

ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

Omaha, Nebraska



SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

A SAFE SANCTUARY FOR ALL

*Child Protection, Vulnerable Adult Safety & Ministry Worker
Background Checks*

ADOPTED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF ANTIOCH BAPTIST
CHURCH

EFFECTIVE DATE July 2026

REVIEW DATE January 2027

"A Safe Sanctuary for All"

FOREWORD

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

This proposal did not emerge in a vacuum.

In the process of developing this policy, I have heard from pastors, congregational members, an attorney, a survivor of sexual violence, and a person currently on the sex offender registry. Each perspective has deeply shaped my thinking, and I am grateful for their willingness to engage this difficult subject with honesty and care.

I also want to acknowledge the theological and pastoral work of colleagues in ministry whose position papers, conversations, and public teaching on the distinction between restoration to fellowship and restoration to ministry provided critical grounding for this proposal. Additionally, other churches in our community have modeled what it looks like to put safe sanctuary commitments in writing, and their example has been instructive.

This proposal is also connected to broader ministry efforts in our city — seminars, partnerships, and conversations among pastors and churches committed to protecting the vulnerable. I am grateful that God has called me to be part of that work.

The point is this: what you hold in your hands represents a wide circle of voices, experiences, and convictions — brought together in service of one purpose: the safety and dignity of every person who walks through the doors of Antioch Baptist Church. The child in Children's Church. The survivor in the pew. The ministry worker who serves faithfully. And yes — even the person whose past has placed them on a registry. A Safe Sanctuary for All means that no one is beyond our care, and everyone's safety is our foremost concern.

It is my hope that this policy becomes not only a governing document for Antioch, but a contribution to a larger conversation among pastors, churches, and ministry leaders. I welcome partnership with any who share that calling.

— Pastor Dwayne Hawkins

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A PASTORAL WORD



“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God.”

— ACTS 20:28

Antioch Baptist Church is a community of faith called to reflect the love, justice, and holiness of God. We are committed to being a place where every person — regardless of age, history, or vulnerability — can encounter the living God in safety and dignity.

This policy is grounded in three convictions that must be held together:

- 1 The protection of children and vulnerable adults from sexual and physical abuse is a non-negotiable responsibility of this congregation.** This church affirms that every person who enters our doors — especially the young, the vulnerable, and those who have been harmed — bears the image of God and is deserving of a safe, protected, and trustworthy community. We therefore commit ourselves to establishing, maintaining, and enforcing policies and practices that prevent abuse, reduce risk, and hold all leaders and volunteers to a standard of conduct consistent with both biblical integrity and the well-being of those in our care.
- 2 Biblical standards for leadership are not punitive — they are protective.** The qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 exist to guard both the flock and the integrity of the gospel witness. Holding these standards is an act of care, not condemnation. The standard of being “above reproach” does not mean sinless perfection — no leader meets that bar. It means that a person’s public life and reputation must not be subject to legitimate accusation that undermines their credibility as a shepherd. A person currently listed on the sex offender registry carries a form of public, legal reproach that — by any reasonable reading of these texts — disqualifies them from pastoral office.
- 3 Grace and accountability are not opposites.** This church extends pastoral care to all people, including those with criminal histories. But grace does not eliminate the need for structure. The restoration of a believer and the protection of a congregation can — and must — coexist.

NOTE ON SCOPE

This policy governs conduct and safety protocols within Antioch Baptist Church’s facilities and at all Antioch-sponsored or co-sponsored events. Decisions about shared or off-site spaces are left to the prayerful discernment of church leadership as circumstances arise.

A

SECTION A DEFINITIONS



For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

TERM	DEFINITION
Child / Minor	Any person under the age of 18.
Vulnerable Adult	Any adult whose ability to protect themselves is diminished due to age, disability, mental health, addiction, or emotional crisis.
Registered Sex Offender (RSO)	Any person whose name appears on the Nebraska Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) or any equivalent state registry.
Ministry Worker	Any paid staff member, commissioned minister, or regularly serving volunteer involved in ministry programs at Antioch.
Two-Deep Leadership	The requirement that a minimum of two unrelated, screened adults be present whenever children or youth are under church supervision.
Safe Sanctuary Team	A designated group of Antioch leaders responsible for oversight, training, and enforcement of this policy.

B

SECTION B SAFE SANCTUARY TEAM



B.1 COMPOSITION

Antioch Baptist Church shall maintain a Safe Sanctuary Team consisting of the following representatives:

- Senior Pastor (or designated pastoral representative)
- Chair of the Deacon Ministry
- Children's Ministry Director
- Youth Ministry Director
- At-Large Lay Representative (appointed by the Senior Pastor)

B.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Safe Sanctuary Team shall:

- Review and update this policy annually, no later than the end of the first quarter of each year
- Oversee all background check processes and maintain secure records
- Provide Safe Sanctuary training to ministry workers annually
- Receive, process, and securely store all incident reports
- Monitor the Nebraska Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) for notifications affecting Antioch's zip code
- Serve as the primary decision-making body when known registered sex offenders are present at church events
- Maintain strict confidentiality in all proceedings

TRAINING STANDARD

Provide Safe Sanctuary training to ministry workers at least once per calendar year. Training shall consist of a facilitated review of this policy conducted by the Senior Pastor or a designated member of the Safe Sanctuary Team. Attendance shall be documented by a signed acknowledgment form retained by the Safe Sanctuary Team. The recommended cadence should be aligned with the church's ministry planning schedule.



MINISTRY WORKER SCREENING & BACKGROUND CHECKS



POLICY STATEMENT

Antioch Baptist Church is committed to ensuring that all persons who serve in ministry roles that involve regular contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults have been appropriately screened. This is not a statement of distrust – it is an expression of our duty of care.

C.1 WHO REQUIRES A BACKGROUND CHECK

A criminal background check is required for:

- All paid ministry staff and employees
- All volunteer Children's Ministry workers (teachers, aides, nursery caregivers)
- All volunteer Youth Ministry workers (leaders, chaperones, teachers)
- Any adult who provides one-on-one ministry, counseling, or coaching to minors
- All deacons in active service
- Any one-time event volunteer who will have unsupervised access to children

C.2 BACKGROUND CHECK STANDARDS

Background checks shall include:

- Sex offender registry check (Nebraska and any state of prior residence)

Background checks shall be renewed every two (2) years for all active ministry workers. Any ministry worker whose background check lapses shall be placed on administrative leave from their ministry role until renewal is complete.

C.3 DISQUALIFYING FINDINGS

ABSOLUTE DISQUALIFICATION

Any person currently listed on the Nebraska Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) or any equivalent state or national sex offender registry will not be permitted to serve in any ministry role at Antioch Baptist Church, under any circumstances.

The Safe Sanctuary Team recognizes that sex offender registry placement can result from offenses with significantly different risk profiles — including offenses committed by juveniles, offenses between parties of similar age, or offenses that occurred many years prior. When reviewing background check findings, the Team may consider the nature, context, and circumstances of the offense, the individual's age at the time of the offense, and evidence of rehabilitation or accountability when determining conditions of participation in church life. In every case, the Team's foremost concern remains the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

C.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

All background check results are confidential. Results shall be reviewed only by designated members of the Safe Sanctuary Team and stored in a secure, locked location. Results will not be shared with ministry workers, congregants, or outside parties except as required by law.



SECTION D

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROTECTION & SUPERVISION



D.1 MINISTRY SCOPE

MINISTRY GROUP	AGE RANGE
Nursery	Ages 1-2
Children's Church	Ages 3-11 (Preschool through 5th Grade)
Youth Ministry	6th Grade through 12th Grade

D.2 TWO-DEEP LEADERSHIP

A minimum of two (2) screened, unrelated adults must be present at all times when children or youth are under church supervision. This applies to:

- Sunday School and Life Development classes
- Children's Church
- Youth ministry gatherings
- Offsite trips and events
- Any situation where children await parent pickup

If an unforeseen circumstance makes Two-Deep Leadership temporarily impossible, the supervising adult must immediately move children to a fully visible, public space and notify a ministry director or pastoral staff member.

D.3 RESTROOM PROTOCOL — BASEMENT FACILITIES

SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Antioch's Children's Church meets in the basement, which is the location of the only restroom facilities in the building. This creates a specific supervision responsibility that must be actively managed.

The following protocols apply specifically to restroom supervision in the basement:

- Children shall never be escorted to or from the restroom by a single adult without another adult present or direct line of sight to the restroom entrance
- A designated ministry worker shall be posted near the restroom area during all Children's Church sessions

- Adults and children shall not use the same restroom at the same time
- If a child needs adult assistance inside the restroom, the restroom door must remain ajar and a second adult must be positioned outside within earshot
- No male adult shall escort a female child to the restroom unaccompanied, and vice versa

D.4 CHECK-IN AND CHECK-OUT

- Parents or guardians must sign children in and out at the beginning and conclusion of each ministry session
- A child will be released only to the parent, guardian, or authorized individual listed on their registration form
- Under no circumstances will a child be released to an individual who is not on their authorized contact list without explicit written consent from a parent or guardian

D.5 REPORTING A CHILD SAFETY CONCERN

If any ministry worker, volunteer, or congregant has reasonable cause to believe a child is in danger or has been abused:

- Remove the child from any situation of immediate risk
- Notify the Children's Ministry Director and the Senior Pastor immediately
- Contact the Nebraska Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline: **1-800-652-1999**
- If the child is in immediate danger, call **911**
- Complete an Incident Report Form within 24 hours
- Do not investigate independently or confront the alleged perpetrator

Note: Under Nebraska Revised Statute 28-711, every person is a mandatory reporter. Failure to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse is a violation of Nebraska state law.



Antioch Baptist Church is explicitly committed to the pastoral care of all persons affected by sexual offense — both survivors and those who have committed offenses. This section governs how we support and engage both.

E.1 PASTORAL CARE FOR SURVIVORS

E.1.1 CONFIDENTIAL PASTORAL SUPPORT

Any Antioch member who is a survivor of sexual violence and who has concerns about the presence of a registered sex offender — at Antioch or in shared ministry spaces — may bring those concerns directly and confidentially to the Senior Pastor. Those concerns will be:

- Taken seriously and acted upon with urgency
- Held in strict confidence unless the member authorizes disclosure
- Used to inform safety protocols without identifying the survivor

E.1.2 ADVANCE NOTIFICATION

When Antioch has advance knowledge that a known registered sex offender will be present at a ministry event — whether at Antioch or at an off-site fellowship — the Senior Pastor may, at their pastoral discretion and with appropriate care, provide confidential advance notice to known survivors in the congregation so they may make an informed decision about their attendance.

E.1.3 NO BURDEN OF MANAGEMENT

Antioch survivors shall not be expected to manage, monitor, confront, or avoid any registered sex offender as a condition of their participation in church life. The responsibility for safety management rests entirely with church leadership.

E.1.4 COMMITMENT TO ONGOING HEALING

Antioch's care for survivors does not end with a single response or conversation. The Senior Pastor shall, with the survivor's consent, connect them to pastoral support and resources within the church and community that promote ongoing healing — recognizing that recovery from sexual violence is a sustained process, not a one-time event, and that this congregation is committed to walking with survivors for as long as that journey requires.

E.2 PASTORAL CARE FOR CONVICTED OFFENDERS

Antioch Baptist Church affirms that the grace of God is available to every person, including those who have committed sexual offenses. This church does not treat a person's registry status as a barrier to pastoral concern or spiritual community, within the boundaries established by this policy.

Antioch recognizes that the ongoing care and accountability needs of a convicted sexual offender require a level of specialized training and clinical expertise that extends beyond the scope of pastoral ministry. Therefore, Antioch's pastoral response to a convicted offender who seeks connection with this congregation shall include:

- A pastoral conversation with the Senior Pastor to understand the individual's spiritual needs and current legal obligations
- Referral to licensed professional counseling with expertise in sexual offense recovery and accountability
- Referral to a structured accountability program appropriate to the individual's situation
- Clear communication of the terms under which the individual may participate in the life of this congregation, consistent with the safety commitments of this policy

BOUNDARIES OF PASTORAL CARE

Antioch's pastoral care for a convicted offender does not include ongoing one-on-one care by the Senior Pastor or any ministry worker, assumption of accountability oversight, or advocacy on the individual's behalf in legal proceedings. These boundaries exist to protect the congregation, the individual, and the integrity of Antioch's pastoral ministry.

F SECTION F INCIDENT REPORTING



An Incident Report shall be completed within 24 hours of any of the following:

- Any allegation of child abuse, sexual misconduct, or inappropriate contact involving a minor or vulnerable adult
- Any unauthorized access to restricted areas by a registered sex offender
- Any violation of the protocols in this policy
- Any situation in which a child was left without Two-Deep adult supervision
- Any safety concern raised by a congregant, parent, or ministry worker

Incident Reports shall be submitted to the Safe Sanctuary Team and stored in a secure, confidential location. The Senior Pastor shall be notified of all incident reports.

Nothing in this policy prevents or discourages any person from reporting concerns directly to civil authorities. Nebraska law requires all persons to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse. The church's internal reporting process does not replace or precede legal reporting obligations.



G.1 ANNUAL REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Safe Sanctuary Team, no later than the end of the first quarter of each calendar year. Recommended revisions shall be presented to the Senior Pastor and Deacon Ministry for approval.

G.2 DISTRIBUTION

This policy shall be distributed to:

- All paid ministry staff upon hire
- All ministry volunteers upon beginning service
- All deacons upon installation
- All parents and guardians of children enrolled in Antioch's Children's Ministry
- Any outside organization that uses Antioch facilities
- The wider congregation and public — a current copy is posted on the church website, where it is always available

H

SECTION H KEY RESOURCES



RESOURCE	CONTACT / LOCATION
Nebraska Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline	1-800-652-1999
Omaha Police Department (non-emergency)	402-444-5600
Emergency	911
Nebraska Sex Offender Registry	sor.nebraska.gov
Nebraska DHHS, Children & Family Services	dhhs.ne.gov
Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers	nebraskacacs.com
National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN)	1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

This policy was developed with reference to the Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures of Salem Baptist Church, Omaha, Nebraska (Feb. 2024), and in compliance with Nebraska Revised Statute 28-711 (mandatory reporting) and applicable Nebraska sex offender registry statutes. Antioch Baptist Church recommends annual consultation with legal counsel to ensure continued compliance with applicable law.

This is a living document. Amendments may be made as new circumstances require, subject to the annual review process in Section G.

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