



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Samaritan Safe Church?

A dynamic process that works with a “Cluster” of 5-9 congregations for seven months to help shift congregational culture to proactive engagement of all adults to protect children from sexual harm – not only at church, but in the communities where we live, work, play and go to school. Teams from each church in the Cluster meet together five times.

Is it part of any particular denomination?

No. It was created by Samaritan Counseling Center in Lancaster PA to work ecumenically with various traditions in a community, joining people of faith in a common vision of protecting children from sexual harm. Most Clusters include denominational and independent churches, ranging from conservative to progressive. While there may not be much agreement on broad social issues, people of faith can agree that the sexual abuse of a child is a great sin, and we are called by God to do everything in our power to keep that from happening.

What distinguishes Samaritan Safe Church from various child protection programs offered by denominations or insurance companies?

- It is integrated into a national social movement to end the child sexual abuse that impacts one in four girls, and one in six boys, before age 18. Samaritan Safe Church calls and equips people of faith to participate in the larger social movement, which includes secular organizations.
- Most child protection programs consist of generic “boiler plate” policies and a few hours of training for those who work with children. While policies and training are important, they are insufficient to keep children safe, and are typically focused on avoiding legal liability. These pro-forma policies and training manuals become “dry bones” that sit on a shelf after a few years! Samaritan Safe Church is resurrecting those dry bones through its interactive movement building process.

Why engage congregations in movement building?

- By calling on common Christian values and using Biblical narratives, we can inspire people of faith to become proactive in preventing child sexual abuse in their churches, AND their communities.
- People of faith were key in past social movements (ending slavery, civil rights, etc.). When faith grounds a commitment to social change, significant ‘staying power’ is available for the hard work it will take to end child sexual abuse.

What is included in the process?

Core teams of 3 - 7 people from each church in the Cluster meet five times with Safe Church facilitators, forming a learning community to inspire, encourage and challenge each other as they move through the process.

- Each meeting is a blend of deep education about child sexual, and other forms, of abuse, plus interactive policy making using Samaritan's template culled from national best practices.
- Speakers from the community, such as adult survivors of sexual abuse, counselors, parents of sexually abused children, Child Protection workers, and others are invited to speak at Core Team meetings.

Congregational Education: Facilitators go to each participating church twice during the period for congregational education sessions designed for parents, grandparents, and all adults that have a child they love somewhere in the world they would like to see protected from sexual abuse

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse are invited to participate in a one day retreat, **Tamar Speaks!** where their stories give voice to the daughter of King David, raped by her brother. Survivors create awareness-raising resources for faith communities at the retreats. Safe Church seeks to empower survivors who wish to do so to become leaders in protecting children.

Staff and volunteers working with children come together at the end of the process for a half day training to learn about their new or revised policies, how to keep kids safe, and appropriate intervention if a child is displaying "red flags" that may indicate abuse. These events often involve several hundred people!

Circle of Grace, a Christian Safe Environment curriculum to teach healthy boundaries to children, is provided to each participating church. The curriculum is on a CD, and is designed for children from Pre-K to Senior High.

How do I get my congregation on board?

The first step is for the lead pastor and board chair to sign a Safe Church covenant to enroll in a Cluster that details the commitment required to participate, and then select 3 – 7 people to be on the "core team" to attend the five Cluster meetings and the Staff and Volunteer Training.

The congregation comes on board gradually – not all at once! The job of your core team includes raising awareness during the process through use of Safe Church worship resources, promoting the congregational education sessions and survivors retreat, and getting input from key leaders in the congregation as part of the interactive policy-making process.

Want to get trained with others in your community or regional church association as a Samaritan Safe Church facilitator?

Learn more at <http://scclanc.org/safechurch/safe-church-facilitator-training/>