

## 8.0 FPC CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM

Scripture           **“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”**  
**Mark 10:13-16**

### 8.1 General Policy   **I. GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT**

In keeping with the covenant of baptism, we, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church (“FPC”), have committed ourselves and our resources to the nurturing of our children. We promise our children that we will provide the structure, education, and the policies that will keep them safe from harm and abuse. In that context, we will screen and train volunteers and ask that each volunteer abides by the policies of the First Presbyterian Church. FPC adopts these policies and procedures to protect children within our community.

### 8.2 Definitions of Child Abuse   **II. DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he or she may not care for that child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens harm to a child’s physical or mental health or welfare. Types of abuse may include physical abuse, including physical injury or threat of injury; physical neglect, such as failure to provide necessary care to a child; sexual abuse; and mental abuse or neglect.

### 8.3 Duty to Report   **III. DUTY TO REPORT**

Ordained Officers are Mandated Reporters by the Book of Order

The PC(USA) Book of Order identifies ordained officers as mandated reporters:

#### **G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting**

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

- A. Any allegation or report of child abuse at the church shall be referred immediately to the appropriate church officials, as specified in Section V.
- B. “Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent...shall report the case of that juvenile to the director of the department of social services in the county where the juvenile resides.” N.C. Gen. Stat. §7B-301.

C. Any allegation of child abuse shall be reported to the church's insurance carrier.

8.4 Procedure for Prevention  
8.4.1 Staff Screening

#### **IV. PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTION**

##### **A. STAFF SCREENING**

Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at FPC will be required to provide, complete, or undergo the following:

1. An employment application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
2. A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
3. A reference check covering, where possible, the two immediate past employers, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.

Prior to hiring an applicant, FPC will obtain a criminal record report for that individual. Periodically, FPC will perform criminal record checks on existing employees, and each employee shall be required to execute any documents that FPC might request for such purpose.

Upon being hired, each new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that they have received a copy of this program and that they understand and will comply with its terms.

Within three months of being hired, each new employee will be provided orientation and training on child abuse awareness as well as on the terms and conditions of this program.

8.4.2 Volunteer Screening

##### **B. VOLUNTEER SCREENING**

###### **1. Definitions**

For purposes of this Program, a volunteer shall be defined as any person not employed by FPC, who shall at any time during the year teach, supervise, or help with children and youth in the church.

###### **2.. Volunteer Forms and Background Checks**

Before beginning work as a volunteer working with youth or children of the church and upon completion of the child protection training class, each volunteer will be required to complete the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement attached to this Program, stating that they have received, read, and agreed to comply with the Program, and that they have not been charged with, pled guilty to, or been convicted of a crime involving child abuse, sexual abuse, child exploitation, child neglect, or other misconduct related to children.

8.4.2.2 Definitions

8.4.2.3 Volunteer Forms and Background Checks

The church will keep records of the signed and dated Volunteer Acknowledgement Statements, the Volunteer Information Forms, and other paperwork related to this Child Protection Program. The church will also check each volunteer's name against the Sex Offender Registry or against registries maintained by other states if necessary. The church will conduct criminal background checks on anyone desiring to work with youth and/or children at this church.

No one who has pled guilty to, or been convicted of a crime involving child abuse, sexual abuse, child exploitation, child neglect, or other misconduct related to children, will be permitted to work with FPC's children or youth. In addition, no person who refuses to complete the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement or the Volunteer Information Form will be permitted to work with FPC's children or youth.

### **3. Child Protection Training Classes**

FPC will provide orientation and training classes on child abuse awareness as well as on the terms and conditions of this Program. All volunteers shall be required to attend a child protection training class conducted by FPC. FPC will maintain records of volunteers who have attended these training classes.

### **C. SUPERVISION**

A "two-adult" rule shall be in effect at all times, meaning that no staff member or volunteer is to be left alone with any child without a justifiable reason pertaining to the child's well-being. If alone, every effort shall be made to meet in an open room with a window and another person in close proximity.

8.4.2.4 Child  
Protection  
Training Classes

### **D. "OPEN" CLASSROOMS/PROGRAM**

Classrooms or childcare rooms and any area in which programs for children or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Any windows shall never be blocked so as to prevent visual observation in the classroom, and any classroom doors shall not be locked so as to prevent entry into the classroom.

8.4.3 Supervision

### **E. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT**

Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in church sponsored activities or programs which involve travel away from the church's physical facilities.

### **F. "SIX MONTH" RULE FOR VOLUNTEERS**

A volunteer must be a member of FPC for six months before working with youth or children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff. -

This rule may be waived by a Pastor after required forms have been submitted, a personal interview has been completed, background check is clear, and training has been completed.

*Updated by Session 12/16/09*

8.4.4 "Open"  
Classrooms/  
Programs

### **G. TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

One adult is never to travel alone with one child unless the child is their child.

### **H. OVERNIGHT ACCOMODATIONS**

8.4.5 Parental/Guardian Consent Specific arrangements for overnight accommodations will be arranged prior to each away trip with the protection of the children and the adults in mind.

8.4.6 "Six Month" Rule for Volunteers **I. ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE**  
Neither possession nor consumption of alcohol or illicit drugs are tolerated during children/youth activities.

**J. PROGRAM REVIEW**

The provisions of this Program shall be reviewed annually by the Children's Christian Education Committee, Personnel Committee and Youth Council. Any proposed changes to the Program will be brought to the attention of the Session for its approval, prior to any such changes becoming final.

8.4.7 Travel Arrangements

**K. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All documents and information gathered in the screening, reporting and investigation of persons as set forth in this Program shall be confidential and shall be maintained under the control of the church.

8.4.8 Overnight Accommodations

**L. OTHER FORMS AND GUIDELINES**

Additional forms, procedures and guidelines used for the protection of our children are listed in a appendix to this program.

**V. REPORTING, COMPLAINT, AND INVESTIGATION POLICY**

8.4.9 Alcohol

**A. REPORTING INCIDENTS**

8.4.10 Program Review

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at First Presbyterian Church, Wilmington or during our sponsored programs or activities a pastor must be immediately notified and the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The incident will be reported immediately to the state authorities (including the police and the Department of Children and Family Services), to the church's insurance company, and to the pastor and church session. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation by civil authorities.

8.4.11 Confidentiality

2. The child will be immediately removed from the situation and the parents notified. We will not confront the accused until the safety of the child has been secured.

3. When the child is safe, the worker/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the child abuse will be removed from working with children pending the investigation. The individual will be handled

8.4.12 Other  
Forms and  
Guidelines

with dignity and respect. He/she will be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.

8.5 Reporting,  
Complaint, &  
Investigation  
Policy

4. The role of the church is to provide pastoral care, spiritual care, and comfort for all parties, including the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and their families. The church staff will not act as detective or investigator. Staff members should not prejudge the situation and should show care and support to all parties.

8.5.1 Reporting  
Incidents

5. In the event the report does not result in further investigation by civil authorities or charges by law enforcement, the Session will form a team to review the circumstances of the incident and make recommendations to Session about further internal action.

8.5.2 Investigation

6. The church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

8.5.3  
Confidentiality

8.5.4 Parental  
Notification

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of the children which has happened while the child was not under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at First Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child which may have occurred off-site by others, this should be reported immediately to a pastor.

8.5.5 Responses

8.6  
Implementation

**VI. IMPLEMENTATION**

Upon approval by the Session, FPC’s Child Protection Program shall be effective immediately.

Background checks will be performed on all current staff for whom such a record has not been submitted in the past and updated training will be provided for all staff. Volunteer implementation shall begin in conjunction with regular teacher and leader recruitment in 2021.

Approved by Session August 3, 2005  
*Updated by Session December 16, 2009*

**VII. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS**

Engaging with youth using social media can be a healthy way to cultivate positive relationships and maintain communications using the tools that youth are using. Digital communication technologies allow extending the care and welcome of the church beyond the physical walls. Yet social media is a rapidly changing communication tool, and the risk of inappropriate sharing or the blurring of appropriate boundaries between youth and adults is ever-present. First Presbyterian takes care to protect the

safety and privacy of youth in digital communication by recommending the following guidelines:

1. Be thoughtful in all communications. Think twice before saying or sharing anything via social media or digital communications. Could this comment be misconstrued? Would you be comfortable if it were shared or read by others?
2. Electronic communications with youth aged 13 and older should be mutually agreed to and should also be with the approval of parents/guardians. With children under 13, parental approval of electronic communication should be documented.
3. Don't use platforms that automatically delete content (like SnapChat).
4. If you accept a social media connection from one youth, you should accept all requests on that platform from other youth.
5. A youth might openly share thoughts and feelings online, but take great care when responding. Be a good listener, but be careful in expressing your own feelings via digital communication. A good rule of thumb is to limit what you share to information only.

8.7

6. Do not post photos or images of minors. If you have photos of a church event that you would like to be shared with the congregation, send them to the church office to be shared on the church's social media pages in accordance with the church policy. Care is taken not to identify children by name, although parents and youth sometimes share, tag, or post identifying information themselves.

8.8 Staff  
Acknowledgement  
Statement

We recognize that social media is a rapidly shifting technology, and we resolve to pay close attention to its development and advise volunteers and staff on its use accordingly.

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
STAFF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT**

I hereby acknowledge that First Presbyterian Church has provided me with a copy of the Child Protection Policy; that I have completed the Training for the Policy; that I understand its contents; and I agree to abide by the Policy.

I further acknowledge that I have not been convicted of a crime involving child abuse or child neglect.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

8.8 Covenant  
For Person  
Working with  
Children and  
Youth

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Position

Approved by Session August 3, 2005

**COVENANT FOR PERSON WORKING WITH THE CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Because I know that my life will teach the next generation far more than my words will, I, as a child myself of a faithful God, will:

Endeavor to live before God, my family, and the children and young people I work with, in a way that seeks to honor Christ with my words, attitudes and actions.

Seek to be a faithful member of First Presbyterian Church by taking part in its activities, governance, worship, prayer, and study and by supporting the work of the church through the giving of my money, time and talents.

Pray for this church and its educational program and offer myself in service to Christ and His church.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Section 8.0 Approved by Session May 5, 2021