



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

MANASSAS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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MANASSAS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

SECTION I – PURPOSE

Manassas Presbyterian Church (hereafter referred to as MPC) and its members are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of the Church. During each baptism of an infant, child or adult, the congregation pledges to uphold that person in the household of God. To these ends, the Session hereby adopts reasonable policies and procedures designed to preclude the possibility that any child or youth (meaning all those 17 years of age and younger) will be subjected to physical or emotional abuse or neglect by Church staff, paid childcare workers, teachers or volunteers while engaged in Church programs or activities. The policies and procedures adopted seek to balance the security, protection, and welfare of the children without unduly intruding on the privacy of staff and volunteers.

SECTION II – DEFINITIONS

Attachment A to this policy provides a summarized list of the complete legal definition of “*Abused or neglected child*” as found in Va. Code Ann. S 63.2-100 (2024). Also provided in Attachment A is the definition of sexual misconduct as found in Va. Code Ann. S 18.2-370.1 (2024), “*Taking indecent liberties with child by person in custodial or supervisory relationship; penalties*”.

Sexual misconduct is the comprehensive term used in this policy to include: sexual abuse of children or adults, rape or sexual assault, inappropriate sexualized behavior, viewing, storing or transmitting pornographic material for any purpose on church property, at Church sponsored events and/or with church owned devices such as but not limited to computers or cellular telephones. Sexual misconduct is an abuse of authority and power, breaching Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship to gain advantage over another for personal gratification in an abusive, exploitative and unjust manner. Child sexual abuse, rape, and sexual assaults are crimes; allegations that these offenses have occurred must be reported to the civil authorities and to Session.

SECTION III – STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Paid staff or adult or youth (under the age of 18) volunteers shall not touch or interact with children or youth in any way that is sexually stimulating, emotionally demeaning, or exploitative. This behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and an adult, whether or not the victim has consented. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), or physical care (diaper changes or first aid) are appropriate in this or any community of caring Christians. Staff and volunteers must be careful that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed upon another individual.

Those people working with children or youth should work in non-related pairs (this includes couples married to each other) Whenever possible, two adults should be present with the

children/youth at all activities. It is incumbent upon the volunteers and staff (to take reasonable and necessary steps to ensure two adults are present.

If you are the only adult in the room with children, seek out another adult, leave the door open, combine your class with another class, and seek out the Director of Family Ministries or Pastor to assist.

Early Learning Center (ELC) teachers and volunteers will seek assistance from the Early Learning Center Director when there is only one adult in the classroom.

Youth (age 17 and under) may serve as volunteers, but must work with an adult. The Session of MPC recommends that staff and volunteers transport children and youth in groups rather than alone. In ordinary circumstances, an unaccompanied adult should not drive a single child in a church sponsored activity without the permission of the child's parent or guardian, preferably in writing.

Virginia Statute (Va. Code Ann. S 63.2-1716 (2017) contains specific staffing ratio requirements for child day care centers operated by religious institutions exempt from licensure. The MPC ELC Director shall ensure that the ELC complies with those staffing ratios.

All overnight activities must have a minimum of two adults present; for mixed youth overnights, there must be both a male and female adult advisor. At no time should one adult be paired with a single youth in overnight arrangements unless they are family members. Parental permission in writing is required for all overnights. Any exceptions to the youth-adult ratio must be approved by Session and parents in advance.

Staff and volunteers that work with youth and children shall discipline with kindness with the goal of helping children develop a sense of responsibility and self-control. Corporal punishment of any kind within the Church is unacceptable. Corporal punishment 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. Derogatory remarks or comments that humiliate or frighten the child shall not be used. Appropriate discipline establishes clear expectations, provides rewards and incentives for acceptable behavior. Appropriate discipline uses verbal disapproval, loss of privileges, and redirection to teach children acceptable behavior.

Staff and volunteer adults and youth working with children and youth are also tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and to be aware of signs indicating neglect of the child's well-being.

SECTION IV – ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPERVISION

The Personnel Ministry Team, in coordination with the Family Ministry Team, will be responsible for the content and updating of this policy and for oversight as it applies to both staff and volunteers. The Personnel Ministry Team will be responsible for the practical application of the

policies for all MPC paid staff. The Family Ministry Team will be responsible for the practical application of the policies for volunteers working with children and youth throughout the Church. The Worship Ministry Team will provide support, as needed, regarding volunteers in the children and youth choirs. The ELC Director is responsible for the implementation of this policy in the day-to-day operations of the ELC.

Members of all Ministry Teams with programs involving children and youth and their staff advisors will seek volunteers in sufficient numbers to allow staffing of the programs as stated above.

The MPC ELC Director shall ensure that the ELC meets the employee and volunteer records check requirements of Va. Code Ann. S 63.2-1720.1 (2017).

A copy of this Child Protection Policy Statement will be made available to all employees and volunteers regularly participating in any MPC program or activity involving children and/or youth.

All staff and volunteers who work with children will complete a background check online.

Volunteers will have been active in the life of MPC for a period of six months or more before holding key positions involving children and youth. These volunteers are welcome to work in these programs along with another adult volunteer or staff member.

SECTION V – ADMINISTRATION

The MPC Session will review the policy at least every three years and update as necessary.

Reference checks, police background checks and child abuse checks shall be made when deemed necessary. All documentation associated with the child protection policy and all documentation concerning potential allegations of physical or emotional abuse or neglect will be held in confidence by the Personnel Ministry Team, the Pastor, the Director Family Ministries, Director of the ELC, and whichever staff person is responsible for the program area involved. All staff documentation will be maintained by the Personnel Ministry Team

In accordance with NCP policy, MPC shall ensure from its insurance agents, confirmation that the MPC liability insurance policy covers sexual misconduct liability for its programs and activities.

SECTION VI – MPC MEMBER AWARENESS

A copy of the approved Child Protection Policy will be made available to the congregation . All staff members who work with children and youth will be required to read and initial the policy every three years indicating their agreement to abide by the terms of the Child Protection Policy. All volunteers will be requested to read the Child Protection Policy statement every three years and sign an acknowledgement of understanding of its contents.

Church professionals (MPC Pastor and Director of Family Ministries and ELC Director) and Session Elders are required to attend training on the issues of sexual misconduct every three years.

SECTION VII – PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS AND REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

The issues of sexual and/or emotional abuse or neglect involving a minor, whether perceived or actual, need to be dealt with immediately, effectively, and with great discretion. Virginia law requires that allegations of abuse or neglect of children be reported immediately to proper authorities. In Prince William County that report is made to Child Protective Services (703-792-4200). It is the responsibility of the Pastor, ELC Director and/or the Personnel Ministry Team chair to see that such report has been made. In every case of alleged abuse or neglect of a child, the Pastor in consultation with the Administration and Finance Chair, shall contact the MPC insurance liability carrier; verify that Child Protective Services has been notified, and the proper written documentation of the allegations and proceedings is maintained.

The first person to learn of an incident of sexual abuse or misconduct (either by witness of the incident or from the victim) shall immediately report the incident to the staff member supervising the activity, the ELC Director (within the preschool) and as quickly as possible, to the Pastor. The Pastor, in consultation with the appropriate Ministry Team Chair, staff member, and Personnel Ministry Team chair shall conduct an initial inquiry. If the alleged offender is a professional staff member, the report should be made to the Personnel Ministry Team chair and the Clerk of Session. In the specific case of the complaint being made against any ordained minister, the Clerk of Session should notify the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk of National Capital Presbytery and request guidance on the procedure to be followed in processing the allegation and obtaining a Moderator for the Session. The Clerk shall also notify the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk of NCP if allegations have been raised against a member or non-ordained staff person.

Any volunteer or staff involved in the allegation shall not participate in programs involving children and youth until the investigation has been completed and resolved.

The Personnel Ministry Team chair and/or the Pastor are responsible for maintaining contact with the police, the victim's family and for determining further actions. The Pastor, as the Moderator of Session, will be responsible for advising the Session as appropriate.

Those individuals involved in any report or investigation should hold information received in strict confidence, subject to such disclosures as required under Church procedure or required by law. The National Capital Presbytery Sexual Abuse Response Team is available as a resource. Further action will be taken in accordance with legal requirements of the County and State and/or MPC and Presbytery personnel policies.

Attachment A - Virginia Code

Virginia Code: § 63.2-100. Definitions.

As used in this title, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Abused or neglected child" means any child less than 18 years of age:

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including, but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § [18.2-248](#);
2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child. Further, a decision by parents who have legal authority for the child or, in the absence of parents with legal authority for the child, any person with legal authority for the child, who refuses a particular medical treatment for a child with a life-threatening condition shall not be deemed a refusal to provide necessary care if (i) such decision is made jointly by the parents or other person with legal authority and the child; (ii) the child has reached 14 years of age and is sufficiently mature to have an informed opinion on the subject of his medical treatment; (iii) the parents or other person with legal authority and the child have considered alternative treatment options; and (iv) the parents or other person with legal authority and the child believe in good faith that such decision is in the child's best interest. No child whose parent or other person responsible for his care allows the child to engage in independent activities without adult supervision shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child, provided that (a) such independent activities are appropriate based on the child's age, maturity, and physical and mental abilities and (b) such lack of supervision does not constitute conduct that is so grossly negligent as to endanger the health or safety of the child. Such independent activities include traveling to or from school or nearby locations by bicycle or on foot, playing outdoors, or remaining at home for a reasonable period of time. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to limit the provisions of § [16.1-278.4](#);
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care, or an intimate partner of such parent or person, commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;

5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis;
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § [55.1-2000](#), with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a Tier III offender pursuant to § [9.1-902](#); or
7. Who has been identified as a victim of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking as defined in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7102 et seq., and in the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, 42 U.S.C. § 5101 et seq.

Virginia Code: § 18.2-370.1. Taking indecent liberties with child by person in custodial or supervisory relationship; penalties.

- A. Any person 18 years of age or older who, except as provided in § [18.2-370](#), maintains a custodial or supervisory relationship over a child under the age of 18 and is not legally married to such child and such child is not emancipated who, with lascivious intent, knowingly and intentionally (i) proposes that any such child feel or fondle the sexual or genital parts of such person or that such person feel or handle the sexual or genital parts of the child; or (ii) proposes to such child the performance of an act of sexual intercourse, anal intercourse, cunnilingus, fellatio, or anilingus or any act constituting an offense under § [18.2-361](#); or (iii) exposes his or her sexual or genital parts to such child; or (iv) proposes that any such child expose his or her sexual or genital parts to such person; or (v) proposes to the child that the child engage in sexual intercourse, sodomy or fondling of sexual or genital parts with another person; or (vi) sexually abuses the child as defined in subdivision 6 of § [18.2-67.10](#) is guilty of a Class 6 felony.
- B. Any person who is convicted of a second or subsequent violation of this section is guilty of a Class 5 felony, provided that (i) the offenses were not part of a common act, transaction or scheme; (ii) the accused was at liberty as defined in § [53.1-151](#) between each conviction; and (iii) it is admitted, or found by the jury or judge before whom the person is tried, that the accused was previously convicted of a violation of this section.

1982, c. 521; 1986, c. 503; 1991, c. 517; 2001, c. [840](#); 2005, c. [185](#); 2014, c. [794](#).

Note: Virginia sexual assault statutes indicate that intercourse with a child under 13 is rape regardless of consent and with a child under 15 is carnal knowledge, if there is consent. In concert with VA statutes and NCP policy, sexual misconduct for the purposes of this Child Protection Policy would also include verbal comments, pornographic videos or materials, obscene phone calls, allowing children to witness sexual activity and stalking.

Attachment B – Permission and Acknowledgement Form

I authorize Manassas Presbyterian Church to conduct a criminal background investigation and/or child abuse investigation if the check is deemed necessary.

I understand that I must report any new allegations, accusations of a criminal, traffic misdemeanor, or felony offense that could lead to a conviction to (the Pastor, Family Ministries Director, ELC Director, or Chair, Personnel Ministry Team) at MPC immediately.

I voluntarily release Manassas Presbyterian Church and any such organization or entity listed herein by me from liability involving the communication of information relating to my background or qualifications.

I have carefully read the Manassas Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy and I understand its contents. I agree to follow the MPC Child Protection Policy.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____