

# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY for VOLUNTEERS

## Highlands Presbyterian Church

God gifted humans with gender and sexuality. God made humans male and female and saw that this was good (Gen. 1:27; 2:21-23; 5:1-2). The Bible teaches that any good gift from God can become twisted or corrupted and that such disorder causes injury, shame, and humiliation (Gen. 3:8-13 and II Sam. 11:1-12:15).

The Gospel calls Highlands Presbyterian Church to minister to all of God's people and to show special tenderness and care for those who are vulnerable, including children, youth and disabled adults, and those experiencing illness, loss, and brokenness.

It is also imperative that we seek to minimize the vulnerability to unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our church and its volunteers may experience in the fulfillment of their duties. Our ministries cannot succeed unless the church has taken care to ensure that they are safe for all.

**Prohibition:** Sexual misconduct is contrary to Christian principles and is forbidden in the Scriptures in every form. Church volunteers must comply with the requirements which follow.

**Definitions:** For the purposes of this policy:

**A.** "Sexual Misconduct" is any sexual conduct which arises from the work of the church; involves a church volunteer and another person; and constitutes either unlawful activity, sexual harassment, youth peer sexual harassment, or activity contrary to the moral instructions or doctrines of the Bible as set forth in the constitutional standards of the Presbyterian Church in America (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, and the Book of Church Order) and interpreted by the Session of the church.

**B.** Volunteers.

1. "Volunteer Staff" refers to volunteers whose positions require regular and consistent interaction with children, youth, or disabled adults. For the purposes of this policy Volunteer Staff includes only the following positions:
  - a. Church officers;
  - b. Sunday School teachers and coordinators;
  - c. Nursery and preschool teachers, coordinators, and regular assistants;
  - d. Wednesday Ministry teachers and coordinators,
  - e. Vacation Bible School directors, classroom teachers and assistants;
  - f. Outreach volunteers whose service with community organizations brings them into regular contact with children, youth, or disabled adults;
  - g. Student Ministry Small Group leaders and assistants;
  - h. Overnight retreat and ministry trip chaperones.
2. "Volunteer Staff" does not include substitutes for the positions described above, or volunteers whose duties do not bring them into regular interaction with children, youth, or disabled adults.
3. Minors will be considered to be "Volunteer Staff" when they assist in ministries to

children or youth and there is at least 4 years difference in age between the volunteer and the participant, and where contact with those participants is regular and consistent.

4. "Casual Volunteer" refers to all volunteers other than "Volunteer Staff."

C. "Sexual harassment" is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, or other verbal, written or physical conduct of a sexual nature when such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's volunteer service or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

D. "Youth peer sexual harassment" is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, or other verbal, written, electronic, or physical conduct of a sexual nature by a minor or between minors which has the purpose or effect of intimidating, embarrassing, or humiliating the other person.

**Distribution of Policy:** Ministry department directors shall distribute this policy to all present and future volunteer staff seeking to serve within their departments.

**Screening of Volunteers:** All current and prospective volunteer staff shall be asked to complete an initial ministry application. The ministry department director and the Executive Pastor will review every completed ministry application. The church may also check at least two references to confirm the information provided on the ministry application. The church will perform a background screening of volunteer staff. Refusal to submit to such a background screening will result in immediate termination of consideration of the applicant for the volunteer position. The Session may review at its discretion any application or search result volunteer staff person at Highlands. Completed applications, screening reports, reference forms and associated documents will remain in confidential locked files in the church office. Returning volunteers will be requested to complete a renewal application annually.

**Waiting Period:** All candidates for volunteer staff positions must be members of the church. In addition, they must have been regularly involved in the life of the congregation for six months regardless of membership before they will be considered for any ministry position involving regular contact with children, youth, or disabled adults.

**Training:** All volunteer staff and others as designated by the Session must attend designated programs (when offered) on methods of recognizing and preventing sexual misconduct involving children and others.

**Obligation to Report:** There are two distinct types of reporting: internal and external. Internal reporting provides notice to church officials of suspected instances of sexual misconduct and harassment and allows the Church to investigate and, when appropriate, apply corrective measures. External reporting provides notice to local law enforcement agencies.

A. Internal Reporting - All Instances of Misconduct or Harassment. Volunteer staff who know or reasonably suspect an incident of sexual misconduct or harassment, or who believe that they are victims of sexual misconduct or harassment, shall immediately provide a detailed written Injury Report to his or her ministry department director, who in turn will provide a report of the situation to the Executive Pastor. The Executive Pastor will then notify the Senior Pastor

and the chairman of the Ministry Committee of the situation. Should the situation involve an employee, the Executive Pastor will notify the chairman of the Personnel Committee as well. Should the situation involve the volunteer's ministry department director, the initial report should be made directly to the Executive Pastor, a member of the Session's Ministry Committee, or to another member of the executive staff.

- B. External Reporting - Child Abuse or Neglect Only. Special circumstances apply when the incident involves the abuse or molestation of a minor. The Mississippi Code (1972 annotated) identifies certain professions as mandatory reporters of suspected abuse or neglect. Mandatory reporters include attorneys, doctors, dentists, interns, residents, nurses, psychologists, teachers, social workers, school principals, children's caregivers, ministers, and law enforcement officers, or any other person having reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect. It is not necessary to have absolute proof of abuse or neglect before reporting. It is the responsibility of the authorities to do their own investigation of the situation. If volunteer staff suspect child abuse or neglect, they must inform their ministry department director immediately (see A) so that the church can begin its initial investigation and determine how to proceed in notifying the proper authorities.
- C. Other Reports. The Executive Pastor (or his designee) must promptly notify the church's insurance carrier upon notice of sexual harassment, abuse or molestation.

**Investigation of Incident Reports:** Whenever a facially credible allegation of sexual misconduct is received, the individual receiving the report shall immediately consult with the Executive Pastor, who will contact church legal counsel and promptly notify the Senior Pastor and the chairman of the Ministry Committee of the Session. Should the situation involve an employee, the Executive Pastor will notify the chairman of the Personnel Committee as well.

The Ministry Committee, assisted by the Senior Pastor and the Executive Pastor, will undertake an investigation and maintain a high level of concern for the alleged victim, the family of the alleged victim, the person reporting the incident, the alleged perpetrator, and others potentially affected by such circumstances. In the case of suspected child abuse or molestation, the Executive Pastor will contact the church's legal counsel immediately to seek a written opinion as to the manner in which the church should report the suspected abuse to law enforcement authorities. The written opinion should be obtained within 24 hours after the incident is reported to the Executive Pastor, and will be acted on immediately.

- A. Upon receipt of a facially credible allegation that the alleged perpetrator may represent a risk to the alleged victim or others, the alleged perpetrator will be immediately relieved of all ministry responsibilities with the church pending the outcome of the investigation.
- B. The Executive Pastor or his or her designee and the Ministry Committee shall take steps to preserve the confidentiality of documents created by their investigation.
- C. In the case of the possible abuse or molestation of a child, the Executive Pastor (or his designee) will ensure that the child's parent or guardian is immediately informed that the possible abuse has occurred.
- D. When accusations are made of sexual misconduct of any kind, contact by a member of

Ministry Committee with the alleged victim and family should promptly be initiated. The Ministry Committee should also make contact with corroborating (and other) witnesses, and the alleged perpetrator as necessary for the purposes of gathering information and offering assistance.

- E. Upon conclusion of its investigation, the Ministry Committee shall report its findings and recommendations to the Session for final disposition. If church discipline is indicated, the Committee may recommend that disciplinary process be initiated according to the Rules of Discipline of the Book of Church Order.

**Media Contact:** Any media contact regarding an incident of sexual misconduct must be directed to the Executive Pastor or his designee.

**Action Where Guilt Determined:** Any church volunteer who admits to, does not contest, or is found guilty of an incident of sexual misconduct shall be removed from all positions of ministry within the church. Future ministry participation will be in accordance with the discipline process carried out in (E.) above. Anyone who admits to, does not contest, or is found guilty of an incident of youth peer sexual harassment shall be immediately disciplined and reported to his or her parents.

**Adopted by the Session of Highlands Presbyterian Church, September 2008**