



Safe Church

Child Protection Manual

Jesus said “Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teacher, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse and mitigating the possibilities of accidents and harm. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. Our congregation’s purpose for establishing our Safe Church- Child Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and as First Presbyterian Church, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the law of the state of Iowa; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that for each child, First Presbyterian Church will “be a safe place for all to encounter God and grow into lives of service and fulfillment.” (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Statement on Creating Safe Ministries).

As the one who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct. (1 Peter 1:15)

This policy manual outlines policies and guidelines for the ministries of our church as it relates to children, their safety in our physical space, and their safety within our programs and services.



Safe Church- Sexual Misconduct and Child Protection Policy

General Purpose Statement

... As [God] who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ... Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, ... not under compulsion but willingly, ... not for sordid gain but eagerly. ... not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.

... You know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 1 Pet. 1:15; 5:2–3; Jas. 3:1, NRSV

The ethical conduct of all who minister in the name of Jesus Christ is of vital importance to the church because through these representatives an understanding of God and the gospel's good news is conveyed. "Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world" (Book of Order, G-2.0104a).

First Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the participants of First Presbyterian Church ministries and programming from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this set of policies, the following definitions are provided for clarity and an understanding of the terms defined.

Child/children includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Vulnerable Adult is a person 18 years of age or older who: a) lives in or receives services from a licensed facility such as nursing home, hospital, or treatment center for a disability (intellectual, physical, mental illness, chemical dependency, brain injury) or b) are in family settings and would not by themselves report abuse or neglect to themselves because of impaired physical or mental function or emotional status.

Worker includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children or vulnerable adults.

Child/Dependent Adult Abuse is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.

- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity involving a child, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Sexual Misconduct is sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct which may range in severity from sexist remarks and harassment to exploitation to violent sexual assault. This may include in person actions and remarks, as well as written, and electronic communications or abuse of technology.

Training

First Presbyterian Church will provide training on this Safe Church Child Protection & Sexual Misconduct Policy to all new child and youth workers, Elders, Deacons, and staff. Opportunities for additional training classes or events will be provided on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events yearly, but must complete a training related to the policy and boundaries every 3 years.

Sexual Misconduct

It shall be the policy of the First Presbyterian Church that all members, officers (Elder and Deacon), non-member Employees, and volunteers maintain the integrity of ministerial, employment, and professional relationships at all times. Sexual misconduct is not only a violation of the principles set forth in Scripture, it is a violation of these relationships and is never permissible.

First Presbyterian Church adopts the full Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy and its procedures to serve as the overarching Safe Church Policy for FPC. The policy is attached as Appendix A.

Child/Dependent Adult Protection

Along with the content of PC(USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy, First Presbyterian Church adopts additional policy related to Christian Education activities and programming. For all First Presbyterian Church sponsored and supported programming serving children, youth, and dependent adults, the following guidelines regarding selection of and screening of workers, safety practices, and responding to allegations of abuse and other incidents shall be in effect. Any deviations to this, as may be in the case of shared ministries with other congregations, will be disclosed and part of registration forms/parental permission forms.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children/vulnerable adults participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) Six Month Rule

No applicant will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been actively involved with First Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children. This 6 month rule will not apply for any paid positions involving contact with minors, should such position come open. Someone not meeting the 6 month requirement may still volunteer with Christian Education programming as long as they are not counted towards adult ratios or left along with children/youth until that 6 month requirement is met.

b) Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children and youth must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by FPC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, and reference information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church. The church reserves the right to expand on this basic application for any future paid positions that may become available.

c) Personal Interview/Conversation

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled, at the discretion of the Christian Education committee or Session, with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees who may come into contact with children or youth as a result of their position and for volunteers working with children and youth programming.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign or complete and submit online authorization forms allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to complete the authorization forms, s/he will be unable to work with children as an authorized volunteer. At the discretion of the Christian Education Committee, they may still volunteer as long as they are with proper ratios of other authorized volunteers.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Christian Education Committee of First Presbyterian Church on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. The Christian Education Committee reserves the right to consult with a closed Session or with the Personnel Committee, if the committee feels that for some reason, they cannot make a fair and objective decision. Convictions for an offense involving children will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will be looked at in terms of severity and time that has passed, and may prompt reference checks, but may preclude someone from being permitted to work with children/youth/dependent adults. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization forms and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the church, unless and until the designated background check provider keeps electronic files.

e) Proof of License/Registration/Insurance

Any adult that may be transporting a child as a volunteer of the church must be at least 21 years of age and provide proof of valid driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) or other child worker volunteers who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. Examples of these activities include, but are not limited to, staffing the church nursery, Sunday and midweek Christian Education programs for children, and Vacation Bible School. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14 (and be at least one grade level above the program's age parameters)
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must have parental consent to volunteer.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult, 18 years of age or older, and must never be left alone with children.

Practices to Minimize Risk of Abuse

The following are practices that First Presbyterian Church has in place to limit the risk of abuse towards children and the risk of false allegations against staff and volunteers.

a) Two Adult & Open Door Rule

A minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session. In these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher, and another adult should be on church premises. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation or with specific parental permissions (ie. An adult has been asked to take responsibility for a child following programming). These rules apply in volunteer's vehicles as well when volunteers are providing transportation to and from an activity.

b) Registration & Check-In and Out Procedures

For any sort of midweek program such as JAM (or any similar program in the future) or Vacation Bible School, there will be a registrar who checks children in and out. While all participants must have signed consents and registration forms, children in 5th grade and below must check in with the registrar at the time of their arrival. Their parent/guardian, or an adult who has been given permission to transport that child home and such permission has been relayed to the registrar, must check out with the registrar before

taking their child home. In the event that the program registrar is not available, the pastor or program leader/director may also check a child out to their parents.

c) Discipline

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the leader/director of the particular program or the pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

People working with children/youth/dependent adults may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of those under their care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child or dependent adult under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the pastor, and/or a member of the Christian Education Committee, for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Clergy and volunteer Christian educators are not considered mandatory reporters under State of Minnesota law. However, under denominational jurisdiction, as outlined in the PC(USA) *Book of Order*, individuals who are teaching elders, ruling elders, or deacons who become aware of or concerned about alleged abuse as a result of their position are mandated to make reports of suspected abuse and should follow state reporting requirements.

For suspected child abuse, contact Pipestone County Family Services at 1-888-964-8407 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). If the worker believes the child is in imminent danger, a call to 911 is encouraged.

For suspected dependent adult abuse, contact the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) at 1-844-880-1574 or mn.gov/dhs/reportadultabuse/.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child/dependent adult will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children/dependent adults pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and the church will comply with the state's current requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. In the absence of the requirement for mandatory reporting, the permissive reporting procedure above will be followed. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

5. The pastor, or another person designated by Session, will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth and may face church disciplinary proceedings as prescribed in the Book of Discipline.

Responding to Accidental Injury to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under FPC care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.



Child/Youth Worker Application Form

It is the goal of this church to create a safe and secure environment for all children and workers who are involved in church activities. To facilitate this emphasis, it is necessary to gather pertinent information from those who offer volunteer services to our children and youth program. This information will be used for the sole purpose of helping the church provide a safe and secure environment for children and workers.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Date of birth: _____

Current street address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Current phone number (Home): _____ Email: _____

Please respond to all questions below that apply to the position for which you are volunteering.

(* Required)

*Programs volunteering for (Please circle all that may apply):

JAM VBS Youth Group

Is there a possibility that you may be transporting youth (ie. Youth Group):

Do you have a valid driver's license, vehicle registration, proof of insurance? _____

(Please provide copies of these with application)

*Is there any reason you should NOT work with or around children or youth? _____

*Have you ever been the subject of a child abuse investigation? _____

If yes, please provide details: _____

*Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense or are you currently facing criminal charges? _____

If yes, please provide details: _____

Please provide the following church information:

How long have you been involved with the Pipestone community? _____ FPC? _____

Have you ever worked with youth or children? _____ List where: _____

Child/Youth Worker Application Form- Volunteer

Emergency Contact Information

So that we can ensure volunteer safety and make necessary contacts in the event of an accident or illness, please provide us with your emergency contact information below:

Name: _____

Relationship to Volunteer: _____

Phone Number: _____

I give permission to make a thorough investigation of my background, and release from liability all persons, companies, or corporations supplying such information. I also release the church from any liability that might result from making such an investigation. I understand that any false statements or implications made by me on this application or other required documentation shall be considered sufficient cause for denial of a volunteer role or discharge.

I also certify that I have received and reviewed a copy of First Presbyterian Church's Safe Church-Child Protection policy and have asked questions or undergone training so that I understand this policy. I agree to uphold the Child Protection policy and understand that in my service as a volunteer, will be held to these standards.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For Parents of Teenage Volunteers

I understand that my teenage child wants to volunteer to work with children at First Presbyterian Church. I understand that they are subject to the same policies and background check provisions as adults. My child is at least 14 years of age and the information provided in this application is true to the best of my knowledge. I also certify that I have received and reviewed a copy of First Presbyterian Church's Safe Church Policy and have asked questions or undergone training so that I understand this policy. I agree to uphold the Safe Church policy and understand that my child in their service as a volunteer, will be held to these standards.

Finally, I grant permission for my child, _____, to volunteer to work with children at First Presbyterian Church.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Child/Youth Worker Application Form- Volunteer

Link to complete online background check:

<https://www.ciaresearch.com/system/erelease.nsf/erelease?OpenForm&ClientID=FPC-Pipestone>