

Child Protective Covenant

Takoma Park Presbyterian Church

July 1997; revised September 2004.

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believes in me, 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 18:5-6, NRSV)

Purpose

Jesus affirmed the uniqueness and value of each child. He took time to play with children. He also affirmed the responsibility of adults to care for children. The Session, pastor, employees and members of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church recognize and believe that the Church is a community of trust, and that the Church is a place where children experience security, love, and acceptance of the Christian Community.

Central to the Reformed faith is the concept of “Covenant.” God entered into a covenant with the Church. We covenant with one another, and the promises we make are sacred. In the covenant of baptism individuals and the congregation take responsibility for the spiritual health and well-being of children entrusted to the believing community.

In order to assure that Jesus’ affirmation of children and the promises the congregation makes in baptism are honored, the following covenant regarding abuse of children will be in force in all areas of the congregation’s ministry.

Definition

In this covenant, children and youth refers to all persons less than 18 years of age. Adults are over 18 years of age.

Child abuse is defined by the legal codes of the State of Maryland as “physical or mental injury of a child by a parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or supervision of the child, under circumstances that indicate the child’s health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed.”

Discipline: Church Sunday School teachers, youth advisors, nursery supervisors and helpers shall discipline with kindness and with the goal of helping children develop a sense of responsibility and self-control. Corporal punishment shall not be used; this includes but is not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching and/or shaking. Punitive techniques that cause physical pain such as assuming an uncomfortable position are not appropriate. Physical restraint of children should be used only when someone’s safety is at risk. Appropriate discipline establishes clear expectations, provides rewards and incentives for acceptable behavior and uses verbal disapproval, loss of privileges and

redirection to teach children acceptable behavior.

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse means any act that involves the sexual molestation, exploitation of a child by any party or other person who has permanent or temporary care. In this Covenant sexual abuse or misconduct includes touching or non-touching interaction for the purpose of sexual stimulation between a child and an adult. Such behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and an adult, even if the child has consented. Inappropriate behavior may include sexual remarks, showing pornography, or watching any sexual activity.

Standards of Conduct

All persons who work in any way with children and youth at Takoma Park Presbyterian Church shall be persons with the respect and integrity for each individual child and maintain behavior that supports children's growth in faith and emotional stability.

An adult or youth who has been convicted of either child physical or sexual abuse may not serve in any church sponsored activity for youth and children. Signing this covenant is an affirmation of not having resigned from or been terminated from any volunteer or paid position for reasons relating to child abuse or sexual misconduct or having been convicted of any crime involving child abuse or sexual misconduct.

Church School teachers, youth advisors, nursery supervisors and helpers shall not touch or interact with children or youth in any way that is intended to be sexual stimulating. Physical expressions of affection shall not be excessive or imposed upon another individual. However, common expressions of affections (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical care taking (diaper changing, etc) are appropriate as long as respect for other's personal wishes about being touched are honored.

All persons who work with children and youth will work in pairs. This is for the safety and protection of adults as well as children.

All children and youth participating in church-sponsored activity, including transportation to and from activity shall have the permission of the child's parents or guardian. When practical this parental permission shall be in writing. Child safety restraints in cars as required by law shall be used for all children. When driving children and youth, it is recommended that they be transported as a group. Except in counseling situations, two adults shall be present with a single child.

Supervision and Accountability

Church School and Youth programs are under the supervision of the Session through the Christian Education (CE) committee. The CE committee shall staff all programs with at least two adults. The CE committee, Church school coordinator, and Church staff will

from time to time participate in these groups to help with supervision.

Training in the meaning of this Child Protection Covenant will be included annually in orientation programs for volunteers, new church staff, Session and Deacons. The covenant will be included in new member class packets and communicated to the whole congregation by a variety of means.

Volunteers in all church programming with children and youth shall have worshipped and participated in church activities for not less than six months or have been through the process of a background check at the expense of the church. All employees, as well as all individuals who are working with youth in a counseling situation or are chaperoning youth overnight, shall be subjected to a background check. Prior to volunteering with children and youth, persons shall have an orientation on this Child Protection Covenant and will be asked to sign the covenant and the attached Volunteer Information Form.

Reporting of Sexual abuse or misconduct

Any person witnessing or having reasonable suspicion of physical or sexual abuse of any child or youth shall report the information immediately to the Pastor, the Elder-chair of Personnel, the Elder-chair of Christian Education or the Clerk of Session. The report shall include what was witnessed, when, where and with whom. Any allegation concerning a pastor shall immediately be reported to Presbytery, and the Presbytery's policy for dealing with such allegations shall be in force. Any allegation of sexual abuse must and will be immediately reported to the proper authorities, according to federal, state, and county laws. The church will cooperate to the fullest with any law enforcement entity.

The Session will not take retaliatory action against anyone who makes such a report. Every reasonable effort will be made to protect the privacy and rights of all persons involved. All parties will be requested not to discuss the matter until a resolution is reached.

The Session will investigate all such complaints thoroughly and promptly, and may, prior to the completion of any such investigation, take such action as it deems appropriate. To the fullest sense practical, and to the extent allowed by law, all such complaints and the terms of their resolutions will be kept confidential. If an investigation confirms that misconduct has occurred, the Session will take whatever corrective action is appropriate, including discipline up to and including termination of the employee or volunteer.

Covenant

I, _____ have read and understand the standards and guidelines set forth in this Child Protection Covenant. I agree to abide by the provisions of this Child Protection Covenant.

Printed name _____

Signature _____

Date _____