

# **KALAMAZOO FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

## **CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY POLICY**

### **PURPOSE**

Kalamazoo First Presbyterian Church is a spiritual community that takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth and other vulnerable persons who participate in our ministries. This policy statement covers the obligations of church employees and volunteers who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons. All employees and volunteers of First Presbyterian Church of Kalamazoo must comply with Parts 1 and 2 of the "Child and Youth Safety Policy," and complete the appropriate form(s).

All are encouraged to participate fully in the lives and ministry of children and youth. However, the church has an overriding obligation to safeguard all children, youth, and other vulnerable persons under its care from abuse and neglect. The following, (1)"Requirements of Employees and Volunteers in the Children and Youth Ministries," (2)"Safety Guidelines and Procedures," and (3)"Child and Youth Paid & Volunteer Clearance Form(s)," reflect the commitment of First Presbyterian Church to provide a safe environment for all children, youth, employees, and volunteers who participate in any church-sponsored activity or ministry. These three parts plus the Introduction constitute the Child and Youth Safety Policy.

### **DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERS**

For the purpose of this policy, "volunteers" are defined as those people who of their own free will offer to help lead or provide childcare for the children and youth who come under the care of First Presbyterian Church. The term "volunteers" shall include but not be limited to all teachers, assistants, drivers, chaperones, childcare providers, choir leaders, hall monitors, youth sponsors, youth leaders and confirmation mentors who work with children and youth. Those persons who are not regular paid employees of the church but are monetarily reimbursed for their occasional service shall be called independent contractors. For the purpose of this policy, all independent contractors shall be considered "volunteers." All volunteers who are in leadership roles in these ministries are living out the vows taken when children are baptized to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every volunteer plays a key role in fostering spiritual development of children, youth and families in our church community.

### **REQUIREMENTS**

In order to provide a safe community for children, youth, and vulnerable persons, the church requires all employees and volunteers to comply with the "Requirements of

Employees and Volunteers in the Child and Youth Ministries" and the "Child and Youth Safety Guidelines and Procedures" adopted by the Session of this church.

In doing so all employees and volunteers will be asked to:

- Complete the *Central Registry Child Abuse and Neglect Clearance Request* (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services)
- Review the attached "Guidelines and Procedures" at an orientation session and meet with the appropriate staff person.
- Complete a training orientation regarding the safety and protection of children, youth, and other vulnerable persons.
- Remain under the supervision of the respective professional staff persons. Any person who is currently under investigation for, or has been convicted of (1) criminal sexual conduct, (2) neglect of a child, or (3) physical abuse, shall not be permitted to work or volunteer in any church-sponsored activity or program involving children or youth.

## **REVIEW**

The Faith Formation Committee shall review the Child and Youth Safety Policy and its implementation each September and report to Session.

## **PART 1**

### **REQUIREMENTS OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES**

1. All employees and children and youth volunteers must read the "Child and Youth Safety Policy" of this church; agree to it by completing and signing the appropriate form (*Central Registry Clearance Request*), attend an orientation session, and meet with the appropriate staff person to review the "Guidelines and Procedures," and complete training.
2. All volunteers must be approved by the Director of Youth and Families.
3. Employees and volunteers are required to report immediately to their supervisors any suspicious or inappropriate behavior of suspected (1) criminal sexual conduct, (2) neglect of a child, or (3) physical abuse.
4. The Director of Youth and Families shall be responsible for maintaining a roster of individuals approved to provide child supervision. The list shall contain: individual names, date approved, and contact information. The Director of Youth and Families shall be responsible for making the roster accessible to other staff and volunteers.

## PART 2

### CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

First Presbyterian Church follows the Rule of Three, that assures staff and volunteers will not be alone with a child. If a situation occurs when another verified adult is not available and there is reason for one adult to be alone with a child, the child will take a “buddy” with them. Adding an additional child, while not the ideal, allows the Rule of Three to be followed and every effort will be made to include another verified adult as soon as possible.

#### **ON-SITE PROCEDURES**

- 1) At no time shall one employee or volunteer be alone with a child or a youth. The only exceptions to this policy would be in situations in which
  - a) the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the child or youth; or
  - b) parents have provided prior approval; or
  - c) an unforeseen emergency occurs and all attempts to comply with the policy have failed (in this case, the remaining adult will report the situation to the Director of Youth and Families).
- 2) The maximum ratio of children to adults shall be:
  - a) Nursery (2 and under) – 3:1
  - b) Preschool (3-4) – 4:1
  - c) Elementary (5-11) – 8:1
  - d) Middle School – 10:1
  - e) High School – 10:1
- 3) All rooms and classrooms shall have their doors closed and locked when in use.
- 4) Restroom use:
  - o Pre-school age children shall be accompanied to the restroom by one of the classroom volunteers who will wait at the door for the child. If there are not sufficient remaining adults in the classroom to abide by the “no one adult left alone with children” rule, the *Rule of Three* must be followed. If a pre-school age child needs assistance in the restroom, the teacher shall provide the assistance necessary, first encouraging the child to handle as much of the process as they can. Bathroom and stall doors must remain open. Elementary school age children may choose a “buddy” to accompany them to the bathroom.

#### 5) Check in/Check out Policy and Releasing of minors:

- Depending on the age of children and youth, some may require check-in or check-out by parents. It is the responsibility of the volunteers, teachers, and any other youth leader to abide by the following procedures for receiving and releasing youth at the end of the designated time.

#### **Nursery**

- a. Upon check-in all parents will sign-in each child. This will indicate 1) child's name 2) parent's name, 3) special needs of the child, and 4) the pager number issued to the parent.
- b. Upon check-out the parent must present the pager upon picking up his or her child at the end of services. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to be verified upon picking up, the Director of Youth and Families will be contacted. The Director of Youth and Families will then be responsible for releasing the child to the care of the parent or guardian after discussing and evaluating the surrounding circumstances.

#### **Preschool**

- a. Preschool teachers will escort all students up to classrooms after "Moment with Young Worshipers" unless special circumstances require parents to bring them to the classroom.
- b. Preschoolers may only be released to parents, legal guardians, or another adult that has been given permission.
- c. In the event that a child is brought to preschool without proper papers completed outlining who has authority to pick up the child, the preschool teacher(s) will:
  - Ask the child who brought him or her to church that day
  - Ask the child to identify the individual asking to have the child released
  - Complete the proper paperwork with the parent or legal guardian

#### **Elementary**

- a. Elementary teachers or assistants will escort all students up to classrooms after "Moment with Young Worshipers" unless special circumstances require parents to bring them to the classroom.
- b. Elementary students may only be released to parents, legal guardians, or another adult that has been given permission.

- c. In the event that a child is brought to Sunday School without proper papers completed outlining who has authority to pick up the child, the elementary teacher(s) will:
  - Ask the child who brought him or her to church that day
  - Ask the child to identify the individual requesting release of the child
  - Complete the proper paperwork with the parent or legal guardian

### **Middle School**

Release of students will be coordinated between parents and youth leaders.

### **High School**

Release of students will be coordinated between parents and youth leaders.

*If a situation unexpectedly does not meet the criteria of any of these policies, then alternatives must be put into place so that the event is in compliance. The following examples are meant as illustrations only and are not to be perceived as the only possible situations or solutions.*

*Example:* If only one teacher and one child/youth shows up for a Sunday School class then the supervisor could recommend these solutions:

- The teacher and child/youth could join another class for the morning
- The supervisor could join the teacher and child/youth
- The teacher and child/youth could attend church

*Example:* For a mid-week Bible Study there are a few toddlers who need childcare, and a scheduled attendant is unexpectedly unavailable.

- The parent(s) can give permission to provide care by only one approved individual (out of ratio)

### **OFF-SITE PROCEDURES**

1) At no time shall one employee or volunteer be alone with a child or a youth. The only exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the child or youth or with prior permission of a parent or legal guardian.

2) As each facility will be different, it will be the responsibility of the supervisors to determine how best to use the facility and comply with the church policy.

3) At least two unrelated adults must be in attendance at all times for overnight activities, whether on or off church property.

4) For events where youth gather for overnights at or away from the church, two screened adults will be present. If it is deemed necessary for adults to share sleeping accommodations with the children/youth, the unrelated-two-adult rule will remain in place.

5) All drivers and chaperones on children/youth offsite trips shall be included in all parts of the Child and Youth Safety Policy.

6) When non-church members are present and representing First Presbyterian Church of Kalamazoo, those volunteers must comply with the Child and Youth Safety Policy.

### **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH MINORS**

1) Any communication done by email or text with minors must be with express parent permission/knowledge. All electronic communication shall be documented and retained. No electronic communication with minors may be deleted and must be made available to view by the parent, pastor or session member as requested.

2) There may be NO communication with any minor at any time by means of Snapchat or any other social media forum that automatically deletes messages.

3) No adult staff or volunteer may initiate a connection (follow/friend/etc.) on social media. If a student initiates a connection, the child or youth's parent or guardian, as well as the Director of Youth and Families, shall be notified.

### **OUTSIDE GROUPS USING THE CHURCH FACILITY**

Any person or group who routinely uses the First Presbyterian Church facility for activities with children or youth shall be required to comply with this Child & Youth Safety Policy or provide a copy of their own policy for approval.

### **USE OF PHOTOS OF MINORS**

#### **Small Groups Photos**

The use of photos of small groups of minors (groups of 4 or less minors) may only be used:

1) With the consent of a parent or guardian.

2) If no names, identifying or contact information is used.

In the event that a parent or legal guardian objects to a photo, for any reason, it will be removed as quickly as possible without questions asked.

*At no time will any staff or volunteer post any photos of the children or youth on their personal social media accounts.*

## **Large Groups Photos**

Photos of large groups that include minors (a group including 5 or more minors) may be used only if no names, identifying or contact information is used.

## **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

It shall be the responsibility of the church Personnel Committee to:

- 1) Give each newly hired employee a copy of the Child and Youth Safety Policy.
- 2) Include a copy of the policy in the Personnel Manual.
- 3) Include a written obligation to enforce the policy into the contract of each employee who has significant responsibility for supervising employees or volunteers who lead children or youth (e.g. Christian Educators, Youth Choir Director, the Associate Pastor for Youth)

## **PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Parents are partners in protecting the welfare of children and should be aware of the First Presbyterian Church Child and Youth Safety Policy. Parents are encouraged to ask teachers and staff questions about any concerns. Parents are responsible:

- 1) For the welfare of their children while on church premises when not participating in church-sponsored programs and activities.
- 2) To provide permission for their children to meet individually with a church employee or volunteer (whether on-site or off-site). Written permission can be given via email or text message.
- 3) For following check-in and check-out procedures for nursery, pre-school and elementary age children.
- 4) To coordinate with youth leaders (employee or volunteer) the release of middle school and high school students from church sponsored programs and activities.

## **INITIAL REPORTING OF REASONABLE SUSPICION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE ACTIVITY**

*What is reasonable suspicion?*

Reasonable suspicion of abuse can be based on:

- Witnessing the abuse yourself
- Noticing the warning signs of abuse in a child
- When an adult, parent, or child confides in you

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR REPORTING ADULT**

The reporting adult shall:

1) Report suspicion of abuse immediately to one of the following staff of First Presbyterian Church:

- The Pastor/ Head of Staff
- Associate Pastor
- Director of Youth and Families

2) Document the date, time, and circumstance of the alleged incident.

3) For purposes of confidentiality, do not discuss the suspicion of abuse with any other party.

4) Take action by calling Kalamazoo County Child Protective Services or other proper authorities.

- All calls are completely confidential.
- A trained specialist will ask a short series of questions to help determine what is occurring and why you are concerned.
- You need not give your name or address.
- If there is a reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect is taking place, authorities will take appropriate action to safeguard the children involved.

### **FPC RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

1) All allegations shall be regarded as serious, and due consideration shall be given to protect the dignity, rights and privacy of the alleged victim, the reporting individual and the person being accused.

2) The staff person receiving the initial report will communicate to the parents or legal guardian if the allegation has been reported to Kalamazoo County Child Protective Services or other authorities, unless the accused is a parent.

3) The person who is being accused will be required to refrain from participating in all child and youth activities pending investigation and resolution.

4) The Pastor/Head of Staff will convene a Response Group. The Response Group will include, but is not limited to:

- The Pastor / Head of Staff
- A Ruling Elder

5) The Response Group will provide oversight of all related actions including:

- Ensuring appropriate contact and cooperation with civil and criminal authorities as required by law, and consistent with the PCUSA Book of Order.
- Maintaining pertinent documents

6) The Pastor/Head of Staff will provide spiritual counseling

7) Protecting confidence, the Elder will communicate the occurrence of a report of suspected child abuse to the session and if appropriate, to the congregation.

8) Together, the Elder and Head of Staff will work with the Presbytery in matters pertaining to the reported incident.

9) Session shall have discretion to reinstate a person who has been the subject of unsubstantiated allegations.

### **STAFF CARE OF DOCUMENTS**

1) Only the Director of Youth and Families and Faith Formation Committee moderator (or ruling elder on the CE Committee) will review forms filled out by volunteers.

2) All information will be treated in a confidential manner. In the case of a response to a report of suspicious activity, only the Response Group and the appropriate legal authorities shall have access to the information on these documents.

3) The documents will be kept in secure storage by a designated support staff person.

4) References may be contacted by the appropriate staff person before the individual begins service.

5) Volunteers will be required to complete a Child and Youth Volunteer Application form yearly.