

Policy on Interaction with Children and Youth__ 10000

POLICY ON CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

The congregation and employees of the First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange (the “Church”) are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in the ministries and activities sponsored by the Church. The Church is further committed to protecting all children and youth associated with Church ministries and activities from child abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse or molestation. This Policy reflects the commitment of this Church to preserving the Church as a place of safety and protection for all who enter, especially children and youth, and as a place where all people can experience the love of God through healthy relationships with others. This Policy also reflects the considered judgment of the Church to adopt an aggressive approach to the prevention of child abuse and an aggressive response to any allegations or incidents thereof.

General Policies

1. All persons desiring to work with children or youth as part of any ministry or activity of the Church shall first submit in writing an application for employment or volunteer status on a form prescribed by the Church. Such persons shall make full and complete disclosures of all information requested on such application. The application and information disclosed therein shall be regarded as confidential by the Church and all persons associated with the evaluation thereof. The applications shall be evaluated by the staff person responsible for the particular area of ministry or activity. The evaluation and decision concerning acceptance shall be made in accordance with the policies set forth herein.
2. The Church will seek volunteers and employees to work with the children and youth of the Church who have a love of God and commitment to the Christian education of children and youth and the exposure of children and youth to the love of God.
3. No person, whether or not a member of this Church, shall have any right or entitlement to work with children or youth in Church activities. The decision to allow a person to be associated with children and youth in Church activities and ministries shall be guided first and foremost by the concern for the well-being of the children and youth. It is a privilege accorded by the Church for any individual to participate in those activities, ministries, or programs.
4. The Church will require all persons seeking involvement with children or youth to permit the Church to obtain a criminal history and driving history when appropriate from the appropriate law enforcement agency concerning such person.
5. The Church recognizes that all persons have inherent worth as children of God and that all persons can seek forgiveness and can receive salvation, regardless of prior crimes. Moreover, the Church supports the rehabilitation of persons who have previously been convicted of crimes. Nevertheless, because of the reported incidents of recidivism involving persons previously convicted of child abuse and

because of the paramount importance this Church places upon the protection of children and youth, no person who has ever been convicted of child abuse or who has had a substantiated claim history from DFACS will be permitted to serve as an employee or volunteer in any activity or ministry associated with the Church in which children or youth participate. For the purpose of this Policy, child abuse shall include any act of abuse, neglect, molestation, or exploitation of children, whether emotional, physical, sexual, or economic, and shall include conviction of any such act in any state or jurisdiction.

6. The policies and procedures set forth herein shall apply to all activities and ministries sponsored by the Church, regardless of time or place, and shall also apply to any activity permitted on the property or premises of the Church, regardless of Church sponsorship. The only exception to this rule of applicability are the programs of organizations independent of the Church, such as the Boy Scouts of America, if those organizations already have in place a set of policies and procedures concerning child abuse that are supplied to the Church in writing and that, in the opinion of the Administrative Council, adequately address the concerns expressed in this Policy. A copy of such policies of those organizations shall be kept on file with the Church and made available to the parents of any child or youth involved in those programs at any time.
7. All adult volunteers involved with children and youth in our Church must have been regular attendees and active participants of our congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
8. All adult volunteers, employees, or participants in any ministry or activity involving children or youth associated with the Church shall be required to attend regular training and education programs designated by the Christian Education Council to keep those persons informed of Church policies and state laws regarding child abuse and for such other purposes as the council shall designate.
9. All persons associated with Church ministries or activities involving children or youth shall covenant that they will take all necessary and proper action to ensure the protection of the children and youth involved in those ministries or activities.
10. Whenever in this Policy reference is made to adult volunteers, the rules and policies set forth in this Policy shall be equally applicable to all persons working in the program, activity, or ministry of the Church, regardless of age and regardless of status as volunteer or employee.
11. The Administrative Council shall promulgate such rules and regulations as are not inconsistent with this Policy to carryout the requirements and intent of this Policy. Such rules and regulations shall be made available to the participants, volunteers, employees, and parents of children and youth involved in those activities to which the rules and regulations apply. Such rules and regulations shall be submitted to the Session for periodic review and for review and modification by the Administrative Council when determined necessary or proper.
12. Whenever strict adherence to the provisions of this Policy are not possible or are inconsistent with the needs of the particular Church ministry or activity, the Minister and the Chair of the Administrative Council can, in writing, waive any specific requirement of this Policy for any such specific activity; provided that, all

such waivers shall be kept on file with the Church and submitted to the Administrative Council for review and ratification.

13. The Church recognizes that volunteers make a valuable and necessary contribution to the activities and ministries of the Church. The Church also recognizes that these persons must be given some discretion and flexibility in dealing with situations as they arise. Therefore, the Church will not adopt rigid guidelines for interaction with children and youth, but the Church, through this Policy and other rules promulgated by the Administrative Council, will specify and define certain basic rules that should govern all such interaction.
14. All persons working with children and youth shall observe the Two-Adult Rule at all times. For the purposes of this Policy, the Two-Adult Rule means that no adult shall be alone with one or more children or youth at any time. All adults working in the activity have the responsibility of ensuring that no adult is ever left alone with a child, a youth, or several children or youth without a second adult present. Although the preference is that two adults be physically present in the same location as the children or youth at all times, for the purposes of this policy, a person is not considered to be alone with a child or youth whenever a second adult is so positioned in proximity to the child or youth that the second adult could be physically present with the child or youth at any time or upon outcry from the child or youth. ***(For the sake of this policy “proximity” shall relate both to the sight and sound. Example: during a routine elementary age Sunday School class, when a child needs to use the restroom, a teacher may position him or herself in the class doorway able to visually supervise the child walking to and into the restroom and remain within sight of the partner teacher who remains in the classroom. Similar creative approaches which permit teachers both to supervise children and remain in proximity with one another can eliminate most needs for additional adults to be present to satisfy the two person rule).***
15. Except in an emergency, no person working with children or youth shall discipline children or youth in any physical manner, but shall report any discipline problems that may arise to the activity supervisor. No person working with children or youth shall at any time be verbally abusive toward or in the presence of children or youth, and no such person shall use profane or vulgar language in the presence of any child or youth.
16. No adult shall expose any child or youth to any activity, material, conversation, or other matter of a sexual nature, or concerning sex or sexuality, regardless of the context or circumstances. The only exception to this rule is if the exposure is part of a program or ministry concerning sex or sexuality presented from a Christian perspective sponsored or endorsed by the Church and approved by the Senior Minister or his designee.
17. No adult shall allow himself or herself to appear to any child or youth in a state of nakedness, and no adult shall be in the presence of any naked child or youth, except as may be necessary under the circumstances and then only if in the presence of at least two adults.
18. No adult shall endanger the mental health of a child through chronic or persistent acts including rejection, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting or constant criticism.

Neither shall an adult use religious references to shame or motivate a child by guilt into a particular action or behavior.

19. Any person who violates any provision of this Policy shall immediately be terminated from any involvement with Church programs, activities, and ministries involving children or youth.

Procedure upon Report of Child Abuse

20. All persons involved in any activity or ministry of the Church involving children or youth have the duty and responsibility for reporting any incident or allegation of child abuse involving any child or youth involved in the activity or ministry or any person present at any Church-sponsored activity or program. The report should be made immediately upon discovery of the incident or allegation to the staff member in charge of the program or activity and to the Minister of the Church.
21. The Church specifically requires that all allegations of child abuse be reported to the staff member in charge and the Minister, regardless of the basis of the allegation or supporting evidence. All persons participating in ministries or activities of the Church by their participation agree that all incident reports to appropriate staff shall be regarded as privileged and shall not be regarded as actionable for any purpose.
22. The Church further requires that any person accused of an act of child abuse shall immediately be removed from any contact with children or youth associated with the Church, until further action by the Church in accordance with this policy. Because the paramount concern of the Church and all program participants is the safety of the children and youth, all persons by their participation with the activities and ministries agree to remove themselves from any place or activity associated with the Church involving children or youth immediately upon any allegation or report of an incident of child abuse, regardless of the validity of the allegations or report.
23. The person making any report or allegation of child abuse shall document the incident in writing and provide a copy of the writing to the staff member in charge and the Minister. The person receiving the report or allegation shall also document in writing the date and time of the report, the substance of the allegations, and the action taken.
24. If an allegation is to be made against the staff member in charge of an activity, the report should be made directly to the Minister of the Church. If an allegation is to be made against the Minister of the Church, the report should be made directly to the Administrative Council chair.
25. Upon receipt of an allegation or report concerning an incident of child abuse, the staff person in charge of the activity and the Minister (or the Chair of the Administrative Council) shall immediately conduct an investigation to determine if the allegation is meritorious. The investigation shall include communication with all persons involved, with all such communications being documented in writing, and collection and preservation of any relevant evidence. If the investigating official of the Church finds that reasonable cause exists to believe

the allegation, that person shall make an appropriate report as set forth herein. For the purposes of this Policy, reasonable cause shall exist whenever there is a specific and credible allegation of abuse.

26. If the Minister of the Church or the Chair has reasonable cause to believe that an act of child abuse occurred during any activity, ministry, or program of the Church or on any premises of the Church or during any event sponsored by the Church, they shall immediately notify the Department of Family and Children's Services, the Presbytery, and the Church's insurance carrier. If the allegations constitute a potential criminal offense, the officials of the Church may also notify the Church's attorney and the appropriate law enforcement agency. They may also arrange for a pastoral counselor to provide services to any person involved in the incident.
27. If reasonable cause is found to report the incident of abuse, the person(s) accused of the abuse shall immediately be suspended from any Church activity or program involving children or youth until the final disposition of the report by the appropriate government or law enforcement agency.
28. The Minister or Chair of the Administrative Council shall, after collection of all necessary facts and evidence, present the matter to the Administrative Council for consideration, providing all persons interested, including the accused individual, an opportunity to present any relevant statement or evidence to the Council. The Administrative Council shall make the final decision concerning the ability of the accused individual to participate in Church activities involving children and youth following the incident. The Administrative Council shall give due consideration to the findings of any governmental or law enforcement agency, but shall not be bound by such findings. The Council will be required to follow the provisions of this Policy relating to persons convicted of crimes involving child abuse.
29. In all matters related to an allegation or incident of child abuse, the Minister shall be the only person authorized to speak on behalf of the Church to the media or other persons outside the Church. Any such public communication shall be first reviewed with legal counsel for the Church.
30. All proceedings, hearings, and investigations concerning matters addressed in this Policy shall be held as confidential by all persons involved, except to the extent that disclosure is required under this Policy or under state or federal law.