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***WHSM & WHCM CHILD SAFETY POLICIES***

***amended September 2025***

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# WELCOME

Welcome to West Houston!

At West Houston, we take our responsibility to care for children, students, and those with special needs seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which they can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and

guidelines for volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for these parts of our church family, you, and the mission of West Houston.

After you have carefully read these policies, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. If you have questions, please contact your ministry director.

Thank you for serving, loving and protecting our students.

Sincerely,

# A black and white business card  AI-generated content may be incorrect.WHSM & WHCM HOUSTON CHILD SAFETY SYSTEM

Because we desire to protect students involved in our ministries, all designated volunteers and staff members must complete the West Houston screening process, including a background check. For this policy, designated volunteers are all volunteers who regularly work with our children and students. This is not strictly limited to NextGen ministries but to all ministries designated by the Executive Minister. All volunteers must be approved by the ministry staff to serve.

*STEP ONE: SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING*

All staff members and volunteers are required to have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in “grooming’ a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child’s trust (and the trust of the child’s parent or ‘gatekeeper’), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip you with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behaviors, West Houston requires all staff members and designated volunteers to complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This training may be completed live or online and must be renewed every two years.

*STEP TWO: SCREENING PROCESS*

Staff members and volunteers serving with children are required to complete the West Houston Screening Process, which includes:

* Employment Application (employees only);
* Background Check & Search
* Face-to-Face Interview
* Reference Checks

*STEP THREE: POLICIES & PROCEDURES*

Please review these policies and sign the last page indicating that you have read and understood the material and agree to comply with our policy requirements.

*STEP FOUR: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK*

All staff members and volunteers working with children must undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required. Individuals who have committed sexually oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or minors. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

*CHILD PROTECTION*

West Houston supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Texas law for any volunteer or staff member to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in West Houston programs.

*ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES*

Our ministries maintain the highest standards to protect both the volunteers and students in our ministry. Anyone working with children or students at West Houston is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff and must follow these guidelines. Staff members and volunteers in supervisory positions must diligently enforce all policies.

West Houston staff reserves the right to dismiss volunteers who fail to follow the policies and guidelines.

*CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION*

Any person accused of committing any act considered by the church to be harmful to a student will be immediately suspended from participation in ministry to youth. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies or the Church.

Any person found to have violated this policy may be prohibited from *future* participation in all activities and programming involving minors. If the person is an employee, such conduct may result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any future activities involving minors at West Houston.

Staff members and volunteer leaders should discuss immediately with their supervisor any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy.

#

# REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

*REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS*

West Houston is committed to protecting our children and students from any form of abuse. West Houston has a Zero-Tolerance Policy that prohibits any act of sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. This zero-tolerance policy requires all West Houston employees and volunteer leaders (those who work directly with children and students) to immediately report any occurrence (or suspected occurrence) of child abuse. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services or criminal law enforcement.

Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report ‘grooming’ behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

*REPORT ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT*

**We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the Texas CPS Emergency Response Hotline:**

**1-800-252-5400**

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Texas reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, West Houston utilizes a ‘tandem or dual report’ model, where permitted. A ‘dual report’ occurs when a West Houston supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR CPS *DIRECTLY.* Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

*NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from West Houston before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing West Houston personnel.*

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or ‘grooming’ behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to an immediate supervisor. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting children involved in West Houston programs.

***When in doubt, report.***

# BUILDING SAFETY

Every ministry supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during youth programming. No student will ever be left unattended in a ministry area during regular programming, class or activity. All students should be easily observable during regular programming, class, or activity. WHSM & WHCM will work in conjunction with West Houston’s Safety Team when it comes to building safety.

# SUPERVISION

Only screened ministry volunteers, church staff members, and students are allowed in areas where ministry to students is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or security team member should be notified immediately.

**Two trained, screened adults should supervise students at all times.**

Avoid being alone with an individual student in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of students, another volunteer or employee must be notified so that the *Two Adult Rule* can be followed.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a middle school student is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.) Keep in mind the location of our security cameras as a last resort.

If you need to talk with a student alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise students and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones, wearing headphones).

*SECURITY*

After every ministry programming event, ensure that every room, space and restroom are checked prior to leaving.

#

# STAFF MEMBER / VOLUNTEER TO STUDENT RATIO

West Houston is committed to providing appropriate supervision in all ministry programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-student **minimum** ratios will be observed:

**Nursery – 4th Grade**

In our Nursery – 4th grade classes, groups, and gatherings we will make sure we have at least 2 workers.

**5th-12th Grade**

1 - 29 students at least 2 staff members or volunteers (2 adult rule)

30+ students at least 3 staff members or volunteers

West Houston practices the “Two Adult Rule” which requires a reasonable number of adult leaders (minimum of two) to be maintained when supervising students

**CHECK-IN (Nursery- 4-year-olds)/Kid’s Praise**
Upon check-in, each child will receive a nametag, and their parent or guardian will be given a claim tag. Volunteers must check each claim tag before releasing a child at pick up.

If a claim tag is lost, send the parent or guardian to a staff member, where proper identification must be shown to a staff member before the child is released. (Have the child stay in the classroom; the parent may pick up the child once cleared).

**RELEASE OF CHILDREN**
At any time that a child has been entrusted to West Houston staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children’s Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the children’s minister before releasing the child.

\*Student Ministry will release students to return to their families on their own.

# RESTROOM POLICIES

DO NOT USE OR OCCUPY a bathroom in use by children. No volunteer OF ANY AGE should enter or occupy a bathroom while children are using it. When no child is present, adults (and young volunteers) are allowed in a bathroom (one at a time) so long as there is another adult at the doorway keeping any child from entering. Diaper changes must be done on changing stations within plain view of other volunteers.

*NURSERY CHILDREN*

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

**DIAPERING**

* Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
* Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
* Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards (“Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.”)
* Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
* No minor volunteers will change diapers.
* Children should be changed on changing stations only.

**TOILET TRAINING**

* No child will be forced to toilet train.
* When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open.
* Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
* Parents should be consulted on each child’s progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card (“Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.”).
* Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
* “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers are available in the children’s area, if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

*GRADES 1-4*

If you must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, seek out another worker to accompany you. If another worker is not available, go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. Do not enter the restroom.

If a child requires immediate assistance, leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his or her toileting activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

If restroom use is required:

* Only one child in the restroom at a time, in a single toilet facility.
* When a worker is assisting a child, the door must not be locked, and must remain ajar. In general, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Encourage children to do all they can for themselves.
* Be aware if a student repeatedly asks to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Report this behavior to a supervisor if it occurs.
* A single staff member or volunteer should never take a lone child to the restroom.

**GRADES 5-12**

Be aware if a student repeatedly leaves to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Report this behavior to a supervisor. In public contexts, send students to use the restroom in groups of at least three, when possible.

# COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their student is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their student’s program will be required to complete the West Houston volunteer application and screening process.

*Parental Contact*

Parents will be contacted if a student becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

**DISCIPLINE**

No physical discipline may be used for behavior management of children & students, including spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, biting or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors.

In the event of a fight or physical altercation, verbally redirect those involved and avoid physical intervention unless necessary for the safety of *other*s. In these instances, staff members and leaders are allowed to restrain a child or student with appropriate physical force, as needed. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and a Ministry Staff Member. Any behavior problems will be handled in the following sequence:

1. The children or student will be asked to correct the behavior.
2. A staff member will talk with them to discuss the problem behavior.
3. Parents will be notified of discipline or behavior problems.
4. They will not be allowed to attend a ministry event. (This is a final measure, but not desired.)

If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student’s parent will be contacted to pick up the student. Any damage of property will be reported to parents or legal guardians who will be responsible for repairs, including damage incurred at off-campus ministry events.

# BULLYING

Verbal, physical, or emotional bullying is not acceptable in West Houston ministry programs.

At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no “harmless put-down” where bullying is concerned.

1. *First* *Offense:* Issue a warning to the student and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is inappropriate. Try not to embarrass or chastise. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.
2. *Second Offense:* Pull the offending student(s) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the student know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the student’s parents.
	1. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that a student who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable.

DO NOT SINGLE A STUDENT OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP: be discreet.

1. *Third Offense:* Send the student to a pastor for a phone call to his or her parents and possible removal from the trip, camp or event.

# EMPLOYEE / VOLUNTEER POLICIES

*TOBACCO USE*

Please abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, or during West Houston ministry activities or programs, whether on campus or away.

*INTOXICANTS*

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drug while in any church facility, while traveling with students, or while working with or supervising minors during any West Houston program or activity.

*NUDITY*

Never be nude in the presence of students in ministry programs.

*PHYSICAL APPEARANCE*

Please dress in modest, comfortable attire. We honor God in how we dress and how we dress is another way we can model our faith to our children and students.

*ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS*

Meeting the emotional or spiritual needs of students may occasionally involve interaction on an individual basis. Please observe the following guidelines when interacting with minors:

The Two Adult Rule should be diligently followed during ministry programs: do not interact *alone* with an individual student in any room or building.

In the event you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or area occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

One-to-one meetings with an individual student must occur at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed. *Example:* If a student desires additional conversation after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, it should occur on church property, with a second adult in close proximity. They must be in the next room with the ability to see through the window treatments. The door must remain unlocked, and any window treatments *open.* This meeting should never occur behind a door with no window.

Never hold a one-to-one meeting with a student who is the opposite gender.

Any ongoing meetings with students (such as counseling, one-to-one discipleship, etc.) should be discussed with a Ministry Staff Member and should comply with the Two Adult Rule OR occur in a public, easily observed location.

Staff members and adult volunteer leaders may not date or have *any* sort of romantic interaction with students.

*SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS*

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any student in the program.

However, it is expected that from time-to-time student ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to dating, sex, and human sexuality. These lessons and discussions will follow West Houston’s Statement of Beliefs and be pre-approved by the appropriate minister.

Students may have questions/struggles in this area and desire to confide in a trusted adult leader for guidance. Proceed with great caution and follow these steps.

* Avoid discussing anything of a sexual nature with students of the opposite gender.
1. If a student’s questions or comments on a sexual matter become too detailed or explicit in a group setting, the leader should use discretion and set up another time to meet with this student.
2. For any follow up meeting: inform a ministry staff member *first.* When possible, clarify the question/topic with a Ministry Staff Member.
3. Comply with the Two Adult Rule OR meet in a public, easily observed location.
4. When in doubt as to whether a conversation could be interpreted as a “sexually oriented conversation,” treat the conversation as such and follow this policy.

PEER TO PEER

When serving in our NextGen ministries you won’t always be with children and students. Even when interacting with other adult volunteers please be mindful of your example to others. There will be no inappropriate behavior or conversations from volunteer to volunteer.

*SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS*

Sexually oriented materials (images or videos) are prohibited on church property or in the presence of students participating in any ministry program. This applies to both volunteers and students.

*PHYSICAL INTERACTION / APPROPRIATE DISPLAYS OF AFFECTIONS*

Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but it is vital that staff members and volunteer leaders do not blur or cross the lines. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

* Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the student, and never based upon *your* emotional needs.
* Your personal behavior must foster trust at all times.
* Pat a hand, shoulder or back in an encouraging manner.
* Side hugs: in public view and kept brief. When hugging someone of the opposite gender, hugs should be limited to side-hugs.
* Look for opportunities to give plenty of “high fives” and “fist bumps”, unless this makes a student feel uncomfortable.

AVOID the following interactions:

* A sexual relationship with a student is never acceptable.
* Never touch a student in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a student has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
* No handholding, unless part of a worship/prayer service or a group game.
* Never touch in anger or disgust.
* Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
* Avoid touching a student between the navel and the knees.
* Never carry a student piggy-back, or on your shoulders.
* Never kiss a student or give (or receive) a massage.
* Never place hands beneath a student’s clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
* Never tickle, participate in ‘horse-play’ or wrestle with a student.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint for the protection of the child or others.

A child or student’s preference *not* to be touched must be respected.

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

*VERBAL INTERACTION*

Verbal interaction with students should be positive and uplifting. All verbal interaction should be encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of students.

To this end, do not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Do not swear in the presence of students.

In general, verbal interaction should occur in a location where others may observe what is happening. At no time should a student and adult disappear behind a closed door, or interact in an area which cannot be seen by others

**ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION**

All communication with students must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with the ministry leader(staff).

*TEXTING/MESSAGING*

Messaging between ministry leaders and students is permissible only as outlined below.

Ideally, messages should occur in ‘group’ form, whenever possible. Though students will often reply individually, make effort to message in group form and encourage replies to the group. When possible, ministry leaders should send and receive messages using a ministry-provided account.

Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts. **Do not text before 7am or after 9 pm** unless the texting occurs as part of a programmed ministry activity.

Do not share photos and/or videos of a sexual or suggestive nature.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via texts.

Do not message inappropriate or off-color content, or comment on inappropriate or off-color posts. When in doubt, treat a message as inappropriate.

*COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS*

It is permissible for the ministry to use applications that have messaging features (i.e., Instagram, Facebook Messenger) – a ministry account. At least one other ministry leader must have credentials to access the application and regularly review the messaging, comments and postings.

All group and direct messaging to/from students should be above reproach, available for supervisory access and originate from a ministry account – not a personal account.

In the event a student direct messages a staff member’s personal account, the staff member will transfer the thread to the ministry account for reply, if necessary. All students will be counseled to direct communication to the ministry account.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via social media.

Do not comment or reply to a student’s post that is inappropriate or questionable. All interaction should be above reproach and reflect the integrity and values West Houston Church of Christ.

Applications that allow anonymous messaging are not permissible.

*PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA*

As a ministry volunteer, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in children and student ministry at West Houston. Please be cautious about the content of your personal social media interactions.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when ministry workers are involved in the transportation of children and students:

* Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place must be avoided.
* Avoid transportation circumstances that leave only*one student*in transport.
* Avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.
* Absent an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone, unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
* No drivers under age 25 may drive West Houston owned or rented vehicles.
* In transportation, the TWO ADULT RULE or ‘RULE OF 3’ must be followed.
* Avoid transporting a single student.
* Never be alone in a vehicle with a student of the opposite sex.
* Never instruct a student to drive other students to a ministry event.
* Transport only the number of students for whom you have seatbelts.
* Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
* Use extra caution when driving students.

**OVERNIGHT EVENTS**

Some Student Ministry activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for students, staff members and volunteers (i.e. camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on West Houston’s property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event. No overnight between any church staff member or volunteer and an *unrelated* minor may occur in any context. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between ‘family friends’, these relationships must be communicated to a ministry supervisor.

**MEDICATION**

Do not administer medication of any kind to any student while serving in ministry programs, including ‘over the counter’ drugs. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, beach/ski retreats), West Houston will bring a designated medical volunteer that will dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms.

**OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT WITH STUDENTS**

West Houston’s safety standards established to protect students and ensure healthy relationships should be respected *outside* ministry programs as well. In addition to ministry safety standards, the following policies should be respected in all interactions with students occurring *outside* ministry programs.

* Never be alone with a minor in an unobserved context or location.
* Limit connections by gender. Do not initiate or maintain contact with students of the opposite gender.
* Any dating or sexual relationship of any kind with a minor is strictly prohibited.
* **Never** spend the night at a student’s home or invite a student to spend the night at your home.
* Do not spend the night in an ‘away’ location alone with any student (vacation, etc.).

# PLANNING EVENTS FOR GROUPS

When planning a group event for West Houston children and students and advertised informally as a student ministry or children’s ministry event outside of regular programming, volunteer leaders should keep ministers and parents informed of details and abide by West Houston’s policies. Some events may require a release form.
Ex. “*\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*(minister) are out of town and there’s nothing scheduled so we’re having the 9th graders over to our house for a swim party.”

**Teaching roles**The following statements of faith represent the core beliefs of the West Houston Church of Christ. As such, it is expected that those in teaching roles will uphold these important faith commitments. These statements, along with our Mission and Vision, serve to ground our work on a solid theological and ministerial foundation.

**ABOUT GOD...**

We believe there is one, true God who is the creator and sustainer of the heavens and the earth. God is eternally existent in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe—the beginning and the end of all things. We believe that God longs to be in relationship with all of humanity and that He cares deeply about the things that take place in this world. We believe that God alone is sovereign and completely trustworthy with every area of our lives.

**ABOUT JESUS CHRIST...**

We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, atoning death on the cross, bodily resurrection, bodily ascension into heaven, and His personal return once again in power and glory. We believe that Jesus died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice, paying the penalty for our sins (Mark 10:45) and that three days later He was raised from the dead demonstrating victory over sin and death.

**ABOUT SALVATION...**

We believe that salvation cannot be gained by human effort, but only through God's grace in the redemption He provided in Jesus Christ, a redemption which is responded to by faith and which leads to a life devoted to obeying God. This salvation is available to anyone who puts their faith and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Everyone who trusts in Jesus should be willing to leave their life of sin, confess their belief and be baptized into the name of Jesus. Only by the grace of God are we made righteous before God.

**ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT...**

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and that Christians are enabled to live a godly life by His dwelling in us. The Holy Spirit also empowers believers for service. We recognize the Holy Spirit as a co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. We also believe that the Holy Spirit lives in each member of God’s family as a helper, comforter and guide. The Holy Spirit plays an active role in our lives as Christians as we seek to do what is right, serve others and share Jesus. Specifically, we believe that the Holy Spirit is a free gift to all believers in Christ Jesus (to those who have placed their hope and trust in Jesus, have confessed him as Lord and have been baptized).

**ABOUT THE CHURCH**

We believe in the ordinances authorized for the Church in the New Testament, namely adult Baptism (immersion in water) and the Lord's Supper. Immersion, as commanded and exemplified in the New Testament, is a burial in water with Christ for the remission of sins and resurrection to a new life with Him in the Spirit (Romans 6:3-4). The scriptures record that the early Church frequently observed the Lord's Supper as instructed by Jesus (I Corinthians 11:23-26; Acts 2:42; 20:7). Therefore, we take communion each Sunday.

  We believe Jesus Christ is the head of His Church (Ephesians 1:22-23) and that authority for life and doctrine rests in Him. (Hebrews 1:1-14). We believe that the purpose of the Church is to glorify God by building its members up in the faith, by instruction of the word, by fellowship, and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world. The formation of the Church, the body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost and will be completed at the coming of Christ.

**ABOUT THE BIBLE...**

We believe that the Bible is God’s written Word. Although it was written by humans, it is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and it is without error or mistake. Literally speaking, we believe that the Bible is “God breathed”, is without error and is the source of absolute truth in our lives. By reading the Bible, we can discover what it means to have a relationship with God, who God is and why he loves us! Simply stated, we believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. We accept both Old and New Testaments as inspirational and authoritative in nature.

**ABOUT HUMANITY...**

We believe that the Bible is God’s written Word. Although it was written by humans, it is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and it is without error or mistake. Literally speaking, we believe that the Bible is “God breathed”, is without error and is the source of absolute truth in our lives. By reading the Bible, we can discover what it means to have a relationship with God, who God is and why he loves us! Simply stated, we believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. We accept both Old and New Testaments as inspirational and authoritative in nature.

We believe that, according to the Bible, we were all created in the image of the invisible God. However, we also believe that everyone needs the grace of God (salvation) because we have all sinned and have fallen short of God’s expectations for us as humans. As a result, sin has separated us from God who longs to be in a relationship with his creation/humanity. We eagerly anticipate the day when God will make all things new under Heaven and earth—completely restoring our fallen world that is currently plagued and marred by sin.

**ABOUT MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY...**

We believe the Bible clearly defines the covenant commitment of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. All expressions of sexual activity outside these bounds of marriage are therefore contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and to God’s original creative intent. (Gen. 2:20b-24; Matt. 19:4-6; I Cor. 6:9-11,18-20; Heb. 13:4).

As a result of the fall of mankind (Genesis 3), we live in a broken world and are all born with a sin nature; as a result, all of us have fallen short of God’s creative intent in various ways (Rom. 3:23), often in the area of sexuality. We pray that every person will seek redemption through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-10), and we encourage those with same-sex attractions, as well as those with opposite-sex attractions, to live out the sexual ethics taught in the Scriptures. As we uphold Biblical standards, we do so with patient grace, knowing the mixed messages that are rampant in our broken world. We welcome and treat with respect, compassion, and sensitivity all who experience same-sex attractions. To extend love and dignity to others in this way is consistent with Jesus’ command to love our neighbor. (Mark 12:31).

**About Gender and Identity**

As a church we recognize that there are some persons whose experience of their gender (identity, expression, behavior) is at variance with the physical reality of their biological birth sex. Our responsibility as Christians is to affirm such individuals as being created in the image of God and to respond with respect and love as informed and governed by the following biblical principle:

God’s original design in creation was that humanity be manifest in two distinct sexes, male and female (Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). Each individual was intended to experience congruence between the physical and experiential dimensions of their sexuality. Except in very unusual cases, our sex as male or female is a consistent biological given from conception and is an unchangeable, stable, enduring characteristic of the person established by God’s creational intent. For those in our church who struggle with gender confusion, we will respond in love, grace and compassion and seek to move them towards wholeness in Christ—seeking alignment with the physical reality of their biological sex determined at birth.

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

# STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AGREEMENT

*This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the minister.*

Staff members and volunteer leaders are required to read and understand this student safety policy. Additionally, each staff member and volunteer leader must execute an acknowledgment form that this policy has been read, understood, and will be followed. Staff members and volunteer leaders who fail to adhere to this policy may be asked to step down from their role.

I have received and read a copy of WHSM & WHCM Child Safety Policies and Procedures on the date listed below, and I understand the importance of the matters set forth herein. I understand and agree to abide by these policies during my service at West Houston Church of Christ.

I understand that these policies may be modified or eliminated at any time by West Houston Church of Christ.

While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the agreed term, I understand that I may choose to end this relationship at any time. If possible, I will provide two weeks’ notice to my supervisor.

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between West Houston Church of Christ and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed.

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Staff member or volunteer’s name (please print)

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Staff member or volunteer’s signature

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Date