

## **Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy**

Foundational commitment: Children, youth, and adults are a gift from God, the care and protection of which Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church takes seriously.

### **1.0 Purpose**

The congregation of Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church ("Woods Church") is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all who participate in the ministries and activities sponsored by the church. This policy serves as our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others, and seeks to create a culture of transparency and accountability.

This policy is intended:

- To be faithful to our baptismal vows as we seek to welcome children and remove stumbling blocks.
- To provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults at "Woods Church"
- To protect children and youth from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse while participating in "Woods Church" activities.
- To assure that "Woods Church" complies with relevant Maryland State Rules and Regulations
- To guide "Woods Church" as an institution in the conduct of its employees and volunteers and prevent incidents and allegations of child abuse.

### **2.0 Persons Affected**

Note: No child, youth, or vulnerable adult may give "consent."

#### **2.1 Minors**

2.1.1 A person considered a minor is someone who is 17 years old and under

2.1.2 A "youth" is a child who is between 11 and 17 years old.

2.1.2a High school seniors who have reached the age of 18 are still considered youth and must abide by the guidelines set for youth while participating in a "Woods Church" sponsored event.

"2.1.3 Minors must always be under adult supervision and have access to an adult or a means of contacting an adult during church sponsored activities. (i.e. common meeting place and time, cell phones, walkie-talkies, etc.)"

*Formerly 2.2, "Youth Leadership Initiative", has been moved to its own separate document*

## 2.2 Adult Volunteers

2.3.1 An Adult Volunteer is 18 years old.

2.3.2 An Adult Volunteer can fill the role of Nursery Worker, Sunday School Teacher, Confirmation Teacher or Small Group Leader, Youth Advisor, Trip Chaperone, or any other event that includes minors who are 4 or more years younger than they are.

## 2.3 Employees

2.3.1 An Employee is someone hired by "Woods Church".

2.3.2 Employees 18 years old or older are considered adults and may count as an adult in the Two Adult Rule (7.1).

## 2.4 Vulnerable Adults

2.4.1 Any adult over the age of 17 without the cognitive ability to give consent. (PCUSA Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Its Procedures)

## 3.0 General Policy Statements

3.1 It is the policy of "Woods Church" to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all minors participating in activities sponsored by "Woods Church" and to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect in accordance with Maryland law.

3.2 Consistent with the Mission Statement of "Woods Church" and the guiding principles that govern the church, it is the policy of "Woods Church" not to place employees in positions, or to assign volunteers to tasks, that cause them to come into contact with minors if the employee or volunteer has been convicted of or is convicted or has substantiated charges of crimes against minors, child abuse or child neglect.

3.3 It is the policy of "Woods Church" to educate its employees and volunteers in the prevention and identification of child abuse and neglect and to articulate the appropriate action to take when abuse or neglect is suspected (See staff employee handbook.)

## 4.0 Employees

4.1 With respect to hiring new clergy, the pastoral nominating committee will rely upon the Presbytery to be responsible for screening applicants on abuse and sexual misconduct issues.

4.2 With respect to existing employees and the hiring of all other employees of "Woods Church", the Church shall implement the following screening procedures:

4.2.1 Applicants shall complete an application form and the standard interview in which appropriate questions will be asked relating to matters involving child abuse and neglect.

4.2.2 Job references shall be verified.

4.2.3 Applicants shall submit to a criminal background check and completion of the Child Protection Policy Information Form (see Attachment 1), to be repeated every 2 years on condition of continued eligibility.

4.2.4 Applicants for positions at the Child Development Center shall comply with all background verification procedures required by law.

4.2.5 Successful applicants will be trained on the Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy as stated below (5.5).

4.3 All employees of "Woods Church" will be required to receive Child Protection Training.

## **5.0 Volunteers**

5.1 "The Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Children's Ministry, Coordinator for Children's Ministry and/or Director of Operations" will search the National Sex Offender Registry and other publicly available lists of registered sex offenders for the names of any "adult" volunteers who serve in positions that are reasonably expected to bring them in contact with minors. "Every two years, adult volunteers will be searched through the National Sex Offender Register and other publicly available lists or registered sex offenders.

5.2 "Woods Church" shall require any "adult" volunteer who serves in a position that is reasonably expected to bring them into contact with minors to "complete" a national criminal background check "administered by the Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Children's Ministry, Coordinator of Children's Ministry, and/or Director of Operations" before "becoming an adult volunteer." Adult volunteers will complete a national criminal background check every two years.

5.3 All volunteers for "Woods Church" in positions where they provide supervision for minors are required to be a member of "Woods Church" for at least six (6) months, or are parents/legal guardians of children participating in the program. In the event they have not formally joined the church, they must be a person who has demonstrated a practice of regular involvement in "Woods Church" and will be paired with current members of six (6) months or more, or be approved in advance by the session.

5.4 All volunteers for "Woods Church" in positions that are reasonably expected to bring them into contact with minors must read, sign and adhere to the "Woods Church" Code of Conduct for adults working with children and/or youth (see Attachment 2).

#### 5.5 Training:

5.5.1 All Adult Volunteers must complete the Child Protection Policy Training, sign a copy, and return the copy to the Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Children's Ministry, Coordinator of Children's Ministry, or Director of Operations.

5.5.2 All employees, all church officers, and any leaders, who work with children and youth, are required to attend a training session and sign the relevant documents regarding child and youth protection. The church will offer regular training opportunities. This training will include the following:

- The need for the Child Protection Policy
- Definition of child abuse
- Preconditions for child sexual abuse to occur
- Definition of inappropriate conduct
- Church policies governing working with children and youth
- Two Adult Policy
- Procedures for reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues
- Procedures for responding to allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues

- Supervising and chaperoning children and/or youth
- "Training for Youth Leaders"

5.5.3 Following successful completion of the above training and approval of their application, employees and volunteers are eligible to work with children and youth at "Woods Church." At times, Pastors or Directors may require additional refresher courses on Child Protection before weeklong programming such as Vacation Bible School or Summer Trips.

## **6.0 Outside Groups Using "Woods Church" Facilities**

6.1 All leaders of non "Woods Church" sponsored groups and events using "Woods Church" facilities, which have direct supervision of children and youth, will be provided with and are expected to adhere to these policies. Upon receipt of the policy from "Woods Church", the leaders must "be trained on" the Child Protection Policy

6.2 Given the nature of the outside groups that use "Woods Church" facilities, "Woods Church" will not perform background checks, seek personal and professional references, review employment records, or obtain civil and criminal records for such groups. Leaders of outside groups will be invited to attend "Woods Church" scheduled training classes and are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.

## **7.0 Supervision Requirements of minors and vulnerable adults requiring assistance for All Staff/Volunteers**

7.1 Two Adult Rule: All volunteers who participate with minors at the Church or at a church related activity must observe a "two adult" rule. Adults must remain in sight of one another at all times except in emergency situations.

7.1.1 "When one-to-one conversations occur between an adult and a child or youth, another unrelated adult is either to be present or capable of visually monitoring the conversation.

7.1.1a Examples include:

7.1.1aa Planned or unplanned on-site conversations can take place in a public location, away from where others can hear but in view of other adults.

7.1.1ab Planned off-site conversations/meetings can take place in a public place (such as a coffee shop or restaurant) in view of other adults.

7.1.1b A Responsible Person shall be informed about the appointment or plans in advance. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if a child or youth discloses a situation pertaining to abuse, neglect, self-harm, or exploitation because of mandatory reporting laws."

7.1.2 "If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youth, during a church sponsored event, that adult shall report those circumstances to the Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Children's Ministry or Director of Operations as soon as possible."

7.2 Since immediate family members cannot be compelled to testify against one another in a court of law, all related adults count as one adult in the context of the "Two Adult Rule". Adults in leadership roles are expected to avoid situations where they are alone with children and youth by having leadership teams of at least two adults for all activities. The presence of two or more adults prevents awkward circumstances where child abuse could occur or be alleged, allows shared leadership, and facilitates appropriate discipline. This two-adult policy extends to all on-campus overnight and off campus-related events. Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany children or youth on an overnight outing as a representative of "Woods Church".

7.3 Restroom Policy "for Children Five Years Old or Under":

7.3.1 When using the restroom away from the classroom, small children, ages five (5) and under, must be accompanied by two (2) screened adults. Before the child enters the restroom, the adult will enter the restroom and make sure it is safe.

7.3.2 If a child, requires assistance in the restroom, 1 adult shall stand in the doorway within eye contact of the other adult who is assisting the child.

7.3.3 When restrooms are directly accessible to children from the classroom where the children's activities are taking place and not accessible to the general public, children can be allowed to use the restrooms alone.

#### 7.4 "Adult to Child and/or Youth Ratio"

7.4.1 The required "Adult to Child and/or Youth Ratio" for chaperones for any ministry with children or youth that is held within a contained classroom shall be 1:10, or as required by Maryland State Law. There will be no fewer than 2 adults.

7.4.2 The required "Adult to Child and/or Youth Ratio" for chaperones for any ministry with children or youth that is held off campus shall be 1:6 or as required by Maryland Law.

7.4.3 The required non-custodial supervision "Adult to Child and/or Youth Ratio" ratios for chaperones for overnight trips shall be 1:6, however There will not be fewer than 2 adults.

#### 7.5 Overnight Trips

7.5.1 During overnight events minors and adults shall not use the bathing facilities at the same time. Adult leaders should change clothes in a separate area if possible.

7.5.2 Where there are separate sleeping facilities for each gender the gender of the adult supervisors must be the same as the youth in consultation with the director for that ministry or other appropriate staff.

7.5.4 Youth who participate in overnight events must sign a covenant regarding acceptable behavior requirements.

## 7.6 Medicines:

7.6.1 A first aid kit will be available "and administered by a First Aid Trained Adult" which contains basic over the counter medication such as Tylenol, Benadryl, Neosporin, and etc. as well as traditional first aid supplies. Parents must complete the current medical information form indicating over the counter medications that adult volunteers are allowed to give to their child as well as any known allergies.

7.6.2 If the youth requires medication he or she will administer it to himself/herself after receiving it from the designated adult who keeps the medications (with the exception of epi-pens, inhalers and insulin, which can remain with the youth).

7.6.3 If the youth requires a prescription medication the parent must sign a written permission form authorizing the designated adult volunteer to administer the medication. The parent must also provide detailed written instructions regarding dosage, frequency, etc.

## 7.7 Communications

When directly communicating with individual Minors and Vulnerable Adults on behalf of "Woods Church" or "Woods Church" programs, outside of the church framework, staff/volunteers should inform the parents/guardians of each Minor and Vulnerable Adult included in the communication, providing the parent/guardian the opportunity to disapprove or to participate in the communication.

## 8.0 Reporting Requirements

8.1 Under Maryland law, any person who has reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected MUST report it to the Department of Social Services or the police immediately by telephone as soon as possible. Follow all instructions given by the Department of Social Services.

8.2 An individual will not conduct an investigation on their own.



8.2.1 Do NOT interview the child. This is a highly specialized field which requires special training and it must be done correctly to assure accurate and untainted information. Leave it to the professionals.

8.2.2 Do NOT confront or interview the suspected abuser.

8.2.3 Once you have reported the suspected abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services do not disclose it to anyone. Do not contact the parents. Leave that to the authorities.

8.3 Every employee and volunteer leader at "Woods Church" is required to report any situation which presents a suspicion that child abuse or neglect may have occurred. Such report shall be made to DSS in addition to the "Senior Pastor", in no case more than 24 hours after such occurrence. Use the form provided online in the DSS website.

8.4 Reporting abuse or neglect must be done by the person who saw or received the information. This is a responsibility that may NOT be delegated to anyone else.

8.5 If the reporter is a health practitioner, police officer, educator, or human service worker, they shall follow their professional guidelines. If the abuse or concern is on church property or affiliated with a church sponsored event, a copy of the complaint will be provided to the Director of Youth and Senior Pastor.

8.6 If the reporter is not a person in a category listed above in he or she shall follow the instructions of Maryland law and prepare a written report as soon as possible and give it to the Senior Pastor.

8.6.1 The oral report as well as the written report shall contain the following information, if known, in accordance with Maryland reporting forms.

- The name, age and home address of the child
- The name and home address of the child's parent or other person who is responsible for the child's care

- The whereabouts of the child
- The nature and extent of the abuse or neglect of the child, including any evidence or information available to the reporter concerning possible previous instances of abuse or neglect
- Any other information which would help to determine the cause of the abuse or neglect and the identity of the offender

8.6.2 Under Maryland law you are protected from civil suit if you report Child abuse or neglect in good faith.

8.6.3 Under Maryland law the name of the reporter is never released.

8.7 All concerns and reporting shall be kept confidential.

## **9.0 Allegations**

9.1 In the event of an allegation of child abuse, a called and installed pastor is subject to the rules set forth in the Book of Order. The following procedures shall be followed at Woods for a volunteer or employee (*staff manual shall govern this*).

9.1.1 Every allegation shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.

9.1.2 The "Director of Operations" will immediately contact the "Woods Church" attorney and liability insurance carrier.

9.1.3 Written documentation, relating to the matter, shall be kept in a confidential file.

9.1.4 The Head of Staff, "Director of Operations" and/or the "HR Ministry" may complete an internal investigation in addition to that which will be carried out by the authorities, following the required notifications.

9.1.5 An individual accused of child abuse may be placed on leave from his/her responsibilities at the discretion of the Senior Pastor, "Director of Operations" or "HR Ministry". For employees, this may be with or without pay.

9.1.6 To protect the child or youth from further possible abuse or harassment, "Woods Church" will prohibit the accused individual access to the alleged victim and other children and youth in ministries sponsored by "Woods Church" during the time of investigation.

9.1.7 In the event of a "ruled out" allegation, the Head of Staff or the "Director of Operations" will decide as to whether the individual will be allowed to return to work as an employee or volunteer at "Woods Church". An employee has the right to appeal the decision to the "HR Ministry". A volunteer has the right to appeal the decision to the Clerk of Session who will address the situation with the Session in the appropriate time and manner.

9.1.8 "Woods Church" employees and volunteers shall cooperate fully with the investigation authorities.

9.1.9 All "Woods Church" employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the HR Ministry." The Head of Staff, or his/her designee, shall be the only person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information, such as to a protective services investigator or a police officer.

9.1.10 All "Woods Church" employees and volunteers are expected to avoid denial, minimization, or blame during the period of investigation of the allegation.

## **10.0 Addressing Known Offenders Who Are Members of "Woods Church"**

10.1 At "Woods Church", we seek to live in covenant with God and with one another and to be a redemptive community to all who are members. We also acknowledge that redemptive action and responsible action can, at times, be in tension or even in seeming opposition. We embrace this fact as a natural part of seeking to be the church in the world. We adopt these procedures for ministering to those among us

who are known offenders of children and youth while maintaining our focus on protecting the children and youth of our church.

10.2. Known offenders will be encouraged to make their status and any terms of probation known to the Head of Staff.

10.3 As circumstances warrant, the Steering Committee may identify a known offender to church employees and leaders whose ministries should be informed of this fact.

### **11.0 Insurance**

It is the Session "of Woods Church's" responsibility to assure that the church's liability policy includes all potential areas of coverage including sexual misconduct.