

**THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AMBLER**  
**POLICY REGARDING CHILD ABUSE BY THOSE INVOLVED IN MINISTRY**

**SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Ambler adopts this policy on child abuse for the use of the Church.

**1.1 Purpose.** The purpose of the Child Abuse Policy is as follows:

- A. to help assure a loving, warm, open atmosphere for adults, youth, and children to worship, study, and carry out their Christian faith;
- B. to set and enforce standards of ethical behavior consistent with Scripture and secular law;
- C. to provide procedures for inquiry and effective response to allegations of breach of emotional, spiritual, and physical care and protection of children and youth which lies on all who interact with children or youth on behalf of the Church;
- D. to serve as a guide for prevention of child abuse, including child sexual abuse; and
- E. to demonstrate pastoral concern for victims of as well as those accused of child abuse.

**1.2 Scriptural Foundation.** The people of God live out their faith in the midst of a particular historical reality. Inherent in every time is promise and possibility, opportunities for the ministry and the mission of the church of Jesus Christ to be carried forth. Recent times have demanded that we deal with issues related to human sexuality. While affirming that God created us to live together in ways which proclaim the worth and dignity of each individual, human sexuality has been a basis for opposition, degradation, violation and injustice: manifestations of our sin.

Our sexuality is a gift from God and when rightly used, leads to the wholeness of life which God intends for all people. Those who serve through the offices of the Church bear particular responsibility in making manifest the goodness of God's gift of sexuality. The directives provided by the church in the area of sexual conduct have been vague and general.

The ethical conduct of all who minister in the name of Jesus Christ is of vital importance to the church, for through these representatives and understanding of God and the

gospel, good news is conveyed. First Presbyterian Church of Ambler has developed this Child Abuse Policy in response to the statistical information regarding child sexual abuse, the number of cases of child abuse in the Church, and God's call for justice. Simply stated, the Church's desire is for the best spiritual environment for all persons -- children, youth, and adults.

**1.3 Theological Affirmations.** Who we are and what we do is based on our understanding of God, known in the prophets and priests of the Old Testament, proclaimed by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, manifested by the Holy Spirit who informs and sustains the Church today. It is this triune God who calls us to share the good news of the gospel with love and integrity. This policy is based on the following understanding of God:

- A. Our human sexuality is a gift from God who created all things good.
- B. God entered into covenant relationship with the people of Israel. That covenant was based on God's act of liberation and the people's response through obedience to ethical regulations on which the community's life was to be based.
- C. To live in covenant relationship with God is to know *shalom* which is health, wholeness, unity and peace.
- D. A broken covenant (disobedience, separation from God) brings the consequences of sin: oppression, injustice, pain and death.
- E. From the prophets sent by God comes forth the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness.
- F. All are sinners, falling short of the ethics of the Kingdom.
- G. Forgiveness and redemption are offered to all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- H. God has particular concern for the poor, the oppressed, the abused and the harassed.
- I. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the church today to enable faithful adherence to the desires of God as we live out our lives as sexual creatures on earth.

## SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS

**2.1 "Child Sexual Abuse"** is any contact or interaction between a person who is a minor (currently under 18 years of age) or who is legally incapacitated and an adult or another child or youth significantly older than the child or youth when the child is being used for the

sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third party, including without limitation, the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of any child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct, or any simulation of any sexually explicit conduct, or the rape, sexual assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault or other form of sexual exploitation of children. The behavior may or may not involve touching, and may include without limitation, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or sexual behavior which includes but is not limited to offensive, obscene, or suggestive language or conduct; unacceptable visual contact; touching or fondling which is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child if the child is fourteen years of age or younger.

**2.2 “Child Physical Abuse”** means any non-accidental, physical injury to a child or youth by an adult or another child or youth significantly older than the child or youth.

**2.3 “Child Emotional Abuse”** means any non-accidental, mental injury to a child or youth by an adult or another child or youth significantly older than the child or youth or any pattern of behavior that damages a child’s emotional development and self-worth, and withholds love, support and guidance.

**2.4 “Child Abuse”** is the comprehensive term used in this Policy to include any Child Sexual Abuse, Child Physical Abuse or Child Emotional Abuse as defined above.

### **SECTION 3: SUPERVISORY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**3.1 Team Approach.** Any church group activity involving children or youth should be attended by at least two adults. At no time shall one adult be alone with a child or youth not related to him or her without the written permission of the child’s or youth’s parent or legal guardian.

**3.2 Membership in Church.** As a general rule, no person shall be allowed to work with children or youth, or to serve in a counseling role, unless he or she has been a member of the Church or has been associated with the Church on a regular basis for at least the prior six months. Persons who do not meet this requirement will be paired with a person who has been a member of the Church for at least the prior six months.

**3.3 Parental Permission.** Children and youth must have the written permission of the child’s or youth’s parent or legal guardian for involvement in church sponsored off site activities or programs involving transportation of the child or youth.

**3.4 Reporting Suspicious Behavior and Suspected Abuse.** Church staff and volunteers who note (1) a child or youth appears aloof or withdrawn or exhibits a marked

personality change; (2) a child or youth shows signs of Child Abuse; (3) a child or youth reports Child Abuse either at the Church or elsewhere; or (4) any inappropriate conduct or relationships between a child or youth and an adult or a child or youth significantly older than the victim should notify one of the following: (i) a pastor; (ii) the directors of children and youth ministry; (iii) the director of the nursery School; or (iv) the Clerk of the Session. Members of the clergy and other employees engaged in teaching or other child-care activities of the Church are required by the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (23 Pa.C.S.A. §§6301 et seq.) to report to the appropriate authorities when they have reasonable cause to suspect a child coming before them in their professional capacities is an abused child.

**3.5 Nursery Identification Procedure.** The Church has instituted an identification procedure for children in the nursery through pre-kindergarten classes that clearly identifies the child and the child's parent or legal guardian. Children are only released to a properly identified and pre-authorized adult. The nursery, whether used by the church or outside organizations, must have two adults with children at all times.

**3.6 Overnight Rule.** All adult chaperones and supervisors on overnight activities involving children or youth must be cleared with the director of children's ministry, the director of youth ministry or other staff member of the Church.

**3.7 Open Door Policy.** In classrooms and other areas used by children and youth that do not have glass windows, doors should be left open during activities. In such areas that do have doors with glass windows, the windows should not be covered or obstructed.

**3.8 Disciplinary Procedures.** Pending an investigation and resolution by the proper authorities in accordance with applicable law, (i) if there is any evidence of Child Abuse by an employee, the employee will be suspended immediately; or (ii) if there is any evidence of Child Abuse by a volunteer, the volunteer will be prohibited from participating in any Church activities with children or youth.

## **SECTION 4: RECRUITING AND SCREENING PAID CHURCH WORKERS**

**4.1 Job Application Procedure - Generally.** An applicant for employment by the Church shall complete and submit an employment application in a form approved by the Session from time to time, undergo a personal interview and provide reference checks. Each reference shall be contacted and a written record of the results of each such contact shall be maintained in the Church's records. Each applicant shall complete a child abuse screening form, a criminal records check authorization form, and an acknowledgment of receipt and certification of the Child Abuse Policy. The Church shall confirm the applicant's identity by requiring photographic identification such as a driver's license. Each applicant shall also be given the Sexual Harassment Policy and asked to sign a receipt therefor. The Session may from time to time establish other procedures and requirements relating to employment in its sole discretion.

**4.2 Child Abuse Screening.** Prior to hire, each applicant shall complete and submit (a) the Primary Screening Form in the form attached hereto as Appendix 1; (b) a Request for Criminal Record Check together with a certified check or money order for \$10.00 payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; (c) a Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance form together with a money order for \$10.00 payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and (d) an Acknowledgment of Receipt and Certification of the Child Abuse Policy in the form attached hereto as Appendix 2. The Church will not reimburse a job applicant for the fees incurred in submitting the documents identified in Section 4.2(b) and Section 4.2(c) to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. After hire, each employee shall attend a presentation and training session on the Church's Child Abuse Policy.

**4.3 Retroactive Application.** All current employees shall complete and submit the Child Abuse Screening forms identified in Section 4.2 above within thirty days of the effective date of implementation of the Child Abuse Policy. The Church will reimburse each current employee for the fees incurred in submitting the documents identified in Section 4.2(b) and Section 4.2(c) to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All current employees will attend a presentation and training session on the Church's Child Abuse Policy and shall complete and submit an Acknowledgment of Receipt and Certification of the Child Abuse Policy in the form attached hereto as Appendix 2.

## **SECTION 5: SCREENING AND RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEER WORKERS**

### **5.1 Screening Procedure for Volunteers Who Work With Children and Youth.**

Persons wishing to volunteer to work with children or youth must (a) complete and submit (i) the Primary Screening Form in the form attached hereto as Appendix 1 and (ii) the Acknowledgment of Receipt and Certification of the Child Abuse Policy in the form attached hereto as Appendix 2; and (b) must attend a presentation and training session on the Church's Child Abuse Policy.

**5.2 Current Volunteers "Grandparented".** To implement this policy, all current volunteers will be excused from complying with the primary screening set forth in Section 5.1(a)(i) above, upon execution of the Acknowledgment of Receipt and Certification, pursuant to Section 5.1(a)(ii) above, which will be kept on file, attesting to the fact the policy has been received, read and will be followed and certifying no past sexual misconduct with respect to a child or youth, an incapacitated person, or an adult, and attendance at the presentation and training session on the Church's Child Abuse Policy pursuant to Section 5.1(b) above.

**5.3 Prior Criminal Record.** Any adult who has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to child sexual abuse, physical abuse or any other form of sexual misconduct will not be allowed to work with children or youth in a volunteer capacity at the Church.

**5.4 Right to Modify Procedure.** The Session reserves the right to modify the screening procedure for volunteers in its sole discretion from time to time.