

Child Protection Policy

Pearl Presbyterian Church,

February 12th, 2020

Section 1. Corporate Biblical Commitment

Since the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to uphold the gospel message in power, love, and self-control, “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord... But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” (2 Timothy 1:7, 13-14)

And since he exhorts Timothy to pursue godliness and keep the word of God free from reproach, “But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Timothy 6:11-14)

And whereas Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be like God in separating themselves from sexual immorality and exposing the despicable works of darkness, “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ...Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:1-3, 6-17)

Likewise the Apostle Peter calls us away from sinful passions into sober-minded preparation, “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope

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fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:13-16)

And Paul elsewhere requires parents to care for their households, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8)

So also, the Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches us about the severity of sinning against children, “And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.’” (Matthew 18:2-6)

Thereafter, the Lord Jesus also instructs us to cut off anything that might lead us into sin, “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” (Matthew 18:8-9)

And finally, Jesus sends us into the world with an exhortation towards wisdom and innocence, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)

Therefore, the Session of Pearl Presbyterian Church (PCA) of Pearl, MS, hereby institutes a comprehensive Child Protection Policy to provide for the safety and protection of the children whom God has entrusted to our care and to mitigate the potential for their abuse, effective January 1st, 2020.

This Policy can be amended by a majority vote of the Session.

This policy was approved and adopted by the Session of Pearl Presbyterian Church on October 9th, 2019. Amended on February 12th, 2020.

Section 2. Observations and Principles

Pearl Presbyterian Church (PCA) exists as an ecclesiastical body in covenant with one another under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Christ's lordship and concern for his flock leads Pearl Presbyterian Church to commit itself to a coherent and comprehensive Child Protection Policy and explanation of our covenant responsibility to one another and to our Lord for the well-being of our covenant children and visitors.

The governing body of Pearl Presbyterian Church is the Session, which consists of the Ruling Elders and the Senior Pastor. Responsibility for the affairs and events that occur either within the PPC facilities, on PPC property, or during PPC ministry events—whether onsite or offsite—belongs to this governing body.

Pearl Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe, secure, and nurturing environment in which all people can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ. This includes an environment free from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

The Bible calls us to work together with one another in the local church as we seek to worship God, make disciples, and love others by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We therefore need the assistance and accountability of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This assistance and accountability is strengthened through the following guidelines, procedures, and rules, **which apply to all persons, whether staff, officers, volunteers, members, visitors, and/or guests.**

The following guidelines are intended to help us understand our obligations to all members and visitors at Pearl Presbyterian Church, but particularly to our children and youth.

Section 3. Purpose

Pearl Presbyterian Church is committed to maintaining an environment in which children and youth are protected from physical, emotional, and sexual harm, and in which church staff, teachers, and volunteers are protected from potential false allegations of abuse and/or negligence. **The purpose of this Policy is to establish an overarching plan that: (1) provides for the safety and protection of the children and youth whom God has entrusted to our care, (2) decreases the potential for child abuse, (3) mitigates the potential for false allegations against staff, members, and volunteers, and (4) makes clear to potential predators that the children of our church are protected.** Additionally, this policy incorporates protocols for expeditiously evaluating and reporting allegations of abuse and negligence.

The Plan and Protocols are intended to protect children and youth from harm in church-sponsored events at PPC property and/or away from PPC property for ministry-related outings (*e.g.*, mission trips, retreats, and pastoral visits). This policy also applies to other individuals and organizations that make use of PPC facilities.

Section 4. Definitions

Child Abuse and Neglect: Any action (or lack thereof) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. See further definitions below.

- **Physical Abuse** – Ann. Code § 43-21-105 – ‘Abused child’ means a child whose parent, guardian, custodian, or any person responsible for his or her care or support, whether or not legally obligated to do so, has caused or allowed to be caused upon the child non-accidental physical injury or other maltreatment.
- **Neglect** – Ann. Code § 43-21-105 – ‘Neglected child’ means a child:
 - Whose parent, guardian, custodian, or any person responsible for his or her care or support neglects or refuses, when able to do so, to provide proper and necessary care or support; education as required by law; or medical, surgical, or other care necessary for his or her well-being;
 - Who is otherwise without proper care, custody, supervision, or support;
 - Who, for any reason, lacks the special care made necessary for him or her by reason of his or her mental condition, whether said mental condition be mentally retarded or mentally ill;
 - Who, for any reason, lacks the care necessary for his or her health, morals, or well-being.
- **Sexual Abuse/Exploitation** – Ann. Code § 43-21-105 – The term ‘Abused child’ includes sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.
 - ‘Sexual Abuse’ means obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depiction of children for commercial purposes, or the rape, molestation, incest, prostitution, or other such forms of sexual exploitation of children under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened.
- **Emotional Abuse** – Ann. Code § 43-21-105 – The term ‘Abused child’ includes emotional abuse or mental injury (*e.g.*, when the child is subjected to constant criticism, belittling, or teasing).
- **Exceptions** – Ann. Code § 43-21-105
 - A Parent who withholds medical treatment from any child who in good faith is under treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer, in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof, shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglectful.
 - Physical discipline, including spanking, performed on a child by a parent, guardian, or custodian in a reasonable manner shall not be deemed abuse under this section.

Minor: Under 18 years of age

Youth: Ages 9 to 18.

Child: newborn to 8 years of age

MDCPS: Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services

PPC: Pearl Presbyterian Church

High Isolation Settings: A location that has little or small amounts of traffic, restrictive access, and/or low visibility from outside. It includes, but is not limited to, bathrooms, closets, and classrooms/offices with no windows. Specific high isolation areas may be denoted at future dates.

Mandatory Reporters: Professionals working in the medical field (physicians, dentists, interns, residents, or nurses), public or private school employees or child-care givers, psychologists or social workers, attorneys, ministers, or law enforcement officers, as well as any persons having reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused or neglected *are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately to the proper authorities.*

- **Clergy:** “Any minister who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a neglected child or an abused child shall cause an oral report to be made immediately, by telephone or otherwise, to be followed as soon thereafter as possible by a report in writing to the Department of Human services.” (Ann. Code § 43-21-353(1))
 - *Mississippi Law does not grant ministers “clergy privilege” regarding allegations or confessions of abuse revealed during pastoral counsel or confessions.*

Members: Those adults and children who are listed on the church roll as belonging to the ecclesiastical body known as Pearl Presbyterian Church.

Primary Reporter: The individual who, upon learning of abuse or neglect, bears primary responsibility for contacting the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

Monitors: Adult volunteers approved and appointed by the session who monitor the interior and exterior of the facilities at Pearl Presbyterian Church during operational hours, particularly on the Lord’s Day and at scheduled PPC functions.

Staff: Any compensated individuals, including pastors, interns, and other paid employees of Pearl Presbyterian Church, whether part-time or full-time.

Teacher: An adult member who has been approved to teach a class (particularly of children) for a specified length of time on a regular basis. For example: Sunday School Teachers.

Volunteers: Unpaid members who work with children, youth, or serve as monitors, who have been through screening and training.

Section 5. Child Protection Plan

To prevent both incidents of abuse and the unfounded assertion of such conduct, Pearl Presbyterian Church has developed appropriate procedures to be followed in the following areas:

- The educational materials, training and screening of staff, officers and volunteers involved in the supervision or custody of minors;
- Orientation and training of approved staff, officers and volunteers;
- Supervision of all of those involved with working with minors; and
- Reporting of and responding to any incident and/or allegation of the abuse of minors.

5.1 Policies and Procedures

- 5.1.1 **Pearl Presbyterian Church is subject to Mississippi law regarding the protection of children.**
- 5.1.2 Internal investigations and/or church discipline regarding matters of abuse or neglect of children do not relieve PPC of its legal responsibility to report allegations of abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.
- 5.1.3 PPC seeks to prevent the abuse and neglect of children participating in church ministries. Preventative measures will include training, screening, and supervision by those overseeing minors, particularly including staff and volunteers as defined in this policy.
- 5.1.4 It is the responsibility of the PPC staff member and/or volunteer accountable for any PPC ministry that involves minors to ensure that appropriate practices are implemented within those programs and activities to reduce the risk of harm to minors, especially harm arising from neglect or abuse. The specific circumstances of each ministry shall be considered in the development of those program-specific practices.
- 5.1.5 **Entities or organizations that use PPC facilities** in any way that involves minors must agree to abide by this policy. Such use must be approved by the Session or their designee. *This includes individuals renting PPC facilities for lessons or activities involving minors.*
- 5.1.6 Parents who use PPC facilities for private purposes are responsible for the actions of all children, visitors, and childcare personnel who accompany them. Minors may not use PPC facilities without adult supervision.
- 5.1.7 The Session of Pearl Presbyterian Church shall designate a person or committee of persons to oversee the implementation and maintenance of this policy. Currently, the Session of PPC has designated the Christian Education Committee to carry out this task.

5.2 Training

- 5.2.1 The Session shall designate a person, or group of persons, to conduct face-to-face educational sessions with ***all staff, officers and adult volunteers***, every other year, either in small groups or individually. These sessions have the purpose of communicating the obligations and commitments contained within this policy and insuring that our teachers, volunteers, and all others have the knowledge, understanding, and tools to safely, effectively, and consistently serve minors in a church setting. The educational training material is the Child Protection Policy.
- 5.2.2 All volunteers must, on an annual basis, review and acknowledge by signature an understanding and agreement to abide by the contents of the Child Protection Policy.
- 5.2.3 In certain ministry programs, a posted list of those who have been trained may be required to ensure that all volunteers have been through the required training.
- 5.2.4 A one-time online training course certification (Ministry Safe) must be completed.
<https://ministrysafecom.com/the-safety-system/awareness-training/>

5.3 Screening

- 5.3.1 **The Christian Education Committee shall ensure conduct screening procedures** are carried out for staff and volunteers who work with minors as outlined in Section 7.1. The screening process will include an informal application-interview and a criminal background check.
- 5.3.2 **All PPC staff members are required to go through the screening process outlined in Section 7.1.**
- 5.3.3 **Officers** of the church (elders and deacons), while they do not necessarily interact with children or youth on a regular basis, are required to have a criminal background check.
- 5.3.4 **All volunteers who work with minors (including monitors) will go through the screening and training process and receive a criminal background check before taking responsibility in a ministry.**
- (a) **Membership Requirement:** All volunteers should be members of PPC for at least 6 months prior to working with minors.
- (b) **Minors Exempt from Screening:** PPC members who are minors who wish to volunteer with children/youth *do not have to undergo the screening process outlined in Section 7.1* and may still serve as volunteers *provided that* (a) they are never alone with minors, (b) they have been a member of PPC for at least 6 months, and (c) they are continuously supervised by an adult who has completed the entire screening and training process.

- 5.3.5 The Session has the authority to give final approval for any volunteer and/or staff member to work in any given area of ministry.

5.4 Supervision

- 5.4.1 Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular visits in each program and ministry to provide opportunities to observe adult interactions with minors.

The volunteer monitor or church officer will conduct periodic, unscheduled observations of Sunday school classes, Wednesday night meetings, and any other church-approved event involving minors. Any individual serving in this capacity should have been screened and received training.

- 5.4.2 **Principle of Visibility:** In all activities, classes, nurseries, and events for our children and youth we want to maintain a high standard of visibility and accountability. It is the adult leader's responsibility to ensure this and to establish a high visibility situation for the duration of the class/event. This must be done by satisfying at least one of the following conditions:

- (a) Two adults will be in attendance at all times. *This is ideal and should be secured whenever possible.*
- (b) The door to the classroom will be open as long as only one adult is present with the class.
- (c) The room in which the class/event takes place will have high visibility to passersby through the form of a window through which either a) the whole room can be seen, or b) all participants can be seen.
- (d) The teacher/leader will take the group to a more visible location, such as the fellowship hall.
- (e) Combine with another class.

****Regardless of how many of the above conditions are being met, there shall never be less than two minors alone with a teacher, worker, or volunteer.**

- 5.4.3 **Peer Supervision:** Providing adequate supervision for children in their care requires that all workers be vigilant that these policies are adhered to by all workers—staff members, officers and volunteers.

- (a) Each classroom of minors will be supervised by at least one adult who has been through the screening and training process and received a criminal background check.
- (b) Only adult female staff or volunteers are allowed to change diapers, unless it is the parent or legal guardian.

- 5.4.4 **Nursery:** PPC's nursery is set up to accommodate children ages 3 years and younger; however, special accommodations may be made upon approval of the Christian Education Committee. Volunteers should report to their duty stations no later than 15 minutes prior to the start of any activity, including worship services, classes, nursery, and special events.
- 5.4.5 **One-on-One Ministry:** Any adult who meets one-on-one with minors should make every effort to use common sense and be safe in their interactions with children and youth. This is for the protection of the children and youth God has placed under our care as well as for the protection of the adults who seek to care for them. For that reason:
- (a) One-on-ones with minors should always be done in highly visible or public areas.
 - (b) Under no circumstances may an adult be alone with a minor without another adult within earshot.
- 5.4.6 **Restroom Guidelines:** Children should utilize a classroom bathroom if available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, a teacher/volunteer should escort the child or group of children to the nearest bathroom, and remain at the bathroom door. The teacher/volunteer should escort the child(ren) back to the classroom as soon as possible.
- (a) If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the teacher/volunteer should take appropriate common sense steps to assist the child in a safe and wise manner.
 - (b) All children may only be wiped by adult females.
 - (c) Minors may not assist children to the bathroom.
- 5.4.7 Any time a child has been entrusted to PPC staff or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge. This requires **releasing children** at the close of services and activities solely to parents, legal guardians, or other persons authorized by parents or legal guardians to pick up their children.
- (a) The Christian Education Committee shall develop, review, and implement sign-out sheets for nursery, Sunday school, children's classes, and other children's ministry activities, as necessary.
 - (b) Children may not be released to minors under 12 years of age, regardless if they have been authorized by parents or legal guardians.
- 5.4.8 **High Isolation Settings:** Minors may only enter these settings with two or more volunteer, one of whom has received a criminal background check.

- 5.5 **Operations:** The Diaconate of Pearl Presbyterian Church is responsible for maintaining a facility that is safe for children, with appropriate safeguards to prevent injury, harm, and abuse as well as to restrict access from those who might intentionally harm those under the care of the Church.

Section 6. Response & Reporting Protocols

It is our prayer that the preceding policies and procedures will protect our children and visitors from any abuse or neglect under our watch. In the interests of wisdom, however, it is necessary to have a prepared plan of response for allegations of abuse or neglect, whether the alleged incident(s) occur within the purview of our facilities and ministries or at the homes, schools, or other relations of the children in our care.

6.1 Summary of Mississippi Reporting Law

Mississippi Annotated Code §§ 43-21-105, 43-21-353

Any mandated reporter who has *reasonable cause* to suspect that a child is abused or neglected (see definitions provided in section 4 of this policy) shall immediately make an oral report to the Department of Human Services, to be followed as soon as possible by a written report. The oral report is to be given through The Mississippi Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation Reporting Hotline System (**Local: 1-662-289-2104, State: 1-888-222-8000**). The proper contact information for filing the written report will be given to the reporter during the telephone report. The written report shall contain:

- The names and address(es) of the child, the child's parents, or other persons responsible for the child's care,
- The child's age,
- The nature and extent of injuries, including any evidence of prior injuries,
- Any other information that might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injury and the identity of the perpetrator.

Mississippi caselaw explains that "the duty to report suspected child abuse attaches to an individual the moment they are presented with a situation producing 'reasonable cause' for such suspicion. Hence, the standard for reporting is possessing suspicion of child abuse that is founded upon reasonable cause." [*Howe v. Andereck*, 882 So.2d 240, 244 (Miss. Ct. App. 2004)]

Mandatory reporters are responsible to report immediately by telephone or otherwise, followed as soon as possible by a written report to the Mississippi Department of Human Services. Willful failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect can result in a fine of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment for up to one year or both (Ann. Code § 43-21-353(7)).

Miss. Ann. Code § 43-21-355 states that "any person participating in making a required report pursuant to the reporting laws or participating in a judicial proceeding resulting therefrom shall be presumed to be acting in good faith." "Any person or institution reporting in good faith shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed."

In the course of the report, the reporter may be asked to provide his/her own contact information, especially if they serve as material witness to abuse. The state worker assigned to the investigation will contact the reporter as the first step in the investigation, with the expressed purpose of getting additional information about the alleged incident of abuse/neglect, and to inform the reporter of the role and purpose of the Department of Human Services in its response to the report. A safety assessment by the worker will be completed within 7 calendar days of the report being assigned (Ann. Code § 11-006-102). It should be noted that Ann. Code § 43-21-353 indicates that the identity of the reporting party shall not be disclosed to anyone other than law enforcement

officers or prosecutors without an order from the appropriate youth court. The identity of the reporter shall not be disclosed to an individual under investigation.

Mississippi law makes no special exception for members of the clergy. Clergymen are therefore considered mandatory reporters as any other professional listed above.

6.2 General Provisions

- 6.2.1 Any witness of actions constituting abuse or neglect of minors occurring on PPC property or during PPC-sponsored events shall immediately inform the Senior Pastor. The same is true for persons who *bear allegations* of abuse or neglect occurring at PPC.
 - (a) In the interest of haste or if the Senior Pastor is unreachable, the report may also be given to a ruling elder.
- 6.2.2 An “Incident Report” shall be composed to provide written testimony regarding potential harm to children at PPC, on retreats, or by PPC staff/volunteers. If possible, at least two witnesses shall provide a written account of the event. These shall be held in a confidential file should any civil or criminal case arise from such incident(s).
- 6.2.3 If an incident occurs on PPC property or during ministry events, the Senior Pastor or his designee shall act as primary reporter to the MDCPS and liaison with state workers and law enforcement personnel.
- 6.2.4 In the event that an in-depth investigation becomes necessary, it shall be carried out by MDCPS and/or appropriate law enforcement personnel and not by church staff, officers, or volunteers.
- 6.2.5 Unless there is immediate threat to the safety of a minor, PPC staff, members/volunteers, and officers shall allow MDCPS and law enforcement personnel to handle the safeguarding of the alleged/potential victim, the notification of parents/guardians, and the confrontation of the person accused of abuse. (If there is cause for immediate concern for the wellbeing of a minor, see section 6.7.4).
- 6.2.6 The needs and safety of a potential/alleged victim take priority over the accused.
- 6.2.7 Persons accused of criminal behavior towards a minor shall immediately be relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with minors until all investigations are completed and the allegations are cleared *or* charges are formally brought against the accused. If charges are made, the Session shall consult with the accused regarding future responsibilities.

- 6.2.8 The Senior Pastor or his designee shall report incidents of alleged abuse to PPC legal counsel and the liability insurer for the church.
- 6.2.9 In the event of a report of abuse or neglect, the Session of PPC may designate a sub-committee of its membership to respond to reports of abuse or neglect involving PPC members, staff, volunteers, or officers. They may also do this as a whole, without forming a sub-committee.
 - (a) This session/sub-committee may elect to form a response team composed of qualified persons to handle legal and pastoral matters pertaining to the abuse or neglect of minors.
- 6.2.10 The Senior Pastor or his designee will be careful to document all steps taken in the course of handling an incident and the report. The documentation shall be kept in a confidential file maintained by PPC.
- 6.2.11 All parties involved in an alleged incident, including the victim, the accuser, and the accused, shall be treated with dignity, support, and love. *The confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible.*
- 6.2.12 The Senior Pastor shall be the sole spokesperson for the church insofar as **media inquiries** are concerned. The Session may designate another individual to act in such capacity with regard to a given case.

6.3 Responding to Questionable Conduct Involving Minors

- 6.3.1 All members of PPC staff, and other adults, participating in the ministries of PPC are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for the abuse of minors. They are encouraged to caution others if they observe conduct that they believe could be, or appear to be, questionable.
- 6.3.2 Even though observed questionable conduct may not itself be abusive, the witness shall report, as soon as practical or by the end of the business day, the observed action(s) to the PPC staff person directly responsible for the ministry program during which the action(s) occurred, or to the Senior Pastor.
- 6.3.3 The PPC staff person shall notify the Senior Pastor, and they will consult regarding any initial action.

6.4 Unwanted or Dangerous Persons on Site

- 6.4.1 PPC is not a public facility. Therefore, any employee or member of PPC has the right to refuse entry or ask any person to leave at any time if they pose a threat to the safety of staff, volunteers, or children.
 - (a) This pertains not only to the interior spaces of the church, but also to all external property.

- 6.4.2 If an unwanted person is unwilling to cooperate, assistance should be immediately sought from a male staff member. Continued resistance warrants a call to the police department (**non-emergency: 601-939-7000**). If possible, children in the area surrounding the unwanted person should be discretely vacated to a safe location.
- (a) If in a classroom, the teacher should lock the door to the classroom, move the children out of view, and place himself/herself next to the door until the all-clear is sounded.
- 6.4.3 We should seek to avoid an altercation with an intruder unless absolutely necessary. Those trying to remove him from the property should remain calm and utilize the presence and wisdom of available staff and volunteers. Do not hesitate to call the police if the intruder is unwilling to cooperate.
- (a) **911** should be called immediately *if things look to turn violent*.
- (b) The use of violent force (lethal and non-lethal) should be restrained unless it is absolutely necessary to protect the life of a potential victim.

6.5 Missing Persons & Abductions

- 6.5.1 ***If a minor goes missing*** during PPC events or on PPC property, and that child cannot be found within **10 minutes**, a team of at least 3 persons shall be assembled from adults on hand to search the area (internal and external spaces) for the missing person.
- 6.5.2 A person shall be designated to call anyone with whom the child may have received a ride to make sure that they did not get picked up or go home with someone else (*Note: this should never happen without prior permission from parents*).
- 6.5.3 If after **30 minutes** of searching the child cannot be found, **911** should be called and the Senior Pastor notified.

6.6 Handling Suspicions of Abuse or Neglect

- 6.6.1 If any member, volunteer, teacher, or staff member has suspicions regarding the potential abuse or neglect of children, whether or not it is tied to PPC, that person should seek the counsel of the pastor.
- 6.6.2 Unless there is reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred in the context of PPC ministries or facilities, the person having suspicions shall act as the primary reporter. PPC pastor is willing to assist members, staff, and volunteers in calling MDCPS and helping compose the written report.
- 6.6.3 In cases of suspicion, the first step to be taken should be continued and prayerful observation of and conversations with the child followed by discussions with the ministry supervisor, other volunteers who have regular interaction with the child, and the minor's parent/guardian where appropriate.

- 6.6.4 No one wants to be mistaken when reporting suspicions of abuse or neglect, however it is outside the scope of PPC to conduct investigations into child abuse and/or neglect. That is the proper role of the civil government. A strong suspicion of abuse or neglect amounts to reasonable cause and warrants a report.

6.7 Allegations & Confessions of Abuse

- 6.7.1 **Anyone who hears allegations or confessions of abuse or neglect** is responsible to **notify MDCPS at 1-662-289-2104**. If possible, they shall provide the identity of the perpetrator, the identity of the victim, and the date(s) the abuse/neglect occurred.
- 6.7.2 A staff member or volunteer who hears allegations and/or confession is encouraged to notify the Senior Pastor of the communication and seek his support and counsel in handling the matter and further ministry to that person.
- 6.7.3 Pastors, staff, members, and volunteers are encouraged to notify adults and minors who confide in them, (especially if there is a request for confidentiality), that we have a responsibility to alert the proper authorities to allegations of child abuse/neglect, or threats of immediate harm to themselves or others.
- 6.7.4 If there is an **immediate threat of harm to a minor, a report must be made *immediately***. In such cases, **911 should be called first and then MDCPS**. The minor person may be brought to the PPC office *with the parent/guardian's permission* (unless the parent/guardian is the potential offender) until MDCPS or law enforcement personnel can take responsibility for the child.

6.8 Allegations against Staff and Volunteers

- 6.8.1 If allegations of abuse are made **against any staff member or volunteer**, the Senior Pastor shall *immediately* be notified, as well as one of the Ruling Elders. Allegations towards staff and volunteers shall be treated with utmost seriousness.
- (a) The Senior Pastor's first responsibility is to notify MDCPS and compose the written report (if not previously done by another party). He shall then notify the Session. He shall provide them with the date(s) of the incident and the names of those involved.
- (b) After notifying MDCPS and ascertaining the security of the alleged victim, the Senior Pastor and a ruling elder shall meet with the accused to issue notification that they are being temporarily relieved of responsibility involving minors. Staff members shall be suspended from all ministry activities for a minimum of *two weeks with pay*. After that point, the staff member may be allowed to return to work *barring contact with minors*.

- (c) A volunteer or staff person who is accused of criminal behavior towards a minor may not have direct contact with minors until all investigations are completed and the allegations are cleared *or* charges are formally brought against the accused. If charges are made, the Session shall consult with the accused regarding future responsibilities. (*Duplicated from 6.2.7.*)
- (d) The Session has a responsibility to protect ministers and staff against baseless charges and to protect the ministry of PPC. Therefore, the Session should not seek to *fire or dismiss* a staff member without some tangible cause. This could include, but is not limited to, charges being made in a court of law, proof/confession of inappropriate behavior, or a disruption so scandalous that it presents significant hurdles to future ministry.
- (e) The session may designate a person or group of persons to shepherd the victim(s), the family of the victim(s), and/or the accused.
- (f) In cases involving **ordained ministers**, the Shepherding and Advisory Committee of the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley should be notified within 3 business days so that they may assist in the process of shepherding and discipline.

6.8.2 **Internal Investigations:** At times allegations may arise against volunteers and staff that are baseless and aimed at the defamation of character. Anytime allegations strike the Senior Pastor or members of the Session as highly suspect—especially if accusations arise as hearsay or appear intentionally slanderous—then the Session may opt to investigate the veracity of the accusations internally.

- (a) **The purpose of an internal investigation is to establish reasonable cause** for reporting to MDCPS when allegations of inappropriate conduct towards minors are highly suspect. ***Internal investigations do not relieve the Senior Pastor of his responsibility to report when there is reasonable weight to an allegation.***
- (b) Internal investigations are to proceed by enlisting the aid of the Session for matters of abuse and neglect, and then by seeking legal counsel regarding the specific accusations. After receiving initial legal counsel, the Senior Pastor and a member of the Session may consult with the accused regarding the veracity and circumstances surrounding the accusation. If the accusations or allegations warrant a legal report in the eyes of legal counsel, then the accused will be handled in accordance with 6.8.1. If, however, there is significant doubt as to the veracity of the claims, the staff person shall be placed on **probation** until the matter can be clarified.
 - i. **Probation for a volunteer** shall consist of being relieved of all responsibilities for ministering to minors, and he may not be unsupervised with a group of minors.

- ii. **Probation for a *staff person*** shall consist of constant supervision when working with minors by an adult who has been through the screening and training process, other than the spouse. In addition, staff persons on probation may not participate in one-on-one ministry or overnight events with minors, such as retreats, until such probation ends.
 - (c) Internal investigations should include phone calls to persons named in the accusation besides the accused, persons who worked closely with the accused when the offense is said to occur, ministry supervisors who worked with the accused when the offense is said to occur, and law enforcement who may have received reports of an offense.
- 6.8.3 If Pearl Presbyterian Church is notified of allegations against a staff member or volunteer by law enforcement personnel, lawyers, or other legal officials, the Senior Pastor or his designee shall serve as liaison and cooperate fully with the investigation.
- 6.8.4 **In the case that the Senior Pastor is unavailable** (*e.g.*, on vacation/sabbatical, ill, or PPC is between pastors), the Session as a whole shall assume the responsibility of the Senior Pastor as it pertains to Section 6.8 of this policy. They shall then:
- (a) Designate one of their number (preferably the clerk of session) to make contact with MDCPS and serve as liaison with legal and law enforcement personnel.
 - (b) Designate someone to serve as media liaison, preferably an officer of the church (minister, elder, deacon).
- 6.8.5 **If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor**, the Session of Pearl Presbyterian Church shall take over all prerogatives and privileges ordinarily belonging to the Senior Pastor as it pertains to these protocols. If accusations are made public, or if criminal charges are made, the Session shall discuss the temporary removal of the Senior Pastor from the pulpit.

6.9 Shepherding of Victim, Accuser, and Accused

- 6.9.1 For those who have never been abused, exploited, or neglected, it is hard to perceive the deep emotional wounds experienced by the victim and his/her family. The church has a responsibility to reach out to those who are violated in such ways with tenderness, compassion, and grace. There is no easy fix, and such situations frequently require years of counseling, prayer, and compassion. Victims frequently blame themselves and feel a deep sense of shame, even though they have done nothing wrong. As shepherds we must bear this in mind. Abuse is not something families and victims can just “get past.” It may mark them for the rest of their lives. What we can do, and *should* do, is listen, mourn, and pray.

- 6.9.2 While lay and ordained leadership are generally able to provide a listening ear, compassion, and biblical encouragement, the type of intensive counseling needed in instances of abuse is frequently that of licensed, professional help. To that end, PPC should maintain a list of quality referrals to provide to victim, family, or accused. Due to the prohibitive cost of seeing a quality mental health professional for any length of time, it would be wise for PPC to subsidize the counseling of members, particularly that needed by the victim and/or their family. **If the victim suffered under the watch of Pearl Presbyterian Church, or at the hands of a staff person or volunteer, then providing quality counseling is obligatory.**
- 6.9.3 It is not uncommon for those who report or make an accusation/allegation of abuse and/or neglect to feel a great burden of responsibility, and perhaps misplaced guilt. They should be encouraged that they did the right thing, and it pleases God to stand up for the rights of the oppressed and abused. It matters not whether the accused is a person of good reputation or high social standing. Additionally, some persons may draw away from an accuser/reporter through a sense of fear that perhaps this person made a needless report. Thus, the Session should include the reporter/accuser in their prayers and surround them with the encouragement of Christ.
- 6.9.4 Handling abuse/neglect within the church is emotional and painful. People may feel that the leadership is not doing enough, or didn't do enough. The leadership and shepherds must remain calm and respond graciously. We must not render judgment about guilt, as that is for the justice system to determine. We must remain balanced in our perspective and tempered in our passions.
- 6.9.5 **Church discipline should be applied through due process (as set forth in the PCA Book of Church Order)** consequent to personal confession or legal verdict of guilt. As in any instance of church discipline, the goals of the Session in disciplining an offender are the glory of Christ, the purity of the church, and the restoration of the sinner. The spiritual state of the accused and his repentance and restoration are therefore primary concerns of the Session. ***It should be additionally understood that preferential child molesters are adept at pretending repentance;*** they are master manipulators and know how to tell people what they want to hear. Therefore, the help of a specialist should be acquired in determining the level of honest repentance in a child molester. Wisdom and care for the congregation may dictate that even a repentant child abuser relocate.

- 6.9.6 Those who are charged with crimes against children—particularly those who are found guilty—will live with the stigma of being a child molester for the rest of their earthly lives. Such sins can be and are forgiven by Christ, but the perpetrator will likely live in shame and disrepute. The church has a responsibility to act both in wisdom and in love towards child molesters who have genuinely repented of their sins and crimes. They may be welcomed into our fellowship and loved as brothers or sisters in Christ. However, the church has a responsibility to protect the children who are in covenant with us, and **we shall never allow a convicted child-abuser or sex-offender to participate in children’s ministries or allow them to be alone with a minor.**

Section 7. Appendices

7.1 The Screening Process

7.2 Forms

- 7.2.1 Statement of Understanding & Agreement
- 7.2.2 Primary Screening Form
- 7.2.3 Criminal Background Check
- 7.2.4 Incident Report

Pearl Presbyterian Church CHILD PROTECTION POLICY SCREENING PROCESS

An Overview of the Screening & Training Process

While all that is required to be a member of Pearl Presbyterian Church is a *credible profession of faith*, this profession alone does not equal qualification for teaching ministry or childcare ministry. For this reason, when a person comes on staff at Pearl Presbyterian Church or desires to volunteer in a ministry involving minors, our Session requires him to go through a screening and training process as described in the Child Protection Policy. All staff members, officers and volunteers working with minors are required to complete PPC's Child Protection screening process. There are three essential components of this process.

Formal Screening: All staff, officers and adult volunteers are required to fill out three forms. These are a *Statement of Understanding and Agreement*, *Criminal Background Check Authorization*, and the *Primary Screening Form*. Upon completion, these forms are to be turned in to the church secretary. In the interest of confidentiality, the forms may be submitted in a sealed manila envelope. The church secretary will pass the forms to the Senior Pastor, who will review them and may pass them to the pastor or elder who will conduct the volunteer's interview. ***These forms will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored in a secured location.***

Screening Review: After the applicant has reviewed the CPC and submitted his/her Primary Screening Form, an additional interview may be requested by the pastor, CEC Committee member, or ruling elder. The interviewer or the potential volunteer may request the presence of an additional pastor or elder during this session.

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training: Lastly, ***all*** staff, officers and adult volunteers are required to go through *Ministry Safe's* "Sexual Abuse Awareness Training" <https://ministrysafe.com/the-safety-system/awareness-training/>. This training is to be done online and takes approximately one hour to complete, with a 25 question quiz that follows the training videos. You may request a link for this training through the church office. If you do not have reliable internet access at home, you may schedule a time to go through the training in the PPC office. Once you complete the training you will receive a certificate of completion and the church office will be notified. This part of the training process may be done at any time. All that is required is a valid email address.

Description of Forms:

- **Statement of Understanding and Agreement:** All staff, officers and adult volunteers who work with minors must know the requirements of the Child Protection Policy, and have a basic idea of what to do if an incident were to occur. To that end, we require these groups read the current version of the Child Protection Policy and sign a form to that effect. We also strongly encourage parents to read the policy and sign this form. This form should be completed every other year, per Section 5.2.2.
- **Primary Screening Form:** This form is to be used with all staff, officers and adult volunteers who desire to work with minors. Think of it as an application for ministry to minors. These forms will be filled out and discussed with a member of the pastoral staff and/or a member of the Session. Upon completion, forms will be kept strictly confidential and stored in a secured location.

- **Criminal Background Check Authorization:** All staff, officers and adult volunteers who work with minors in any capacity are required to submit to a criminal background check. Upon completion, these forms and their results will be kept strictly confidential and stored in a secure location.

Pearl Presbyterian Church
STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING & AGREEMENT

I have received a copy of the Child Protection Policy and have read it in its entirety.

I understand the policies and procedures outlined and enumerated in Pearl Presbyterian Church's Child Protection Policy. I agree to fully comply with and follow the Child Protection Policy.

Signature _____

Date _____

Print Name _____

**Pearl Presbyterian Church
PRIMARY SCREENING FORM**

CONFIDENTIAL

*This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (voluntary or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. This is not an employment application. It is being used to assist the church in providing a safe environment for children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities. We do not discriminate based on appearance, race, age, or gender. However, we will consider religious beliefs, personal holiness, and criminal background in staffing voluntary and compensated positions. All information provided will be kept **confidential**.*

Date _____

Name _____
Last First Middle

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Telephone _____

Marital Status: _____ (Single, Married, Divorced, etc.)

Ministry Information

How long have you been a member of Pearl Presbyterian Church? _____

When did you begin attending PPC regularly? _____

List the name, address, city and state of all other churches you have attended regularly during the past ten years (include addresses). *Use the back of this form if necessary.*

List *all previous work* involving youth or children. Include organization's name, type of work performed, and dates, along with a **contact person** familiar with your work. *Use the back of this form if necessary.*

List any training, education or other experiences that have prepared you for ministry to youth or children.

Personal References

May not be relatives or former employers unless pertinent to this application

Name _____

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Telephone _____

Confidential Background Information

Because Pearl Presbyterian Church cares for our members and our children, and desires to protect them, please answer the following questions. We understand that the answers to these questions may be private and deeply personal, and we will protect your privacy. The only people who will have access to this form is the senior pastor, the PPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry area you seek to serve in, and the Session upon formal request.

Why do you want to work with children or youth at Pearl Presbyterian Church?

Do you have a preference concerning the age group or sex of children or students with whom you would like to work? Why?

What is your philosophy concerning the re-direction or discipline of children in a ministry or classroom setting?

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime other than a minor traffic violation?

Yes _____ No _____

If “yes” please explain (attach a separate page as necessary):

Have you ever been legally accused in civil or criminal court, had charges filed against you, and/or been convicted of physical or sexual abuse?

Yes _____ No _____

If “yes” please explain (attach a separate page as necessary):

Have you ever been treated for or had a problem with drug and/or alcohol addiction or abuse (including prescription medications)?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain:

Do you have any medical, physical or emotional conditions which may impact your ability to work with children?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain (if pertinent, please identify any related medications):

Has anyone ever accused you of physically or sexually abusing a child outside of a court of law?

Yes _____ No _____

If “yes” please explain (attach a separate page as necessary):

Feel free to use the below space to answer above questions. Please indicate which question you are answering/continuing for easy reference.

APPLICANT’S STATEMENT AND RELEASE

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the PCA Book of Church Order and the Child Protection Policy of Pearl Presbyterian Church and subject to the authority of its Session, and to refrain from unbiblical conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, former employers or churches listed in this application, and anyone identified by such references, former employers or churches to provide Pearl Presbyterian Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children or youth work.

In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by Pearl Presbyterian Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or my family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

I clearly release any church or reference supplied by me in this application from any damages to me, my family or heirs, because of any oral or written communications supplied to Pearl Presbyterian Church as a result of my application.

I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING APPLICANT’S STATEMENT AND RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS STATEMENT AND RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant’s Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

Parent’s Signature (if applicant is under age 18) _____

Date _____

REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK AND AUTHORIZATION

I hereby request any Police Department or government agency to release any information to Pearl Presbyterian Church of Pearl, Mississippi which pertains to any record of convictions contained in its files or in any criminal file maintained on me whether local, state, or national. I hereby release said Police Department or agency from any and all liability resulting from such disclosure.

Signature _____ Print Name _____

Parent’s Signature (if applicant is under age 18) _____

Maiden name, if applicable _____

Print all aliases _____

Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____

Social Security Number _____ Today’s Date _____

Current Address _____

How many years have you lived at this address? _____

List all previous addresses at which you have lived in the last five years, together with dates:
If you have lived at the prior address for at least the past five years, include only your last prior address.

Do you have a current driver’s license? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, list # _____

Please attach a copy of your current driver’s license

**Pearl Presbyterian Church
INCIDENT REPORT FORM**

Pearl Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and state law. This form is to be used anytime an incident occurs during PPC ministry events, whether on-site or off-site, as well as to provide a written record of inappropriate behavior towards minors (e.g., grooming), policy violations, suspected abuse, or allegations of abuse. In the case of a potentially serious incident, it is highly encouraged that two eyewitnesses fill out an Incident Report.

Name: _____ Phone No. _____

Date and Time of Incident: _____

Location of Incident: _____

Name of Minor(s) Involved: _____

What was your involvement in the incident, if any? _____

Who was the adult in charge at the time of the incident? _____

Description of Incident: (use back of form if more space is needed)

Was there injury? Yes ___ No ___

If so, describe the nature of the injury:

What action was taken, and by whom?

Other witnesses to the incident:

How and when was the parent/guardian contacted? _____

Please indicate which of the following individuals you notified of the incident, their name, and the date and time at which you notified them:

Pastor: _____

Chairman/Christian Education Committee: _____

Elder: _____

Deacon: _____

Church Secretary: _____

Signature of Witness/Reporter

Date

Signature of Person Receiving Report

Date

Signature of Active Session Member

Date

(Extra Space for Incident Description and Additional Comments)