**SAFEGUARDING 201**

This document is a model step by step guide to creating a best practices safeguarding system in your congregation regarding minors. Please note it is just a model. If your congregation is further down this road then many of the decisions and suggestions mentioned here will be behind you.

Also, take into consideration that different states have different laws.

Remember the end result: that both your insurance agent and your congregational attorney are happy with what you have put together.

**Next Steps**

After reading through “Safeguarding 101,” the “How Safe is Your Youth Ministry Survey” and the “Good Insurance Questions to Ask” document here are some next steps to consider.

Using this Step by Step Guide, create a written document outlining the Best Practices your congregation has decided to adopt in regards to safeguarding minors.

**A Step by Step**

**Guide to**

**Creating a**

**Congregational**

**Best Practices**

**Safeguarding System**

**Regarding Minors**

**Introduction**

**Creating a Congregational Best Practices Safeguarding System Regarding Minors**

Congratulations on taking this important step in safeguarding the children and youth in your congregation.

**Document Purpose**

This document was created by faithwebing.com for the expressed purpose of providing subscribers with a model for creating a system for safeguarding congregational children and youth.

The intent is to walk congregations through a process of understanding the need for, and provide an example of, a safeguarding system for the protection of children and youth involved with congregational-sponsored activities both on and off the church property.

**The offerings in this document are not to be considered as the only way to develop a congregational safeguarding system, nor is this document giving legal advice.**

**However, it is highly recommended that your congregation develop a system for safeguarding children and youth that is approved by your church governing body. It is also recommended that congregations involve both their congregational insurance agent and congregational attorney during the development of any safeguarding system.**

**Please note that it is important for your congregational attorney to be aware of any legislation pertaining to safeguarding minors in your state. Each state has different laws and revised codes on the topic.**

**In The End…**

In the end the hope is that each congregation has in place its own safeguarding system. This safeguarding system can include a Safeguarding Team and a Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors that has been reviewed and approved of by the insurance agent, the congregational attorney, and the church governing body.

**The Need for Creating a Congregational**

**Best Practices Safeguarding System Regarding Minors**

**What is a Best Practices Document?**

Simply put, a best practice document is a document made up of best practices. A best practice is a method or system that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark. In this case developing a congregational best practices document regarding minors helps a congregation to standardize procedures and maintain a quality system for how the church, its staff, and its volunteers will function in regard to working with minors.

**Awareness:**

We are all aware of the stories heard regularly on the news regarding the abuse of children and youth in America.

**The Church is not immune:**

One major insurance company that specializes in insuring churches recently reported that they receive approximately 250 incidents pertaining to sexual abuse in congregations per year. That averages to about 5 per week. And that is just one insurance carrier. Please understand that **this issue is real!**

**At Risk:**

Our congregational activities are gatherings involving children, teens, and adults and thus there is an inherent risk with each congregationally sponsored activity that is provided.

**The Need:**

It is strongly recommended that each congregation have its own safeguarding system in place including its own version of a Safeguarding Team and a Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors.

**In Addition, It May be the Law:**

Of course each state is different; however, most states do have laws and/or revised codes pertaining to safeguarding which congregations must adhere to. Have your church attorney investigate the laws in your state.

**Ok, Where Do We Start?**

Proceed with the step-by-step process for creating a Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors using this document as a guide.

**A Model Process and Timeframe for Implementing a Safeguarding System**

A congregation that plans to create and adopt a safeguarding system should allow a period of approximately one year from the beginning of study to the full implementation of the system. Be careful not to skip steps along the way. Some of your members will need time to process the implementation of a safeguarding system, especially, if it will require them to submit to a background check.

Here is a list of suggested steps for study and implementation.

**Ten-to-Twelve Months in Advance:**

* Realize the need for creating a safeguarding system.
* Talk with your pastor(s) about the importance of having a safeguarding system in place.
* Identify which staff person, volunteer, or committee is directly responsible for congregational ministry to children and youth.
* Make a presentation to Church Council (or appropriate governing body) stating the desire to investigate the need to create and implement a safeguarding system for the congregation. Gain Church Council approval to move forward on the safeguarding system project.
* Recruit volunteers to serve on a Safeguarding Team. One model is to create a six-member Safeguarding Team each with three year staggered terms. Consider adding a pastor and a church council member to be on the team.

**Nine Months in Advance:**

* The Safeguarding Team should start meeting to discuss information and to divide tasks including contacting the insurance carrier, identifying the congregational attorney, investigating background check options, acquiring the appropriate revised codes, and locating example forms and documents.
* Contact your congregational insurance company to acquire what guidelines and recommendations it has pertaining to safeguarding children and youth in your congregation. **Especially ask if the congregational insurance company has any examples, models, or templates that they recommend that you use**.

If not, faithwebbing.com has provided examples that you can use as drafts. These examples are provided by Church Mutual.

Please note that you should always give priority to any example forms or documents recommended by your insurance company. Anything your insurance agent tells you or provides you trumps any examples provided on this website.

You will eventually want to confirm with your insurance company what safeguarding procedures you plan to engage in before implementation.

This may be a good time to have your insurance company do an **“insurance audit”** of your property and your programs.

* Begin to make church members aware that the church governing body has approved the creation of a Safeguarding Team which is reviewing the congregation’s safeguarding system regarding working with minors. Consider utilizing weekly church bulletins, announcements, monthly newsletters, email blasts, etc…

**Six Months in Advance:**

* Develop a preliminary budget for implementing a safeguarding system. For most congregations this would be the cost associated with running a background check on each person who will be working with children or youth at congregational sponsored activities and any attorney fees associated with the process.

Your insurance company can give you specific advice on which types of volunteers background checks are required (VBS leaders, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, overnight chaperones, etc…).

Your insurance carrier will also most likely have a background check company that it recommends. Check to see what the cost is to run a background check. Please note that some states require that those living within the state for less than five years acquire an additional background check. Also note that insurance companies often recommend that background checks be renewed every few years. Check to see how often your insurance company expects your church to submit volunteers for an updated background check.

* Report the initial findings of the Safeguarding Team to the Church Council (or governing body) and if necessary ask for approval to delve deeper into creating a safeguarding system.
* Shift through the acquired information and forms and develop a safeguarding system specific to your congregation including your own version of a Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors. In many cases you can simply adopt the safeguarding documents provided by your insurance company. Otherwise, look through this safeguarding section of the faithwebbing.com website for ideas, examples, and templates.
* FYI, many insurance company templates will be generic in nature so as to be workable in all congregations. This is a good start; however, you may wish to customize your Best Practices document. See the “Best Practices Supplement” for addition topics you may wish to include in your document.
* Have your congregational attorney review and approve the Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors. Make sure any revisions to the document have been approved.
* Meet with the appropriate financial leaders to discuss the topic of background check funding and paying for attorney fees.
* Present the safeguarding system to the appropriate church governing body for approval. Consider giving all documents to church governing body members in advance of the meeting.
* Present to paid or volunteer congregational youth leaders the need for creating and implementing a safeguarding system.
* Present, along with the youth leaders, the need for creating and implementing a safeguarding system to each ministry team that works with youth.
* Continue to put announcements in congregational bulletins and newsletters that the church is in the process of developing safeguarding guidelines for working with children and youth.

**Three Months in Advance:**

* Choose an implementation date for instituting the safeguarding system and a timeframe for compliance.
* Identify the location where volunteer and staff confidential files will be kept including volunteer applications, background check results, and documentation of training completion. Any files on volunteers will need to be kept under lock and key under the jurisdiction of a church governing body.
* Identify who will conduct any necessary background checks and maintain the files. Limit this function to one or two people.
* Present plan to the pastor(s) and ask to have the plan shared with the staff of the church.
* Advertise! Advertise! Advertise! Give regular updates to the congregation of the status of the creation of the Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors. Put the information in weekly newsletters/bulletins, monthly newsletters, mass emails; post on church Facebook page, website, bulletin boards, etc…
* Plan training sessions. Anticipate questions in advance.
* Remember: The Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors not only protects our children, it also protects those who are working with the children, as well as the congregation as an entity during any litigation.

**One Month in Advance:**

* Have potential approved adults go through the safeguarding system training. Consider including the pastor(s), other staff members and Church Council. This shows the importance of the plan, and plus it shows that no one is exempt.

These sessions should be offered at different times during the day and on different days to accommodate as many people as possible. Holding a training session during a regular meeting time can be helpful (holding training for Sunday school teachers during the Sunday school hour, holding training for volunteers during the normal youth group time, etc…).

**Training Sessions:**

* These sessions can be as simple as walking participants through your Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors and having attendees fill out and turn in the appropriate forms. Many insurance companies also offer training materials that can be utilized. There are also internet training programs available. Example: www.protectmyministry.com.
* Continue advertising and updating the information about the Safeguarding System.

**Week of Implementation:**

* Continue to advertise the plan. Include the number of how many people have completed the training.
* Have a last minute training session if you still have people who need training.
* Job Well Done!

**Ongoing:**

* Remember that this is a continuous process. As new people volunteer to work with your children and youth, they need to be screened, trained, and made aware of the Congregational Best Practices Document Regarding Minors.
* Meet every six months to evaluate and discuss any revisions that need to be addressed.

**Final Reminder:**

**Ok, it will be mentioned one more time….**

**Make sure that your congregational attorney and**

**your congregational insurance agent are happy**

**with what has been developed before**

**implementing any safeguarding system**