



**MARYLAND**  
presbyterian church

# Safe Church Covenant Protection Policy and Forms

A guide for members and friends of Maryland Presbyterian Church  
Revised 2023

## **Theological Foundation & Purpose**

The purpose of this Safe Church covenant is to be proactive in our efforts to provide an environment that protects and promotes the flourishing and wholeness of all of God's people. This includes being proactive in our efforts to prevent child abuse and sexual misconduct in our congregation and on church property, and to address it, if it occurs or is suspected, in a way that honors our biblical mandate to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). It is the intention of the session of Maryland Presbyterian Church that this Safe Church Covenant be implemented and enforced by staff and volunteers in all areas of our life together. In addition to this policy, all clergy, commissioned lay pastors, and certified Christian Educators are subject to the Presbytery of Baltimore Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Many thanks to the session of Light Street Presbyterian Church, for their guidance in the formation of this policy.

## **Conditions for Employment & Volunteering**

All paid staff and volunteers whose role include the supervision of minors are required to fill out and sign a confidential background self-disclosure form, and must be willing to agree to a background check and to attend a basic first aid training. Volunteers must be more than 18 years old unless supervised by an adult. Youth who are 14 years or older may assist under adult supervision. Please note that a criminal history will not necessarily exclude a person from volunteering. However, no one will be employed to work with children who has been convicted of, is currently being investigated for, has in any way admitted to or is on probation for charges of child abuse.

## **Standards of Conduct**

### *Sexual Misconduct & Physical Touching*

Maryland Presbyterian Church paid staff and volunteers shall not touch, photograph, videotape, or interact with children in any way that is intended or could be reasonably construed to have a sexual connotation or be sexually stimulating. This includes showing programs with age-inappropriate sexual or violent content according to the Rating System. Exceptions to the rating guidelines must be made in conversation with the pastor and parents.

Paid staff and volunteers shall take care to act in sexually appropriate ways while on church property or at a church-sponsored event. Common expressions of affection are appropriate as long as respect for others' personal wishes about being touched are honored and are not excessive or imposed upon another individual. Child abuse and sexual misconduct by paid

staff or volunteers are unacceptable and are to be reported by anyone if suspected (see “Guidelines for Reporting” below).

### *Meaningful Consent*

All sexual or romantic relationships of volunteers or paid staff should be ones of meaningful consent. Under no circumstances may youth leaders or clergy date youth. A clergy person who is seeking a romantic relationship may do so outside their own congregations, because the ministerial or supervisory relationship must be severed before ethically pursuing a sexual or romantic relationship. Sexual or romantic relationships that don't meet the criteria for meaningful consent are considered sexual misconduct on the part of the clergy person.

### *Discipline*

Paid staff and volunteers shall discipline children with kindness and with the goal of helping them develop a sense of responsibility and self-control. Corporal punishment of any kind by paid staff or volunteers on church property or at a church-sponsored event is unacceptable. Physical restraint of children should be used only when safety is at risk. Appropriate discipline establishes clear expectations and provides rewards and incentives for acceptable behavior. Appropriate discipline uses verbal disapproval, loss of privileges, and redirection to teach children acceptable behavior.

### *Verbal Harassment*

Unwelcome teasing, bullying, name-calling, or other derogatory comments or verbal harassment of any kind aimed at an individual or group of people is not acceptable. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to, negative or insulting comments referring to gender, sexual identity or expression, race, age, nationality, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, political opinions or affiliations, level of education, physical appearance, or type of employment.

### *Child/Adult Ratio*

Paid staff and volunteers working with children should always work in pairs; an adult may teach, tutor or lead an activity alone ONLY when there is free access to the classroom (door with window or open door) and other adults nearby (and are able to see and hear into the classroom). In the case of individual lessons offered by a contract employee, permission slips will be required.

Paid staff and volunteers will be sought in sufficient numbers, typically a 6:2 child to adult ratio, to allow for the staffing of the programs as stated above. Parents of participating

children may also participate in these programs and may be called upon to help with supervision.

### *Driving*

Only paid staff and pre-approved adult volunteers will be allowed to transport children by motor vehicle as part of a church-sponsored event. Drivers will be to notify the Program Director of any traffic violations in the last three years, as well as any that occur while a driver is an active volunteer or paid staff. Driving permission may be revoked at any point.

### *Leaving Church Grounds/Overnight Events*

Paid staff or volunteers wishing to conduct church sponsored activities with children off of church property must:

- Have approval of the session
- Have signed permission slips and emergency contact information on file
- Have an adequate number of chaperones (at least 2:6; never 1 adult)
- Observe traffic laws and drive carefully

Overnight activities should:

- Have approval of the session
- Have signed permission slips and emergency information on file
- Have an adequate number of chaperones (at least 2:6, absolutely not 1:1)
- Have mixed-gender chaperones for mixed-gender groups

### *Bathroom Policy*

When escorting children to the bathroom, staff should wait outside of the bathroom, unless assistance is requested by the child or the parent/guardian. Care should be taken to respect privacy and dignity.

### *General Safety & Medical Emergencies*

First-aid kits will be made available (and regularly updated) in both Church Kitchens. A portable AED will be kept in the Link. Ingestible medicines, including over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin or an antihistamine, will not be given to a child without his or her guardian's permission.

After a medical emergency or whenever significant medical care is provided on church property or at a church-sponsored event, a medical incident report form must be completed. Forms are available in the church office and with emergency health forms and in Appendix B.2.

### *About this Policy*

All paid staff and volunteers working with children must review the Safe Church Covenant annually or whenever substantive changes are made to the document (i.e. non-grammatical or stylistic), a record of which will be kept in the church office.

### **Guidelines for Reporting Child Abuse & Sexual Misconduct**

Paid staff or volunteers who have reason to suspect that a child of Maryland Presbyterian Church is currently the victim of neglect or physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, OR have reason to suspect that another paid staff or volunteer is perpetrating abuse or sexual misconduct, should immediately notify the Pastor. If the Pastor is the accused or is unavailable, then the Clerk of Session shall be notified. Clergy will discuss the matter with the reporting individual following the procedure in effect under the Policies Governing Charges of Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct section of this document, as found on the web.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources recommends that all persons report suspected child abuse or neglect to the local department of social services or to a local law enforcement agency. If you are a health practitioner, educator, human service worker or a police officer, you are required to report both orally and in writing any suspected child abuse or neglect.

### *Failure To Report*

Failure by a Maryland Presbyterian Church volunteer or paid staff to report knowledge of immediate danger, child abuse, or sexual misconduct on church grounds, at a church-sponsored activity or involving a MPC member, paid staff, or volunteer may result in the termination of employment and/or volunteer responsibilities, and may be punishable by the law.

### *Definitions*

This policy makes use of the definitions and guidelines of the Presbytery of Baltimore, which in turn makes use of the definitions and guidelines of the FaithTrust Institute, whose long experience with clergy sexual abuse prevention has become authoritative.

**Child abuse** refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (including Maryland Presbyterian Church volunteers and paid staff) that is not accidental and that harms or threatens to harm a child's physical health, mental health or welfare. This includes individuals that may not care for the child on a daily basis. The four basic types of child abuse are physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

- **Physical abuse** occurs when an adult injures a child and it is not an accident. It can include, but is not limited to: assault, shaking or slapping, burning or scalding, kicking, and strangling.
- **Neglect** is any maltreatment or negligence that harms a child's health, welfare or safety. It can include physical, emotional or educational neglect through actions including, but not limited to, abandonment; refusal to seek treatment for illness; inadequate supervision; health hazards in the home; ignoring a child's need for contact, affirmation and stimulation; providing inadequate emotional nurturance; knowingly permitting chronic truancy, keeping a child home from school repeatedly without cause; and failing to enroll a child in school (or home school).
- **Emotional abuse** is conduct which deeply affects a child's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve visible injuries. It can include, but is not limited to, close confinement, such as being shut in a closet, inadequate nurturance, extreme discipline, or knowingly permitting such behavior as drug or alcohol abuse.
- **Sexual abuse** happens when someone in an authoritative role, including, but not limited to, pastors, teachers, parents, and mentors, engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, child, staff member, or counseling client, or ignores a request to cease such behavior. **Meaningful consent** can occur in a sexual or romantic relationship when two people are relatively equal in power and when fear, coercion or manipulation is completely absent from their relationship. Any sexual contact or sexualized behavior is considered abuse, whether or not the victim/survivor is perceived to have given consent, when it occurs between an adult and a child, or between an adult and any non-minor who is determined by a medical or psychological professional to have been incapable of appraising the nature of the conduct or communicating unwillingness to be subject to unwelcome sexual interaction at the time of the incident. Sexual abuse can include physical contact from the person in the position of power or authority, such as (but not limited to)
  - sexual touch and repeated “accidental” touch of sexual areas of the body;
  - tickling or playful aggression that seems uncomfortable to the recipient;
  - a prolonged hug when a brief hug is customary behavior;
  - kissing on the lips when a kiss on the cheek would be appropriate;
  - pressing up against the body when hugging;
  - an inappropriate gift; and
  - sexual intercourse.

Sexual abuse can also include **sexual harassment** in the form of verbal behavior, in person or by technological means, initiated by a person in the position of power or authority when such behavior sexualizes a relationship. Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexualized verbal or physical behavior from another person, irrespective of a difference in power or authority. It includes, but is not limited to

- innuendo or sexual talk or joking;
- suggestive or critical comments about one's appearance or dress;
- sexual advances of any kind;
- tales of one's sexual exploits or experiences;
- questions about the intimate details of another's relationships;
- looking for sympathy about his or her partner's sexual inadequacies;
- exposing children to [inappropriate] sexual activity and/or video, internet or television content; and
- establishing an intimidating/hostile work environment in response to perceived rejection, including threats of retribution and requests or demands for secrecy that require persons to consent as a condition of employment.

**Sexual misconduct** is the comprehensive term used in this covenant to include: sexual abuse or exploitation, including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, as well as any associated verbal, emotional and/or spiritual abuse. Sexual misconduct often involves an abuse of authority and power, breaching Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship to gain advantage over another for personal gratification. Any sexual or romantic relationship between two adults that does not meet the criteria of meaningful consent may be considered grounds for a charge of sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct is not limited to physical contact, but may include gestures; spoken words; written contact; the viewing, storing or transmitting of pornographic material for any purpose on church property, in the presence of church members or visitors, or on church-owned devices such as, but not limited to, computers and cell phones.

## **Appendix A: Reporting Abuse or Neglect in Maryland**

### *Reporting Abuse or Neglect*

You should report suspected abuse or neglect to the local department of social services or to a local law enforcement agency where the alleged incident took place. If you are a health practitioner, educator, human service worker or a police officer, you are required to report both orally (immediately) and in writing (within 48 hours) any suspected child abuse or neglect.

#### **Baltimore City Social Services/Child Protective Services**

Tel: (410) 361-2235 (24 hours)

Fax: (443) 423-7003 or 7002, After hours (443) 423-5950

Address: 1900 N. Howard Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218

#### **Baltimore County Social Services/Child Protective Services**

Tel: (410) 853-3000 (Option 1) After hours: (410) 583-9398

Fax: (410) 853-3698

Address: Drumcastle Government Center, 6401 York Rd, Baltimore, Maryland 21212

**The Toll-Free reporting number for Maryland is 1-800-332-6347.**

**For information for other counties or states, visit**

**<http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/address.php>**

Oral reports should be made immediately and written reports must be made within 48 hours of contact which disclose the suspected abuse or neglect. A report must include:

- The name and home address of the child and the parent or other individual responsible for the care of the child;
- The present location of the child;
- The age of the child;
- Names and ages of other children in the home;
- The nature and extent of injuries or sexual abuse or neglect of the child
- Any information relayed by the individual making the report of previous possible physical or sexual abuse or neglect.
- Information available to the individual reporting that might aid in establishing the cause of the injury or neglect;
- The identity of the individual or individuals responsible for abuse or neglect



If reporting abuse or neglect of a child involving mental injury, a description of the substantial impairment of the child's mental or psychological ability to function that was observed and identified and why it is believed to be attributable to an act of maltreatment or omission of proper care and attention.

All reports of abuse must be made to the local departments of social services and the appropriate law enforcement agency. To initiate prompt handling of the report of suspected child abuse or neglect, employees of a local department of social services must make a report to the protective services unit.

## **Appendix B: Forms**

- 1) Background Self-Disclosure and Check Approval**
- 2) Incident Report Form**
- 3) Overnight/Event Medical Form**



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## Background Self-Disclosure Form

This part of the Safe Church Policy asks potential employees & any volunteer who intends to work closely with children to answer questions that are intended to protect children, volunteers, paid staff, & the church as a whole. Because answers to these questions are personal & sensitive, access to this part of the application will be limited to specific members of the church staff (Clergy & designated Program Directors). **Your answers will not automatically preclude you in all instances from ministry with children, unless you have been convicted, are currently being investigated for, or are on probation for child abuse.** All situations will be reviewed by Clergy & the designated Program Director; positions will be filled at the discretion of Clergy & Program Directors. Information contained in this affidavit will be kept in the strictest of confidence in association with all church, state & federal laws.

If you answer “yes” to any starred (\*\*\*) questions, please provide a detailed explanation in writing on the back of this form, or on a separate sheet of paper. Explanations may also be made directly in person. If you would like to discuss this part of the Safe Church policy, please contact the Pastor.

### Personal Information:

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### I would like to serve as a volunteer in the following capacity:

I wish to assist with Children and Youth Formation events.	YES / NO
I wish to be an approved driver. If yes, please list on the back of this form any at fault accidents or traffic violations you have received in the past three years, and attach a copy of your license and current proof of auto insurance.	YES / NO
Has your driver’s license ever been suspended or revoked?	YES / NO

Have you ever been convicted of, pleaded guilty to, or are you currently charged with, on probation for, or have you in any way admitted to a misdemeanor or felony charge?***	YES / NO
Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that might affect your ability to supervise, guide, or care for children/youth?***	YES / NO
Has your application or request to be a children/youth volunteer, or application for employment in connection with a child/youth related job, such as at a school, day care facility, or other child/youth related activity ever been declined?***	YES / NO
Do we have your permission to contact any organizations or groups mentioned in your responses to the above questions?	YES / NO
Do we have your permission to run a background check?	YES / NO

I affirm under the penalties of perjury that the information contained in this application, including any written or verbal explanations of the above answers, is within my personal knowledge and is true and correct.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Background Check Run/Received on: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Accident/Incident Report

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

Date and Time of Accident/Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Accident/Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe Accident/Incident:

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Describe nature of injury:

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Witness(es) to accident/incident:

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What action was taken?

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# Maryland Presbyterian Church

## Youth Medical and Release Form



### Individual Information

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

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Current Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

If a parent or guardian cannot be reached in an emergency, please contact:

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

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Medical Information

The following medical information is required to ensure that your youth's needs are met while taking part in church programs. All information will be kept confidential and will be available only to staff, adult leaders (if necessary), and medical professionals. In the event of an emergency, we will make every effort to contact the designated parent/guardian.

Health Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Physician: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Does your insurance require a second opinion before emergency procedures? YES / NO

Date of last COVID booster: \_\_\_\_\_ Last tetanus shot: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please list any physical or mental health conditions that would be helpful or important for us to know about, and any accommodations needed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please list current medications and dosage; and give instructions for administering:

\_\_\_\_\_  
The staff may administer the following if needed:

- \_\_\_ aspirin
- \_\_\_ acetaminophen
- \_\_\_ ibuprofen
- \_\_\_ eye ointments

- \_\_\_ antihistamine or decongestant
- \_\_\_ motion sickness medication
- \_\_\_ laxative or anti-diarrhea medication
- \_\_\_ antibacterial or antibiotic ointment

Specific instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

### Medical Release and Permission

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my child (print name), \_\_\_\_\_, permission to attend and participate in MPC's programs. I understand that all precautions will be taken to safeguard the health and safety of participants. In the event of an emergency, I authorize calling a physician at my expense to provide whatever medical or surgical treatment is necessary. I understand that I will be notified as soon as possible in case of an emergency affecting my child.

I agree to indemnify and hold harmless Maryland Presbyterian Church, its officers, agents, volunteers and employees from any and all claims, damages, expenses or injuries arising out of or incident to my or my child's participation in this project, unless such loss or injury results directly from the neglect or willful act of an officer, agent, volunteer or employee of Maryland Presbyterian Church acting within the scope of their employment.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_