

Towson Presbyterian Church Child Protection Covenant

Background

One important aspect of Christian ministry is to express and give witness to the love of God through Word and action. This is how the church reveals God's vision and Kingdom of justice in the world. Expressions of God's love are revealed to us through worship, study, prayer, and fellowship. Through this ministry, the Christian Community connects us to the most intimate, vulnerable, and sacred dimensions of our lives. The work of building God's church and ministry is done by church members (both adult and children), clergy, and church staff.

Central to the Reformed faith is the concept of "covenant." God entered into covenant with the people of God to assure survival and liberation. God's people made promises to God in order to live out the covenant in their lives. As the body of Christ, we covenant with one another to create a community where all the people experience the security, love, and acceptance of the Christian community. The promises we make to each other are sacred.

In the covenant of baptism, individuals and the congregation take responsibility for the spiritual well being and growth of individuals entrusted to the believing community. In the covenant that takes place during communion, the cup and the bread represent our commitment to remembering the new covenant Jesus created with his friends and disciples.

As a community of believers at Towson Presbyterian Church, we embrace the covenant Jesus created. As Disciples of Christ we have a special responsibility to protect those in our community who are most vulnerable.

Purpose

The purpose of this child protection covenant is to clearly address instances of child abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and harassment in our social and ecclesiastical culture in a proactive manner. Survivors and victims of abuse, neglect, and sexual misconduct experience a breach in their sense of belonging and identity with a community of faith. To protect potential victim and accused person, the following covenant will be in force in all areas of our ministry. In addition to this policy, all clergy are subject to the Presbytery of Baltimore Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Definitions

- a.) For the purposes of this covenant, "child" and "children" means those of less than 18 years of age.
- b.) An abused and/or neglected child shall mean any child less than 18 years of age whose parent(s) or other persons(s) responsible for the child's care:

1. Causes or threatens to cause upon a child physical or mental injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions.
 2. Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care.
 3. Abandons a child.
- c.) Sexual misconduct is the comprehensive term used in this covenant to include: sexual abuse or exploitation of children, rape or sexual assault, sexual harassment, and any associated verbal, emotional and/or spiritual abuse. 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. Such behavior is not limited to physical contact, but may also include gestures, spoken words, or written contact.
1. Types of abuse that involve touching include: fondling; oral, genital, and anal penetration; intercourse; rape.
 2. Types of abuse that do not involve touching include: verbal questions, remarks, or comments about sexual activity; pornographic material; obscene phone calls; exposing children to sexual activity and/or sexually suggestive video or television programs.
- d.) Child sexual abuse or misconduct includes touching or non-touching interaction for the purpose of sexual stimulation between a child and an adult. This behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and an adult, whether or not the victim has consented. This is also true in the case of any non-minor who is incapable of appraising the nature of the conduct or communicating unwillingness to be subject to unwelcome sexual interaction. Sexual abuse or misconduct also includes any act that involves the sexual molestation or exploitation of a child by any party or other person who has permanent or temporary care.

Standards of Conduct

- a.) Volunteer adults working with children and youth in church related activities in a leadership position shall have attended the Towson Presbyterian Church for at least three months and be well known to the supervisor. Exceptions can be made if the supervisor previously knows the volunteer.
- b.) Paid and volunteer adults, youth leaders, preschool teachers, and assistants shall not touch or interact with children in any way that is intended or could be reasonably construed to be sexually stimulating. Care must also be taken that consenting adults do not act in a sexual way during any Church activity. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical care-taking (diapers, etc.) are appropriate as long as respect for others personal wishes about being touched are honored, not excessive, or imposed upon another individual.

- c.) Supervisors of programs involving children should work in pairs: whenever possible, two adults should be present with the children at all activities. An unaccompanied adult should not drive a single child to a Church-sponsored activity without the permission of the child's parent or guardian. When practical, parental permission should be obtained in writing. It is recommended that children and youth be transported in groups rather than alone.
- d.) Christian education teachers, nursery caregivers, youth leaders, preschool teachers, and assistants should work in pairs when possible; a teacher may work alone when there is visual access to the classroom (door with window or open door).
- e.) All overnight activities must have a minimum of two adults present; for mixed youth overnights there must be both a male and female present. Parental permission in writing is required for all overnights. On those occasions when one-on-one counseling is appropriate, the adult should notify another adult where he/she and the youth will be.
- f.) Christian education teachers, youth leaders, nursery caregivers, preschool teachers, assistants, and helpers shall discipline with kindness with the goal of helping children develop a sense of responsibility and self-control. Corporal punishment of any kind with 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 uncomfortable positions are not appropriate. Physical restraint of children should be used only when someone's 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.

Supervision and Accountability

- a.) Christian education leaders, youth leaders, and other children's programs will seek volunteers in sufficient numbers to allow staffing of the programs as stated above. Church staff may participate in these programs and may be present at random times to help with supervision.
- b.) Communication and explanation of this policy will be included annually in all training and orientation programs for Christian education volunteers, youth leaders, and preschool staff.
- c.) Written information about this policy will be sent to all elders and posted in the office.
- d.) As a condition of paid employment with children all people agreeing to work with children and/or youth will be required to state whether he/she has ever been convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse or misconduct, as defined in this covenant, or terminated from employment for sexual abuse, harassment, or misconduct. Two references will be required for all paid employees. References will be asked whether the person has ever

been convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse or misconduct. A background check into his/her arrest records will be required.

Reporting Misconduct

Any person within the church who has reason to suspect that a child is abused, neglected, or a victim of sexual misconduct shall immediately notify either the Head of Staff or another staff member. The staff member will discuss the matter with the reporting individual and if it is deemed necessary will file a report with the appropriate state or local officials. After the report is made, a second staff member and the Personnel Committee chair will be informed. A contact person will be appointed to receive a response from the legal official if the decision to investigate is not made at the time of the call. If a minister is the subject of such incident, the witness or victim must contact the Clerk of Session and the Personnel Committee Chair. The allegations will be forwarded to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery in accordance with the Book of Order. Ministers are subject to the Presbytery of Baltimore Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Those persons involved in the report or investigation should hold information received in strict confidence, subject to such disclosures as are required under Church procedures or required by law. Further action will be taken in accordance with this church's policies and legal requirements of the State of Maryland.

EACH STAFF MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER WHO WORKS WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH IN ANY WAY WILL SIGNIFY ACCEPTANCE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION COVENANT USING THE STATEMENT THAT FOLLOWS. A SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED ONLY ONCE. RECORDS WILL BE KEPT ON FILE AT THE CHURCH.

I _____ have read the Child Protection Covenant and agree to abide by the standards of conduct herein. I hereby affirm that I have never been convicted of child abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse or misconduct. I have not resigned from or been terminated from a position for reasons relating to child abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse or misconduct, as defined in this Covenant.

Signature

Date