



Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



Solutions Classic: Suffer the Little Children

📅 December 28, 2015

Volunteers are vital to the ministries of the Adventist Church. Karnik Doukmetzian, General Counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, provides an update to his 2004 article on the important role volunteers perform and on how to protect them during ministry activities

2004—My earliest recollections of volunteering at church are of Ingathering on Saturday nights using little tin cans with battery-powered candles protruding from the center. But long before that, many others had volunteered at my church so that children like me could have a safe, carefree worship experience. From the deacons who shoveled the snow to the teachers who taught my Sabbath School class, volunteers enabled our church to function effectively.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The headlines appearing regularly in the church press emphasize the critical role of volunteers: "Fifty-two Thousand Youth Involved in Adventist Youth Service Network," "Volunteers Build 1,000 Churches in 1,000 Days," "Volunteers Distribute Thousands of Handbills," "Dramatic Church Growth Led by Volunteers," and so on. The church would suffer without the contributions of its army of more than 13 million volunteers.

Every year nominating committees scour church membership lists, attempting to attract volunteers to assist with various functions. Sometimes, in their haste to fill all open positions, not enough attention is focused on ensuring that the volunteers selected are well suited to accomplish the church's mission and ministry, and particularly, to ensure that no harm comes to those entrusted to them. We applaud ourselves that we have family-friendly churches, but in order for us to truly claim that credit, we must ensure that both our facilities and church family are a safe haven for our children.

We hear of people whose lives have been torn apart by those in trusted volunteer leadership positions. To assure our children and parents that we have done all that we can to ensure the safety of our church environment, we need to follow some simple rules, as detailed in the Volunteer Management and Screening Guidelines. These guidelines, developed by the North American Division, are effective only if they are consistently referenced and applied.

When Jesus said, "Suffer the little children," He did not intend that *they* should suffer. He continued by saying, "forbid them not, to come unto me." We can't accept this admonition without also accepting the corresponding commitment to plan ahead and seek ways to provide a safe environment that will help children learn to love and follow Jesus.

We have all been offered the privilege of volunteering to fulfill the Great Commission. This means we not only help children grow in their relationship with Jesus, but we must also protect them from abuse.

2015 UPDATE From the Author

2015—The need for volunteers continues to be one of the greatest needs of a local congregation. Volunteers fulfill many important functions in a church but none more important than helping with children. Since this article was first written, there have been a few policy additions to help fulfill the ultimate goal of a safe environment for children.

For institutions within the North American Division (NAD), Working Policy FB 20 outlines the process to be followed for all individuals who volunteer in children and youth ministries. The policy requires that local churches select, screen and manage trustworthy individuals to work in volunteer positions involving children and youth activities. Volunteers selected should be known or hold membership in the congregation for at least six months. Orientation, training and background screening (including criminal background checks and personal references) are all required. Once volunteers have completed this process, they must agree to a code of conduct. For institutions outside of the NAD, consider adopting a similar policy to ensure that volunteers selected can truly create the safe environment all children need.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual has also incorporated guidelines for local congregations to adopt policies for the protection of their children. Policies should include a two-adult rule, an open door rule, volunteer screening, a six-month policy membership, and training.

To learn more about how to protect volunteers and children, please review our [available resources here](#).



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