight outings shall be supervised by at least two unrelated Leaders and sufficient additional adult chaperones so the student-to-adult ratio is not more than 6 to 1.
3. Each youth who participates in an overnight activity or outing shall deliver to a Leader, before the start of the event, a copy of the Youth Covenant, generally in the form attached to this Policy, signed by the youth and by a parent or guardian.
4. To the extent feasible, males and females shall sleep in separate quarters.
5. Recognizing that accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one adult in a sleeping area may suffice, so long as any one adult is not alone with any one child/youth.
6. Separate shower and restroom facilities should be made available to males and females. When separate facilities are not available, separate times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showering/bathing. Likewise, children/youth and adults must shower/bathe at different times.
7. Adults must respect the privacy of children and youth in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers/bathing, and intrude only to the extent that safety and health require. Adults should protect their own privacy as well.
8. The use of alcoholic beverages and controlled substances shall not be permitted by any person at any time during Fair Oaks child/youth activities, whether held on church premises or off.
9. While most persons use cameras and other imaging devices responsibly, it has become very easy to invade the privacy of others. It is inappropriate for anyone, whether child/youth or adult, to use any device capable of recording or transmitting visual images in shower houses, restrooms or other areas where privacy is expected by participants. Any transmission of sexually explicit photographs or videos electronically and any "sexting" by cell phones is prohibited.
10. Adult Leaders and chaperones of outings and overnight activities are responsible for monitoring the behavior of youth participants and for

interceding when necessary. Parents of youth participants who misbehave will be informed and appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken.

D. First Aid and Emergency Response Guidelines.

1. A first aid kit shall be available in all classrooms and carried on every outing. Ice for ice packs shall be available in the church kitchen.
2. Each injury and accident involving a child that requires first aid or other medical attention must be reported by the Leader to the Supervisor, if one is available, and to the child's parent as soon as practicable.
3. If the circumstances warrant it, minor first aid will be administered immediately by a Leader. Depending on the nature and severity of the injury or illness, additional medical attention, including a call to "911," may be taken, particularly if a parent cannot be located.
4. The Leader involved in the incident will enter the incident in a log maintained in the church office, identifying the persons involved, the time and nature of the injury or accident, the person or persons who administered first aid, and the person who reported the matter.
5. The Supervisor or Leader shall endeavor to make a follow-up telephone call to a parent of an injured child within 24 hours after the injury.

E. View of Classrooms. Observation of activities in classrooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc. It is acceptable to close the door to a room if there is a window to the hallway that allows observation of activities in the room. Under no circumstances shall a member of Fair Oaks staff, Leader or adult volunteer be alone with a child or youth behind a closed door with no window. Doors shall never be locked while occupied by adults working with children or youth.

F. Individual or Group Counseling and Advising of Youth. Counseling and advising of youth and children is to be done in such a way that both the counselor and counselee are both clearly visible from outside the room. If possible, the adult serving as counselor should notify the child's parent about the meeting in advance of the meeting; if that is not feasible, the counselor should notify a member of the church staff.

G. Bathroom Visits. Routine "bathroom breaks" are recommended to minimize disruption caused by youth visiting the bathroom during classes. It is recommended that an adult escort children under age 6 to the bathroom. Adults may choose to remain outside of the bathroom after first checking the safety of the room. When a pre-school child or a child who needs assistance uses the bathroom,

an adult may enter to assist. In that circumstance, the door for the bathroom must be left open while the adult is assisting.

H. Discipline. Physical punishment of all kinds is strictly prohibited. In general, discipline must be administered carefully and sparingly, with careful consideration of a child's dignity and psychological and social development. Gentleness, respect, and understanding must guide all acts and words of discipline. Discipline will be carried out through instruction, training, and verbal corrections.

I. Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries. Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than the same from a youth. Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older, it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then a member of the Pastoral Staff and/or Director of Christian Education Ministries should address the issue.

J. Changes to this Policy and Forms. The Session may amend this Policy from time to time. An amendment will be effective immediately upon its approval. The Committee may revise any of the forms used in conjunction with this Policy; provided, however, that any change to a form that effects a substantive change in this Policy shall require the approval of the Session.

K. Review of this Policy. This Policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and more frequently as may be required to make any amendments necessary to comply with applicable law.

X. Incidents

A. Fair Oaks' Commitments. Fair Oaks is committed to avoiding all incidents and acts of child abuse in its programs. Fair Oaks also is committed to achieving 100% compliance with this Policy's reporting requirements and to a timely and thorough response to each such report. To those ends, all Leaders shall be taught that abuse may be committed by anyone, including adults and youth, and that the best and essential response to an incident or to abuse is prompt and proper reporting.

Notably, it is not the responsibility of a person reporting an incident or an act of child abuse, or the responsibility of the person receiving the report, to substantiate any allegation or suspicion. A person reporting a suspected incident or act of child abuse shall do so without fear of reprisal.

B. Reporting Procedures.

1. Every adult working with youth in an activity shall report any suspected or alleged incident or act of child abuse observed in connection with that activity promptly to a member of the Child Advocacy Team. However, the child's safety and well-being are paramount before any reporting. If there is an immediate danger to the child, the staff member or Leader shall first take all necessary steps to ensure the child's safety, including calling 911.
2. As soon as possible after receiving the initial report of an incident or act of child abuse, a member of the Child Advocacy Team shall inform the child's parent or guardian of the incident.
3. Each report and all circumstances that lead to a report are highly sensitive and strictly confidential information. No person, including Session members and the person initially reporting the incident, may disclose any such information to any person outside of the Child Advocacy Team, except as required by law or pursuant to the request of attorneys representing Fair Oaks.
4. The member of the Child Advocacy Team who receives a report shall convene the Child Advocacy Team promptly to review the report and to determine the appropriate response to the report, including gathering the facts and circumstances related to the allegation.
5. The Child Advocacy Team shall notify the Session promptly about an investigation. That notice shall not describe the facts or circumstances related to the report and shall not identify any individual involved in the matter.
6. The Session, with the assistance of the Child Advocacy Team, shall determine whether any communication shall be made to the congregation, church authorities or the media about any report or investigation.
7. The Child Advocacy Team shall determine whether to advise any law enforcement officials or any state or local agencies about any report.
8. No person who is the subject of a report of an alleged incident may serve on the Child Advocacy Team in any capacity until all aspects of

that incident are resolved. Any resulting vacancy shall be filled by the Session.

C. Duties of Child Advocacy Team. The members of the Child Advocacy team shall:

1. Know the provisions of this Policy;
2. Be knowledgeable of Illinois laws relating to the reporting of child abuse;
3. Review all reports made to the Child Advocacy Team and gather such facts as needed to decide what further action is appropriate to respond to the report;
4. Assure that an objective, effective, confidential, and caring response to an initial report is made to all interested parties;
5. Notify law enforcement authorities and state and federal agencies as required;
6. Write an incident report including the information listed in Section X.D. below; and
7. Seek additional sources of expertise that members of the Child Advocacy Team determine are needed.

D. Incident Reports. Each incident report of the Child Advocacy Team must include:

1. The names of all persons involved, including the accused, victim, and the person who reported among any others;
2. The allegations made by the person who reported the incident;
3. The response of the accused;
4. The names and reports of witnesses and others with information about the incident;
6. A copy of each relevant document; and
7. Recommendations for further action or assistance if any.

E. Suspension of Involvement. A person who is the subject of a report of an alleged incident shall withdraw or be suspended from all involvement in programs, activities, or events sponsored by Fair Oaks until the matter is fully

resolved. In addition, if a paid staff member is the subject, the Child Advocacy Team shall make a recommendation to the Session concerning the suspension of other duties and the continuation of salary and benefits while the matter is pending. Additional actions may be taken as required by the Presbytery of Chicago's Child Protection Policy and as required by applicable law. Reinstatement will be considered only after final action is taken by all appropriate authorities.

F. Management of Information; Confidentiality. Members of the Child Advocacy Team shall maintain confidentiality in all of their activities. All information about a report shall be managed exclusively by the Child Advocacy Team and shall be kept in a secure location for so long as required by the applicable legal statute of limitations. Such information shall be disclosed only to persons who are required to have it to fulfill the purposes of this Policy or to comply with applicable law or under the advice and direction of attorneys representing Fair Oaks.

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTED PRACTICES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are positive and enriching resources that connect people and enrich ministry. However, intrinsic differences between the digital and physical worlds can create confusion that affects pastoral relationships. The following suggested practices are designed to support the use of social media in faith communities.

Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safe Congregations

- Adults have more power than children and youth.
- Because of the expectations and assumptions surrounding their role, clergy generally have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- The mutuality of a truly egalitarian friendship does not exist when there is a disparity of power.

General Information about Digital Communications

- **THERE IS NO CONFIDENTIALITY ON THE INTERNET.** All digital communication, be it through email, texting, social media, blogs, etc., can be searched by others or reposted publically.
- Healthy boundaries and safe church practices are as essential in the digital world as they are in the physical world.
- Interactions in the digital world should be as transparent as those in the physical world.
- In the digital world, a "friend" is anyone with whom you are willing to communicate. In the physical world, expectations for friendships include

more intimacy, and self-disclosure than is typical in the digital world.

- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the digital world as they do in the physical world.

Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Children and Youth

- Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile.
- Adults should not initiate “friend” requests to minors or youth. Youth may feel uncomfortable about declining such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults.
- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with Fair Oaks, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence.
- Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to join this dedicated group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account. The purpose of maintaining two separate accounts or profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries between youth and real family, friends and colleagues.

Dedicated Groups on Social Networking Sites

- Dedicated groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators.
- Dedicated groups for youth groups should be closed, but not “hidden.”
- Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for each dedicated group. The covenant should be readily available to any person who wishes to join the dedicated group.
 - Dedicated groups for youth should be open to the parents of the current youth members.
 - When adult leaders and youth group members leave the dedicated group, they should be removed from digital communication with that dedicated group and its current members.

Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Adults

- Clergy are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile.
- Clergy should generally not initiate “friend” requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. Parishioners may feel uncomfortable about declining a friend request from their pastor. Any parishioner who does not receive a friend request may feel slighted.
- Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with

parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a dedicated group account that all parishioners may join.

- Clergy should consider the impact of declining a “friend” request from a parishioner. These encounters may create a tension in “real world” relationships.

Recommendations for digital communications and content

- Remember that materials posed on any site are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.
- Ask – ‘Are your posts consistent with the values and mission of the church or ministry that you serve?’
- Ask – ‘Will your social media participation affect your job duties?’
- Ask - ‘Who, how and when may photos be tagged?’

Recommendations for Posting Content Online

- Leaders of child and youth activities must inform participants when they are being taped. If the video will be posted on the web or broadcast through other media, participants must be informed accordingly.
- Photographs or video tapes of children and youth shall not be posted unless Fair Oaks has a signed parental release. Such releases should be secured annually.
- The names, especially last names, ages, grades, and other identifying information of children and youth should not appear in any media, especially online. Adults should be asked before identifying information is posted.

Other Recommendations

- Email is generally not an effective communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- Humor or sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted.
- Think before clicking ‘send.’
- If there is a computer room in the church that is accessible to youth or visitors, the usage should be monitored and cookies should be regularly cleared.

