

Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church

Safeguarding Policy

“Towards a Safer Church”

Version: June 2023 (V.2)

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**Trigger Warning: Please note that this document mentions issues of abuse that may be distressing for some readers.*

1. Introduction

The care and protection of children, young persons, and vulnerable persons is the responsibility of every member of the Body of Christ, as we strive towards promoting a **Safer Church for all**.

This document sets out the safeguarding policy of **Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church** (the “Church”).

2. Policy Statement

The Church is committed to the safeguarding of all children, young persons and vulnerable members of and visitors to the Church community.

As the people of Christ, we believe:

- a. In the worth and dignity of every individual. To be a person (male or female), is to be constituted in relationship, since we are created in the image of God who himself experiences relationship in the Trinity (Matt 3:16-17; Luke 10:21; John 14:31, 17.24-26).
- b. That abuse has significant and lasting effects on us. Humans are created from the dust of the earth, hence we are embodied souls or ensouled bodies (Gen 2:7; Dan 12:2; Rev 21:1-4). The spiritual, psychological, and physical aspects of human life are interconnected. This is what makes us human. We are not

just spirits in an unimportant body to be left behind when we go to heaven. This is why human-induced abuse is so traumatic, and hence, why safeguarding against such abuse is necessary and central to our commitment that God has made us precious in His image.

- c. That abuse tends to be perpetrated against the weak and vulnerable. While it is true that abuse can happen to anyone and everyone, it tends to happen to those who are more vulnerable and powerless, as their relative weakness makes them easy targets for abusers. This is a reality that the Bible acknowledges as well (Ecc. 4:1-3; Mosaic Laws). Such vulnerable and needy ones therefore need the followers of Jesus to speak up for them and defend their rights (Prov. 31:8-9). Doing so is an integral aspect of the Church's mission to reflect the God who protects the marginalized (Ps. 68:5).
- d. Church is a community where we love one another, and bear each other's burdens (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-12; Rom 13:8; Gal 6:1-2). In light of the above, Church must therefore be a place where we protect each other, especially those who are the most vulnerable. Church must also be (and be seen to be) a safe place for people who have suffered abuse, and a beacon of justice commanding repentance from those who have perpetrated harm.
- e. Safeguarding is not just an institutional requirement but a key aspect of our Gospel living. Prioritizing the welfare of the Church is a critical element in our witness for Christ.

3. Safeguarding Aims & Approaches

In light of the above, the Church is committed to the following:

- a. We strive to safeguard and care for the wellbeing of all in the Church, and especially the young and vulnerable;
- b. We strive to adopt a Biblical, swift, and effective response to instances of safeguarding breaches, and allegations and instances of abuse;
- c. We strive to cultivate and nurture a Safe Church environment where every leader and member is responsible for one another to guard against the risk and effects of abuse;
- d. We strive to be a community where those who have been hurt by abuse find compassion and spiritual support from fellow believers journeying alongside them; and

- e. We strive to be a church where those who commit abuse are called to face justice under the laws of Singapore, receive God's word of judgment and warning, and repent to live a transformed gospel life.

In order to realize the above aspirations,

- f. We will equally prioritize keeping children and young persons and vulnerable persons safe regardless of their age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, or sex;
- g. We will carefully select and train all those with any responsibility whether leadership or otherwise within the Church;
- h. We will raise awareness across the Church family as well, so that everyone plays their part in preventing, identifying and responding to abuse;
- i. We will be responsible for the appropriate selection and training of those who work with children, young persons or vulnerable persons (e.g. our screening procedures);
- j. We will seek to prevent abuse wherever possible;
- k. We will respond in a timely manner to any allegations of abuse to a child, young person or vulnerable person, and cooperate with other agencies such as the local authorities where appropriate in any investigation;
- l. We will be mindful of and be willing to challenge any asymmetry or abuse of power, especially by anyone in a position of leadership or trust. Specifically, we will watch out for the male-female power dynamic in our Church relationships (e.g. in a marriage, or in church leadership), as abuse can be facilitated by the unequal exercise of (worldly) power. We will therefore hear both sexes equally and respectfully;
- m. We will offer pastoral care to victims of abuse but also recommend them to seek professional counseling or support where appropriate; and
- n. We will suspend anyone in a position of trust and authority under suspicion of abuse, while offering them pastoral support throughout the process.

In all these principles, we will abide by the legislation, guidance and recognised good practice of the State of Singapore, including but not limited to:

- Republic of Singapore Children and Young Persons Act 2001 (2019):
<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CYPA>

- Protecting Children in Singapore (2016):
<https://www.msf.gov.sg/publications/Pages/Protecting-Children-in-Singapore>
- Singapore Personal Data Protection Act 2012 (PDPA):
www.pwc.com/sg/en/personal-data-protection.html

4. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all leaders, staff, communicant members, and volunteers, visitors and participants in the Church's ministry activities, whether or not they may work directly with children, young persons or vulnerable persons.

5. Definitions

- a. **Safeguarding** refers to the process of protecting vulnerable persons, regardless of age from any form of abuse or neglect.¹
- b. A **child** is an individual below the age of 13 including infants (aged 0 to 18 months) and toddlers (aged 18 months to 3 years).
- c. A **young person** is any individual below the age of 21.
- d. A **volunteer** is an individual who of their own free will offers to help, lead or provide care for children and young people during the Church's activities.

6. Roles & Responsibilities

- a. The Church's **Safeguarding Team** (the "Team") is responsible for supporting and guiding the Church in all matters pertaining to safeguarding. This includes assisting the Session of the Church in:
 - i. Responding to whistle-blowing reports involving allegations of abuse or harm affecting the Church community;
 - ii. Formulating response plans for the care and accountability of individuals in the Church community who are assessed to present a risk of harm to others; and
 - iii. Coordinating a timely response where an incident of abuse occurs, and in caring for the victim, the perpetrator, their families and the affected Church community.
- b. The Team is also responsible for the training of leaders and members, and the provision of policies and safe practices for all ministries.

¹ See **Appendix 1** for the types and forms of abuse.

- c. All **pastors and elders** are responsible for the oversight and pastoral care of their congregations, and must always work in close partnership with the Team whenever responding to an allegation or instance of abuse or safeguarding breaches.
- d. All **deacons, ministry staff and ministry leaders** are responsible for the implementation and oversight of safe practices within their ministries where the children, young persons and vulnerable persons are concerned. They must always refer any allegation or instance of abuse and safeguarding breaches to the Team in the timeliest manner.

7. Accompanying Documents

The following accompanying documents and guides for safe practices should be read alongside this safeguarding policy:

- a. *Zion Bishan Children & Young Persons Safety Policy*;
- b. *Zion Bishan Code of Conduct for Volunteers*;
- c. *Zion Bishan Whistle-Blowing Policy*; and
- d. *Zion Bishan Biblical Principles for the Handling of Sexual Offences and Misconduct*.

8. How this Policy should be used

- a. All pastors, elders, deacons, ministry staff and ministry leaders should be familiar with this policy and the accompanying documents.
- b. Along with the requisite safeguarding training session(s), all new volunteers to ministries serving the young and vulnerable must be familiar with this policy and the accompanying documents.

9. References

- a. *Assault on the Body: Sexual Violence and the Gospel Community*, eds. Nicole Ong, Raphael Zhang, Ng Zhi-Wen, Ronald JJ Wong, Jonathan Cho, and Bernice Lee (Singapore: Graceworks Pte Ltd, 2023).
- b. *'The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church: A theological resource for the local church'*, The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England (Church House Publishing: 2016)
- c. *'The Child Safeguarding Policy for Churches and Ministries'*, Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits (New Growth Press; First edition (August 7, 2017))

- d. *'Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused'*, Brad Hambrick (B&H Books (June 4, 2019))
- e. *Thirtyone:eight* Safeguarding Ministry Resources (<https://thirtyoneeight.org/>)
- f. St George's Church Tanglin Singapore Safeguarding Policy
- g. St Helen's Bishopsgate Safeguarding Statements & Policies

10. Contact Details

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This Policy Statement was endorsed by the Session of Zion Bishan on:

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Appendix 1

Types & Forms of Abuse

- 1) **Physical Abuse:** is any act or omission which results in a non-accidental trauma or physical injury being inflicted on another person. For example, someone slapping or punching another. Some signs of physical abuse are: bruises, or cane marks. Any injuries that are not consistent with the explanation given for them, or any injuries that occur in places which are not normally exposed to falls or rough games, etc (such as the forearm).
- 2) **Physical Neglect** is not doing what one is supposed to do to meet the physical needs of those (especially children) in his or her care. This is a non-violent form of abuse. For example, sometimes some parents may be physically or mentally unable to care for their kids. This could look like a failure to provide adequate nutrition, clothing, hygiene, or supervision.
- 3) **Sexual Abuse** is exploitation of a person regardless of age or circumstances for the sexual gratification of another. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who can't understand such acts, or know how to resist threats or gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve sexual contact.
 - a. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse can happen in person or digitally. It could include unwanted sexual requests, messages or gestures; people exposing themselves; displaying pornographic material or making someone view such material against their will; photographing a child for pornographic materials; obscene telephone calls; requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). unwanted taking and/or sharing of nude or intimate photographs or videos, e.g. upskirting.
 - b. Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact includes fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; unwanted sexual touching, stroking, kissing, groping, etc; intercourse and other sex acts.
 - c. Sexual Grooming: Grooming occurs when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with the victim so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them. This can take place online or in person.
 - i. Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked.

- ii. Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender or race. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative.
 - iii. Children and young people can be groomed online, in person or both – by a stranger or someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them like a teacher, faith group leader or sports coach. When a child is groomed online, groomers may hide who they are by sending photos or videos of other people. Sometimes this will be of someone younger than them to gain the trust of a “peer”. They may target one child online or contact lots of children very quickly and wait for them to respond.
 - iv. Groomers might also try and isolate children from their friends and family, making them feel dependent on them and giving the groomer power and control over them. They might use blackmail to make a child feel guilt and shame or introduce the idea of 'secrets' to control, frighten and intimidate.
 - v. It's important to remember that children and young people may not understand they've been groomed. They may have complicated feelings, like loyalty, admiration, love, as well as fear, distress and confusion.
 - vi. The groomer may also “groom” the parents or other adults around the child, thereby making it even more difficult for the child to seek help.
- 4) **Emotional or Psychological Abuse** is harm or threatened harm to a person's welfare or well-being by a chronic or intentional pattern of deprivation; manipulative threats, words or action; harassment; or unnecessary and excessive attempts to control a person's behaviors or thoughts. Examples include constantly belittling or putting down the person, isolating them from family and friends, deliberately damaging their personal belongings, or threatening to hurt themselves or others if their victim doesn't do what they want. Some signs of emotional/psychological abuse: in children, regression of mood or behaviors, particularly when a child becomes withdrawn or clingy. Depression, aggression or severe anxiety.
- 5) **Domestic Abuse or Family Violence** is violent, threatening or controlling behavior and all the forms of abuse we've mentioned that happens in a domestic setting. It can happen at any level of close interpersonal relationships – spouses, partners, parents, children, and siblings.

- 6) **Spiritual Abuse** is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context usually by appealing to God, faith or religion. This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, coercion to conform.