

# First Presbyterian Church of Holland

## Child and Youth Safety Policy

### I. Introduction

First Presbyterian Church of Holland, as it gathers for worship, education, and fellowship, seeks to promote Christ centered and biblically directed living. First Presbyterian Church is committed to preventing physical, mental, or sexual abuse of children and youth by a person or people holding a perceived authority and or responsibility over them. In order to protect both children and all who are in a position of caring for or supervising them, clear guidelines and procedures of conduct that ensure a safe church environment are necessary.

The Session of First Presbyterian Church declares its intention to protect “the least of these” and to acknowledge that if abuse occurs both the perpetrator and the victim need our Christian understanding and prayerful attention.

The Child and Youth Safety Policy has the following objectives:

- To set and enforce standards of ethical behavior consistent with Scripture and secular law;
- To prevent incidents of sexual misconduct in the church;
- To provide procedures to investigate and effectively respond to allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse raised against those who represent the Church;
- To recommend policies for volunteers within the church;
- To demonstrate concern for the alleged victims as well as those accused of sexual misconduct or abuse;
- To protect the church’s volunteers from false accusation.

Sexual misconduct is a difficult and painful matter to address. If we are to protect our children and ourselves, we can not assume sexual abuse and misconduct is “someone else’s problem” and “could not happen to us.” We must join together as a congregation to listen, to teach, to protect and to heal.

### II. Standards of Conduct

#### A. Sexual Abuse Defined

##### 1. Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse is defined as any incident during which a minor child is used by a person of any age whether the contact is for sexual stimulation of that person or a third person regardless of whether the contact involves touching. Sexual behavior between a minor and a person of any age is always considered forced, whether not consent is given by the minor. The age of majority is governed by state law. (Attachment A)

## 2. Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment, is defined as other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which by its purpose or effect interferes with a person's participation at First Presbyterian Church of Holland or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. Incidents of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to inappropriate sexually oriented humor or language, questions of comments about sexual behavior, orientation, or preferences, unwelcome or undesired physical contact, inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance or repeated requests for social engagements.

### B. Sexual Misconduct Prohibited

First Presbyterian Church of Holland strictly prohibits acts of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment of any and all kinds in its activities and/or programs. This prohibition applies to all volunteers involved in any program or activity affiliated with the Church. In addition, First Presbyterian Church strictly prohibits personal interaction with children or youth by anyone who has ever been convicted of or has pled guilty or no contest in a court of law to either child sexual or physical abuse.

## III. Prevention Management:

### A. Screening

- a. any person wishing to work directly with minor children whether volunteer or paid staff must complete an application. (See Attachment B - Confidential Security Form)
- b. any person working with children must participate in an annual Child Protection training event provided by First Presbyterian Church. Annual participation will be recorded. (See Attachment C -Child and Youth Policy Training Acknowledgement.)
- c. all application forms and required background information will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Information will be kept in a locked file only accessible to the Head of Staff. A release form will be sent to all churches and persons listed as references in an attempt to receive an honest performance report.
- d. six month membership requirement
- e. A release form permitting photos at church events will be signed by parent or legal guardian.
- f. Any outside group supervising children and using the First Presbyterian Church facilities shall be required to provide proof of training prior to building use.
- g. Provide Child Protection training at each New Member Class.

## **B. Implementation**

Implementation of the Child Safety Policy and procedures will be carried out by the Child and Youth Protection (CYP) Council, which consists of the following:

- Head of Staff
- Associate Pastor
- Chair of Christian Education Council
- Chair of the Personnel Council
- Additional members of the congregation with appropriate expertise

The duties of the Child and Youth Protection Council shall be as follows:

- Make sure all volunteers have applications/agreement forms on file
- Make sure references and background check are complete
- Present the policy with rationale to the congregation
- Prepare one training session per year for all those with applications on file
- Provide care and counseling when necessary
- Attempt to mediate and to resolve all issues possible before suggesting disciplinary procedure while following mandated guidelines for reporting.
- Annual review and revision (if necessary) of the Child Safety Policy
- Annual report to Session by the Elder for Personnel
- Publish a statement on the church website stating we have a child protection policy.

## **IV. Church Response and Reporting of Allegations**

Any misconduct, sexual relations, or child abuse of any nature will be reported to the local authorities for investigation. Such conduct could lead to a felony conviction. All such conduct will be reported, with no exception. The Internal Incident Report form shall be used (Attachment D)

### **Reporting Obligations**

- A. The staff, officers, leaders, teachers, or anyone in a position representing First Presbyterian Church of Holland are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse within the church setting to the Head of Staff. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse, but only to report it to the Head of Staff.
- B. The church Session, as well as the State of Michigan, and the Book of Order, requires the Head of Staff to report all alleged abuse cases involving minors to Social Services and Law Enforcement Agencies.
- C. All records of reported incidents shall be maintained by a designated staff person. All matters pertaining to the accusation will be kept confidential by the church.
- D. If the allegation is made against the Head of Staff then the incident shall be reported to the chairperson of the personnel committee.

- E. A report shall be made when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or youth has been abused or is in danger of being abused.
- F. Reporting numbers: Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-422-4453, Ottawa County 616-394-7220 (24 hours). A report of suspected abuse is only a request for an investigation. The reporter does not need to prove the abuse. The investigation and validation of child abuse reports are the responsibility of the child protective service workers.

See Michigan Law (Attachment A)

G. Response of First Presbyterian Church to the media will be handled by the Clerk of Session or designee.

H. Response of First Presbyterian Church to members will be by letter explaining that an allegation has been made against clergy, staff persons, members or non-members using the church building. A Congregational meeting may be called if necessary. Only members of First Presbyterian Church will be admitted to this meeting with names confirmed by designated persons.

In addition to the above, the following responses will be made to allegations:

- 1. The church will take all allegations seriously, The Head of Staff will be the spokesperson for the church unless, or until, such a person is designated by the Session. Denominational officials will be notified.
- 2. The victim's family will be notified of the allegation and the steps that the church is taking to investigate and bring healing to the situation.
- 3. The church will show respect for the accused.
- 4. The church will work with the authorities to try to assure the child's safety.
- 5. Immediate contact will be made with the insurance company, attorney and denominational officials.
- 6. The church will co-operate with all state agencies and as they investigate the allegation.
- 7. Removal or suspension of alleged offenders serving in some capacity within the church will follow the listed guidelines.

- a. When the allegations of abuse is made, the alleged offender must be informed of these allegations and must be suspended from participating in all service roles in the church until an investigation is done by the proper authorities (Protective Services and/or local law enforcement agencies.)
- b. If the allegations are found to be false, the censure on service will be lifted.
- c. If the allegations are true, the offender must continue under censure and be dealt with according to church discipline as stated in the Book of Order.
- d. If the Head of Staff is the alleged offender, the Presbytery office will be contacted immediately.

Attachment D  
Internal Incident Report Form of First Presbyterian Church of Holland  
*Please print all information clearly*

Persons Making the Allegation:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Being Accused:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Information:

Reported Victim's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Occurrence: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Occurrence: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity/Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: (include witnesses; all conversations regarding the event; authorities called, when called, who talked with; write down anything that even remotely involves the case. Use additional pages as necessary.)

---

---

---

---

State of Michigan form must also be completed.

## Guidelines for adults working with children and youth

### **Worker Supervision**

Each program conducted or sponsored by First Presbyterian Church Holland that involves minors is required to have and maintain operating procedures that will protect children and youth and prevent opportunity for abuse.

The following guidelines are to be followed when dealing with the children and youth in our church.

These rules are in place not only to protect our youth and children from the risk of sexual misconduct and abuse, but also to help eliminate the possibilities of false accusations from occurring

1. A team approach or two adult rule will be used. A minimum of two adults shall be present during any church activity or function.
2. No children/youth activity sponsored by the church will take place without adequate supervision.
3. Both male and female adults should be present on youth trips that include both boys and girls.
4. An individual adult will not drive a single child.
5. Supervision will be maintained before and after all activities until all youth/children are in the custody of their parents.
6. Youth and children shall have written parental permission for any activity off the church property.
7. Children being cared for in the nursery shall only be released to appropriate family members. Parents/guardians shall insure child's safety by signing him/her in& out on the provided form.
8. Teachers should situate themselves in a classroom so that they may be easily seen and observed.
9. If you are the only adult in the room, leave the door open.
10. All volunteers, staff members, Session members and Deacons must attend an annual training event provided by the church. Ordained members who are not currently serving are encouraged to attend the training event. A training acknowledgment with signatures of all attendees will be kept in a locked file with all Child Protection files.

## Safety Policy for Drivers

This section applies to all people who drive for church activities. Drivers will not have to attend a safety policy training session. However, they will need to complete a Driver Form.

1. All drivers must be licensed drivers. All drivers must be 18 years or older.  
A copy of driver's license and proof of insurance must be on file.
2. All occupants will wear a safety belt, and follow State of Michigan laws regarding child safety restraints.
2. A first aid kit will accompany each vehicle (available in church office)
3. Emergency contact information for each person and a permission slip must be in the vehicle. Forms are available in church office. (Attachments E and F)

## Children and Youth Workers Selection

1. Paid staff working with children and youth within the church will be at least 18 years of age. Volunteers will be members of First Presbyterian for at least six months. Exceptions will be made at the discretion of the Session.
2. It is preferred that potential worker child/youth candidate be recommended first by the CE Council or by the Pastor(s), before the candidate is asked to apply.
3. Workers will go through a screening procedure. The screening procedure will include an application that will remain a part of the church records, and be accessible only to the pastor(s) and the Child & Youth Protection Committee/Council. Once screened, each worker will be screened each third year unless waived by a pastor(s) or Children/Youth Protection Committee.
4. The screening shall also include a personal interview.
5. A reference check will be made. This will include the applicant's previous church affiliation if applicable.
6. Only the pastor(s) and/or the CYP Council will review each application, and will make a final judgment of acceptance of the applicant.
7. If an application is rejected, the pastor(s) and/or the CYP Council will contact the applicant and allow him or her an opportunity to clarify or refute any information found during the screening process. They will also allow that individual the opportunity to withdraw the application on record.
8. All child/youth workers will attend an annual training session regarding the Child and Youth Protection Policy.

Attachment C

**Child and Youth Protection Policy Training Acknowledgement**  
First Presbyterian Church of Holland

*Please return this form to the church office.*

I have completed the training and have read and understand the criteria for appropriate behavior, as outlined in the First Presbyterian Church's Child and Youth Protection Policy.

This includes the policy, definition and reporting procedures.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_