

**ITEM**  
**FOR INFORMATION**

**PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) CHILD/YOUTH/VULNERABLE  
ADULT PROTECTION POLICY AND ITS PROCEDURES**

**POLICY APPLICATION STATEMENT**

It is the policy of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (“PCUSA”) and all entities of the General Assembly (“Entities”) that all church members, church officers, nonmember employees and/or contractors, and volunteers of congregations, councils, and Entities of the church are to maintain the strongest sense of integrity, safety, nurturing, and care involving all interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults . This Policy applies to all General Assembly Entity sponsored activities that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

**DISTRIBUTION**

Copies of this Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and its Procedures (“Policy”) shall be made available to all agency, council, and Entity offices in hard copy or electronically or via the internet. It is intended as guidance for churches, mid-councils, and related entities. This is a policy of the General Assembly of the PCUSA and is a policy of General Assembly agencies and Entities, including the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Administrative Services Group, and the other four agencies of the General Assembly and General Assembly Entities. Other councils and organizations of the PCUSA may use this Policy as a guide to develop their own policies and procedures related to the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Wherever this Policy indicates that Entities shall do something, if a council adopts all or part of this Policy, the council should do likewise.

**POLICY RATIONALE**

The implementation and documentation of a Child/Youth/Vulnerable Protection Policy strives to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect for the following reasons:

- Children, youth, and vulnerable adults are a gift from God and the Church has a divine mandate to provide for their safety and nurturing. The Church is called to be a place that reflects the open arms of Jesus. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me.” The Church is to be, at all levels of council and in all entities, a place of safety and nurture reflective of the arms of Christ.
- Any type of abuse involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults has lasting and devastating effects on the life of the victim/survivor. It is the call of the Church to be a life-giving entity of Christ’s healing and hope for community and individuals, not an entity that brings harm and hurt.
- The larger Church suffers with the victim/survivor and his or her family when abuse and neglect occurs. The Church is unable to do the full work of Christ, due to the hurt, pain, and distrust that accompanies abuse. Not only does the Church lose its credibility at all levels, it also suffers considerable financial loss and loss of integrity. More importantly, in instances of child, youth, or vulnerable adult

abuse within the Church, there is immeasurable spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical harm can be perpetrated that woefully hinders God's call on the Church.

- The *Book of Order* states, "The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life," and Presbyterians believe this baptismal commitment to be a serious one, understanding it to apply to all in the church's care, including children, youth, and vulnerable adults (*Book of Order* W-2.3013).
- Children, youth, and vulnerable adults are not only persons of care and service in the church, but they are also co-recipients of the graces and love of God. Jesus exemplified this in the Gospel of Mark 10:15–16 when he urged his followers to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. And he specifically takes up the children into his arms and blesses them. So also the Church, as the body of Christ, is to be the presence of Christ's love, in the same way taking up all children, youth, and vulnerable adults into its arms and blessing them; providing for them a safe, thriving, and nurturing environments in which to grow in every way.

### **PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW WHEN ENTITIES ARE PROVIDING CARE FOR MINORS**

When Entities provide care and supervision for Minors at one of its meetings, events or conferences (this excludes meetings, event or conferences for which an Entity reimburses parents or guardians to pay for care for minors), the following procedures shall be utilized.

### **DEFINITIONS**

Each state has its own statutes regarding what is defined as child/youth/vulnerable adult abuse. This Policy advises all Entities of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to consider and be familiar with state statutes pertaining to the location of each event/activity.

The following is a list of definitions of terms and their intended use in this particular Policy. For the purpose of this Policy:

**Child:** A child is defined as a person between the ages of 0–11.

**Youth:** A youth is be defined as a person between the ages of 12–17.

**Minor:** A minor is defined as any Child or Youth 0–17 years-old.

**Child/Youth Worker:** Any person, volunteer, paid staff or contractor who participates at any level at General Assembly Entity sponsored events or activities involving Children and/or Youth. This includes chaperones who accompany Minors to and during meetings, events, and activities covered by this Policy.

**Vulnerable Adult:** Any person eighteen-years-old or older without the developmental or cognitive capacity to consent.

**Vulnerable Adult Abuse:** Any act or failure to act that results in physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment or exploitation of a Vulnerable Adult.

***Child/Youth Abuse:*** Any act or failure to act that results in physical abuse, neglect, and or sexual molestation or abuse, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, or exploitation of a Child or Youth.

***Sexual Abuse:*** In the *Book of Order*, sexual abuse is defined as, “Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone without the capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position.” (*Book of Order*, D-10.0401c).

***Misuse of Technology:*** The use of technology that results in Vulnerable Adult Abuse, Child/Youth Abuse, or in the harassing or abusing of a Child/Youth.

***PMA:*** Presbyterian Mission Agency.

***OGA:*** Office of General Assembly.

***Safe Child Response Team:*** The Safe Child Response Team is a team comprised of a minimum of at least three members of or appointed by an Entity of the General Assembly who are specifically trained to respond to allegations and reports of Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult Abuse at General Assembly Entity sponsored activities. These teams must be readily available to be contacted and used at all General Assembly Entity sponsored events.

***Sexual Misconduct:*** as that is defined in the Sexual Misconduct Policy and its Procedures (219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010)) and revised by the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (2013).

Sexual Misconduct is the comprehensive term used in this Policy to include:

*Child sexual abuse;* including, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the sexual abuse definition of a child is anyone under age eighteen.

*Sexual abuse* as defined in the *Book of Order*: “Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position” (*Book of Order*, D-10.0401c).

*Sexual harassment;* defined for this Policy is as follows: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- a. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment, or their continued status in an institution;

- b. submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such an individual;
- c. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment; or
- d. an individual is subjected to unwelcome sexual jokes, unwelcome or inappropriate touching, or display of sexual visuals that insult, degrade, and/or sexually exploit men, women, or children.

*Rape* or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation.

*Sexual conduct* is offensive, obsessive or suggestive language or behavior, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome touching or fondling that is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another.

*Sexual Malfeasance*; is defined by the broken trust resulting from sexual activities within a professional ministerial relationship that results in misuse of office or position arising from the professional ministerial relationship.

*Misuse of technology*; use of technology that results in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages and images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography on church property. When this includes a person under the age of eighteen, it is considered child abuse. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by a church or church entity or within the context of ministry.

## **SCREENING, TRAINING, AND BACKGROUND CHECKS**

A Child/Youth Worker, whether on a paid staff, contractor, or volunteer basis, shall be subject to:

1. The organizing Entity's receipt of a completed, signed, and approved application and background check authorization forms, including a signed form verifying the event policy has been read. The application should include a minimum of two references.
2. All Child/Youth Workers must be at least eighteen years-old and four years older than the oldest Youth whom they are serving.
3. The applicant's consent to a comprehensive background check, including a criminal background check. The Entity must consult with the insurance company through which they have coverage to determine what background checks are appropriate for their particular event. The Entity should cover the costs of the background checks for all Child/Youth Workers. These checks shall be run no more than six (6) months prior to the event. (This time restraint is also at the discretion of the organizing Entity's insurance company's requests. Child/Youth Workers who participate annually in events may only be required to have one (1) background check per calendar year, depending on insurance company standards.)

4. All Child/Youth Workers, paid, contracted, or volunteer, must participate in training sometime within the year prior to the event. The training is to be provided by the Entity and shall cover the event Child/Youth protection policy thoroughly as well as methods of abuse prevention and a detailed plan of reporting. The Entity may contract with others to provide these trainings. These trainings shall further cover:

- What constitutes Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Abuse and neglect.
- How to recognize signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.
- State laws concerning definitions of abuse and reporting.
- Mandatory criminal background checks and the security of those files.
- Explanation of the importance of the application and screening processes.
- Appropriate boundaries with Minors, especially regarding adult/Child/Youth ratios, transportation, and use of technology.
- If an overnight event is planned, discussions of boundaries involving appropriate sleeping arrangements and restroom/shower facilities use shall be discussed.
- The presence of a Safe Child Response Team at each event and how to contact them.
- All paid employees working directly with children or Youth at any General Assembly Entity sponsored events must be certified in first aid and CPR.
- Other related topics.

5. No person may serve as a Child/Youth Worker who has a conviction on his/her record of certain felonies or misdemeanors, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

- Criminal homicide;
- Aggravated assault;
- Crimes related to the possession, use, or sale of drugs or controlled substances;
- Sexual Abuse;
- Sexual assault;
- Injury to a Youth;
- Incest;
- Indecency with a Youth;
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a Youth;

- Possession or promotion of child pornography;
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a Minor;
- Employment harmful to Youth;
- Abandonment or endangerment of a Youth;
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint;
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure; and enticement of a Youth;
- Any crime that involves Sexual Misconduct or Sexual Abuse, particularly if it involves misconduct or abuse with a Minor;
- Any crime that involves Misuse of Technology for sexual purposes, such as collecting or distributing photographs of Minors who are naked or in sexual or inappropriate poses (child pornography);
- Any crime that involves the use of force, such as assault or endangerment;
- Any crime that involves abduction and kidnapping;
- Any crime that involves drinking and driving, such as driving while intoxicated.

In addition, if any council or General Assembly Entity is aware that a Child/Youth Worker has a prior conviction for one of the aforementioned crimes or a related crime, the Child/Youth Worker shall automatically be ineligible to attend a Child/Youth event in any capacity.

6. No person may act as or be engaged as a Child/Youth Worker if that person has been found guilty of an offense, in local, state or federal court or in an ecclesiastical proceeding, that includes actions that fall under definitions or prohibitions set forth in this Policy.

7. Whenever a General Assembly Entity organizes an event for Minors for which the Entity will invite Minors from other church councils who will be supervised by Child/Youth Workers, the Councils who selects the Youth workers shall:

- a. Not send a person to act as a Child/Youth Worker whom the council knows has violated the provisions of the *Book of Order* or policy of a local congregation or presbytery pertaining to Sexual Misconduct or Child/Youth protection.
- b. Not send a person to act as a Child/Youth Worker for Minors when that person is also scheduled to work at the event.
- c. Require Councils at all levels of church life who are assisting in organizing General Assembly Entity events for Minors or sending Child/Youth Workers to these events to abide by the same screening, training, and background check standards mandated in this Policy for the General Assembly and its Entities.

8. Whenever a General Assembly Entity organizes an event for Minors that invites Minors from Councils who will be supervised by Child/Youth Workers, the General Assembly Entity shall:
- a. Provide guidance to the Councils that are sending Child/Youth Workers about best practices for securing Child/Youth Workers and eligibility requirements.
  - b. Provide guidance to the Councils that are sending Child/Youth Workers concerning the requirement that the Council perform and pay for background checks for potential Child/Youth Workers and how to evaluate the background check for offenses that would disqualify a person from being a Child/Youth Worker with Minors.
  - c. Provide guidance to the Councils on when to perform the background checks and with what background check provider.
  - d. Identify someone on the organizing committee or staff of the General Assembly Entity to be the designated recipient of background checks from Councils and train that person:
    - i. To review every background check received;
    - ii. To identify criminal convictions on background checks that should disqualify a person from being a Child/Youth Worker;
    - iii. To notify a Council if the staffer believes the Council has erred in selecting a Child/Youth Worker whose background check indicates that the person should not act as a Child/Youth Worker;
    - iv. Report to the General Assembly-Entity of the event of each potentially disqualifying background check and related concerns so that a formal decision can be made to inform the Council that the person whose background check is in question is not eligible to attend the event as Child/Youth Worker.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS**

The Entity shall maintain all Child/Youth Worker applications, results of background checks, and related information in confidential, secured files.

### **REPORTING**

Each sponsoring-General Assembly Entity will publicize a procedure for reporting any prohibited actions and have copies available at all times in a public place at the event. Anyone suspecting or having knowledge of a violation of child abuse may report such violation to any leader of the General Assembly Entity sponsored event. A leader of the General Assembly Entity who receives a report of abuse will report child abuse promptly to local law enforcement and appropriate state authorities. Any Child or Youth who suspects or has knowledge of any type of Minor abuse is invited to share the knowledge with any adult leader of the General Assembly Entity sponsored event. Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of Child/Youth abuse should be made aware that state law requires the immediate reporting of such abuse to the civil authorities. Any adult leader should report such violation to any Stated Clerk or Associate or Assistant Stated Clerk of the General Assembly or any other leader designated by the

sponsoring General Assembly Entity of the event. Any person receiving information under this paragraph shall share that information immediately with the designated response team.

### **SAFE CHILD RESPONSE TEAM**

At every meeting, conference, event or activity for Minors planned by an Entity of the General Assembly, a Safe Child Response Team must be trained by the sponsoring Entity and be present and available throughout the entire duration of the event. This team should be comprised of at least three members, staff or appointed, selected and sent by the sponsoring Entity. An attorney chosen and secured by the General Assembly Entity shall be on-call for all conferences, events, and activities. The response team will familiarize itself with the terms of this Policy as well as established procedures under the Rules of Discipline, *Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* for responding to complaint(s) of alleged Child/Youth abuse against any teaching elder, ruling elder, employee, or volunteer in a leadership position(s) with the sponsoring Entity and any events they may sponsor.

The Safe Child Response Team shall have the following responsibilities in response to allegations of Child/Youth or Vulnerable Adult Abuse or neglect incurred against any Child/Youth Worker or event participant:

1. Immediately provide for the safety of the alleged victim(s) involved.
2. If the report alleges abuse or harassment of a Minor, the response team will:
  - a. immediately ensure the allegation is reported to the civil authorities under state law;
  - b. immediately notify the parents or guardian of the Minor;
  - c. notify the insurance company of the allegation and that no investigation has yet occurred.
3. Make immediate decisions concerning the temporary removal of the individual accused from any contact with Minors pending an investigation and/or removal of the accused from the event until a resolution of the allegations has occurred.
4. Notify designated people at the General Assembly Entity immediately of the report of alleged abuse/neglect including the attorney who is on-call throughout the duration of each event, who has been previously secured by the General Assembly Entity in case of such allegations during each sponsored event. Any possible media requests will be handled by a designated person or office with advice from the on-call attorney, taking care to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
5. Consult the OGA and PMA about resources available for victims of the alleged abuse prior to each event and have those resources readily available at every event. This will provide victims and their families immediate resources that may aid in the particular spiritual, psychological, or emotional needs and trauma that arise from the devastation of abuse.
6. If the report is against a teaching elder, the response team shall send a written statement of allegation to the stated clerk of the presbytery that holds the teaching elder's membership. This written

statement of allegation shall trigger the formation of an investigating committee under the Rules of Discipline of the *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II*.

7. If the report is against a ruling elder, the response team will notify the clerk of session of membership that an allegation of offense has been received against an elder that triggers the formation of an investigating committee under the Rules of Discipline of the *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II*.

8. If the report is against an employee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, the response team will notify the person(s) or committee responsible for supervision of the employee, Human Resources, and Legal Services. The response team will request a follow-up report from the supervisory body of the outcome of any subsequent investigation or discipline.

9. If the report is against an employee of a sponsoring Entity other than Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, the response team will notify the person(s) or committee responsible for supervision of the employee. The response team will request a follow-up report from the supervisory body of the outcome of any subsequent investigation or discipline.

10. If the report is against a volunteer, or nonmember of the PCUSA, the response team will request that the General Assembly Entity appoint an investigating committee of three persons to initiate an investigation of the allegations in order to:

- a. gather any statements of abuse from those making the report, including any information from the Safety Response Team, and any party to the abuse;
- b. gather any information from the person who was accused of abuse;
- c. make written determinations and take actions appropriate to resolve the matter including, but not limited to, making recommendations for prevention as well as response.

11. Provide for pastoral counseling for the principal parties involved (accuser(s), possible victim(s), accused, family members).

12. A written summary of any proceedings in such cases will be maintained by the General Assembly Entities.

13. Any person bringing a report of abuse or assisting in investigating will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.

#### **EVENT RULES FOR WORKING WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

The sponsoring Entity of the General Assembly shall ensure that the following measures be in place and actions taken for each event or activity involving Minors and Vulnerable Adults:

1. Child/Youth Workers shall:

- a. respond to Minors and Vulnerable Adults with respect and consideration and treat all of them equally, regardless of race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age (40 and over), marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information, uniformed service or veteran status or religious affiliation; and
  - b. act as a positive role model for Minors and Vulnerable Adults by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity.
  - c. maintain appropriate boundaries when in positions of power with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
  - d. Not give money or gifts to Minors, except within the context of a group gift given to all participants in the celebration of special events or recognitions.
2. Two-adult rule: Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of Minors or Vulnerable Adults. The only exception is if an emergency situation deems this not immediately possible for both in person and online gatherings. All Child and Youth Workers and volunteers must be a minimum of four years older than the age group they lead or supervise.
  3. Ratios: The adult to Child ratio for all Child-related events/activities is 2:10 for both in person and online gatherings. The adult to Youth ratio for all Youth-related events/activities is 2:17 for both in person and online gatherings. There shall also be one adult of each gender when there is one or more Minors of each gender in a group. Only in emergency situations may the ratios and gender diversity be compromised.
  4. View Windows and Open Doors: When Minors and adult workers or volunteers are in a room, if the door is closed, the door must have a view window installed. If no view window is installed in the door, the door must remain open at all times.
  5. Adult workers/caregivers should respect the privacy of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults to whom they provide care. Responsible use of digital devices and cell phones is required in all situations (ex. Taking age-appropriate photographs and movies, not taking photographs of Minors who are not fully clothed). Adults and Minors are required at all times to wear appropriate attire. Child/Youth Workers are not permitted to take photographs of Minors or Vulnerable Adults under their care or at the meeting or event and share them in any way, including on the internet, without the written permission of a parent or guardian of the Minor or Vulnerable Adult.
  6. Age appropriate training to Minors should be provided regarding behavior that should be reported to caregiver or leader of the event.
  7. Transportation: All adult drivers at Child/Youth events must have proper licensure and insurance on file with the organizing Entity. All vehicles used must have seat belts for the driver and each passenger. No Minor under eighty-five pounds may sit in the front seat of any vehicle. All drivers transporting Minors and Vulnerable Adults must be over the age of twenty-five and must be informed that if their vehicle is used, their insurance would be primary if an accident occurs. If a charter bus is rented, or any outside carrier is contracted, the company hired must ensure criminal background checks on their

drivers. Each vehicle must follow the ratio rules noted in point 2 in this section. Lastly, no minor may be a driver at any event or activity (this includes golf carts at events).

8. Forms: The legal guardians of each Minor must provide the appropriate information and medical forms for each activity/event. The information form should include all contacts for legal guardians and the medical form must include a copy of the Minor's health insurance card. Further consent forms must be signed by legal guardians for any off-campus events. Any photos at the event that are used in social media or published material by the organizing Entity must be released by a signed consent form from a participant's legal guardian as well as the Minor. All such forms must be stored at the event site, in a secure place with restricted access.

9. Each event/activity must ensure that rules are gone over with participants at each event/activity. These rules shall include but are not limited to a code of conduct specific to the event/activity, as well as a list prohibited and expected behaviors for the specific event/activity. The code of conduct and prohibited and expected behaviors list should be given in written form to each participant and legal guardians, as well as discussed thoroughly at the beginning of the event/activity.

10. Minors and adults must maintain different showering and grooming hours at events in which bathrooms and shower rooms are shared in housing. These hours must be posted on site.

11. Adults should never share sleeping quarters with Minors. The exception to this rule is for the occasional legal caregiver/child situation or parent/child situation. If a Minor requires a caregiver/parent, written permission must be given and kept on record from the Minor's parent/legal guardian.

12. All volunteers and employees at any General Assembly Entity sponsored meetings and events who are responsible to supervise Minors and Vulnerable Adults must also abide by a code of conduct that emphasizes the following prohibited behaviors. Some of these prohibited behaviors include but are not restricted to:

- a. Display of sexual affection toward a Minor.
- b. Use of profanity or off-color jokes.
- c. Discussion of sexual encounters with or around Minors or Vulnerable Adults or in any way involving Minors in personal problems or issues.
- d. Dating or becoming "romantically" involved with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- e. Using or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
- f. Possessing sexually oriented materials—including printed or online pornography—on church property or property being utilized for a church event.
- g. Having secrets with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- h. Staring at or commenting on the bodies of Minors or Vulnerable Adults.

- i. Engaging in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- j. Working one-on-one with Minors or Vulnerable Adults in a private setting.
- k. Abusing Minors or Vulnerable Adults in anyway, including (but not limited to) the following:
  - Physical abuse: hit, spank, shake, slap, unnecessarily restraint.
  - Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, or curse.
  - Sexual abuse: inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented conversations.
  - Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, act cruelly.
  - Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter.
  - Permit Minors or Vulnerable Adults to engage in the following: hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, ridicule, humiliation, or sexual activity.

#### **Social Media—Electronic Communications**

**General Social Media Policy**—No minister, employee, contractor, or volunteer of the General Assembly and its Entities shall create or use a media site (Web, Facebook, YouTube, or similar) in the name of or purporting to represent the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) without the explicit written permission of the, General Assembly Entity, or event leadership. When clergy or staff, acting in their capacity as a representative of the General Assembly or its Entities, lead or coordinate a group activity using social media, each may use only official General Assembly Entity sites/channels when they have been made available by the Entity of the General Assembly. These may include Web pages, Facebook, e-mail, and similar means.

#### **Social Media Communications**

Persons who shall create public pages on behalf of General Assembly Entity programs are responsible to monitor communications and to assure that employees and volunteers do not have private (and possibly inappropriate) conversations with Minors and Vulnerable Adults.

Persons having Facebook privileges on behalf of the General Assembly Entity shall treat unsolicited communication or “friending” from Minors and Vulnerable Adults as an unauthorized text message. No reply may be given except to indicate by a posting that accepting a “friend” invitation by Minors and Vulnerable Adults is a violation of the code of conduct.

If a Minors and Vulnerable Adults reveal abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult, the person must report this information in the manner of any “suspected abuse.”

When using Facebook to communicate with Minors and Vulnerable Adults, the authorized minister shall inform parents/guardians of each Minor and Vulnerable Adult that the latter is communicating with the

person via Facebook, providing the parent/guardian the opportunity to disapprove or to participate in a group.

### **Social Networking Code of Conduct**

Each person who leads using the resources of social media shall apply this Social Networking Code of Conduct:

- Prohibit comments that are, or could be construed by any observer, to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
- Prohibit sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities.
- Prohibit private messages between employees and volunteers and Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
- Prohibit posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive, or voyeuristic) or inappropriate comments on pictures.
- Provide Minors and Vulnerable Adults, and their parents and guardians with this Social Networking Code of Conduct.
- Encourage parents and guardians to play a role in monitoring their Minor's and Vulnerable Adult's interactions with employees and volunteers.
- Continuously remind Minors and Vulnerable Adults how to interact appropriately through social networking sites.
- Deny participation by individuals who repeatedly violate the code of conduct.

At the institution of the use of social media, the authorized minister shall present this Social Networking Code of Conduct to Minors and Vulnerable Adults and parents/guardians.

### **Misuse of Technology**

No minister, employee, contractor or volunteer of the General Assembly and its Entities shall misuse technology in the following ways:

- Using technology to send suggestive messages and/or images to a Minor.
- Having contacts by Misuse of Technology to contact a Minor or Vulnerable Adult that is not preapproved by the Minor's or Vulnerable Adult's legal guardian with a signed waiver, unless the contact is on an open public medium, such as a church or Entity website or church or Entity social media program.
- To view pornography or sites (ex. dating websites) which include pornography or naked bodies on the premises of a General Assembly Entity event, activity or meeting, no matter where it is held or by which Entity it is organized.

### **Virtual Meeting Code of Conduct**

**Child/Youth workers, ministers, employees, contractors or volunteers (“Adults”) of the General Assembly or its Entities must follow any virtual meeting policies or protocols of the General Assembly and these protocols when planning and conducting a virtual meeting on virtual meeting platforms (ex. Zoom, Skype) with one or more Minors:**

- **Adults should seek permission of the parent or guardian who has legal custody of a minor before inviting the minor to participate in a virtual meeting. Such permission can be sought in any hard copy or electronic registration forms but must be a separate and clear section seeking permission of the parent or guardian. The option to observe the virtual meeting should be made available upon request to parents and guardians. The permission section of the registration form shall provide the parent or guardian with information (name, contact information, including telephone/text) on how to report concerns, issues or to make reports of inappropriate conduct or sexual misconduct or abuse by an Adult or any participant that occurs before, during or after a virtual meeting.**
- **Adults and meeting organizers should advise parents and guardians who have legal custody of Minors of the following so that the parents and guardians are aware of it when they give permission for the Minor to participate in the meeting: (1) that a meeting will be recorded; and, (2) that images, video or audio may be used from the recording in media reports or on PCUSA or other websites.**
- **No Adult is permitted to meet one-on-one or one Adult with a group of Minors either in a virtual meeting space or a breakout room. There must be at least two (2) Adults in any virtual meetings or breakout room or other virtual meeting space.**
- **All Adults, Minors, and other participants in virtual meetings shall dress appropriately for the meeting. No meeting participants shall wear offensive clothing or clothing that displays inappropriate or offensive messages that are demeaning, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, threatening, profane, abusive or pornographic.**
- **No Adults, Minors, and other participants in virtual meetings are permitted to make displays of inappropriate or offensive messages by putting a sign or note in front of the camera in some form or fashion, such as messages that are demeaning, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, threatening, profane, abusive or pornographic.**
- **Adults, Minors, and other participants in virtual meetings should be considerate and not carry the phone or device they are using to participate in the meeting into private areas of their meeting space, such as bathrooms, while their camera and sound is on and the meeting is in progress.**
- **No Adults or Minors are permitted to use the chat function or the name section for inappropriate purposes during a virtual meeting, including, but not limited to:**
  - **Displays of inappropriate photographs or images, such as pornography or photographs of anyone who is naked or inappropriate attired.**
  - **To display offensive messages that are demeaning, intimidating, threatening, profane, abusive or pornographic.**
  - **To provide links to offensive and inappropriate websites or platforms.**

- **Bullying, discriminating against or harassing conduct based upon a person's race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information or religious affiliation.**
- **No Adult is permitted to use the private chat function of a virtual meeting platform to communicate privately with one or more Minors. All chat communications must be done openly so that all participants, including the other Adults, parents or guardians in the virtual meeting can see the chat communications. This should be announced at the start of every virtual meeting. (Exception: if the Adult is designated by the meeting organizers to receive reports of concerns or issues or to make reports of inappropriate conduct or sexual misconduct or abuse).**
- **If a minor attempts to contact an Adult using the private chat function, the Adult should not respond. If an Adult attempts to contact a Minor using the private chat function, the Minor should not respond. (Exception: unless the Minor is contacting the Adult designated by the meeting organizers to receive reports of concerns or issues or to make reports of inappropriate conduct or sexual misconduct or abuse or that Adult is contacting a Minor who made a report).**
- **No Adult is permitted to use other means of communication (ex. text, email) to communicate privately with one or more Minors before, during or after a virtual meeting. No Minor is permitted to use other means of communication (ex. text, email) to communicate privately with one or more Adults before, during or after a virtual meeting. (Exception: if the Minor made a report to the Adult and the Adult is designated by the meeting organizers to receive reports of concerns or issues or to make reports of inappropriate conduct or sexual misconduct or abuse).**
- **Adults and meeting organizers shall provide Minors with information (name, contact information, including telephone/text) on how to report concerns, issues or to make reports of inappropriate conduct or sexual misconduct or abuse by an Adult or any participant that occurs before, during or after a virtual meeting. Adults and meeting organizers are responsible to make mandatory reports of sexual misconduct or abuse as required by the *Book of Order* (G-4.0302) and under local, state, and federal law.**

#### **SIGNING OF POLICY AND APPLICATION TO SERVE**

Each adult engaged in the leadership of a General Assembly Entity event shall acknowledge receipt of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Its Procedures by signing a form verifying they read the Policy. In addition, each person engaged in the leadership of a General Assembly Entity event shall consent to all comprehensive background checks required and shall comply with any consequences of a reported violation of this Policy.

#### **PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW WHEN AN ENTITY IS PROVIDING CARE FOR MINORS OUTSIDE THE U.S.**

There are times when a General Assembly Entity may offer care for Minors at a meeting, conference or event to be held outside the United States (ex. a regional meeting of World Mission liaisons and/or mission co-workers). The organizing Entity will take all appropriate actions to comply with this Policy to the extent they can be complied with, considering the venue of the meeting, the resources and facilities available, and the laws of the country of the venue. Exceptions should be discussed and addressed with leadership of the Entity and its legal advisors.

**PROCESS TO REVISE THIS POLICY AND ITS PROCEDURES**

Between meetings of the General Assembly proposed changes to this Policy and its procedures shall be submitted to the Mid Council Ministries office in the OGA and the Legal Services Office of the Administrative Services Group who will review and present any proposed changes to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation Board of Directors (“A Corp.”) for review and approval, after consultation with the Coordinating Committees of the Board of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and Committee on the Office of the General Assembly. Changes will become effective when approved by the Board of the A Corp. Changes approved by A Corp. that are substantive, and more than mere editorial changes, should be reported by A Corp. Board to the next meetings of the General Assembly after the changes are approved. The General Assembly can receive and accept those changes, but any Assembly may revise this Policy with or without a report of changes from the A Corp.