

Forest Lake Presbyterian Church
Child Protection Policy
Approved by Session in May 2026

“And Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’” adapted from Mark 9:36-37

I. PURPOSE AND MISSION

Because trust is so fundamental to the well-being of the Christian community, people have the right to expect that those they choose as Christian leaders (lay and ordained) are committed to standards of behavior that are trustworthy. We are bound to serve and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Forest Lake Presbyterian Church (FLPC) is committed to maintaining a safe environment in which children and youth are nurtured and instructed in the faith and protected from abuse or neglect. We believe that we have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for children and youth as well as to support those who work with them. We will prohibit any person who poses a threat to our children and youth from working in any ministry involving children or youth. This policy applies to all those who work with children through Forest Lake Presbyterian programs including employees, church members, and volunteers. Our goals are to protect the children and youth of Forest Lake Church, to educate everyone concerning FLPC safe child protection procedures, and to provide appropriate response guidelines.

II. APPLICATION AND SCREENING PROCESS FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

A. Volunteer Applications

Those who wish to volunteer to work with minors (defined as a youth under 18 years of age) at Forest Lake Presbyterian Church must submit and agree to the following:

1. Complete the FLPC Child Protection Background Check Form, sign the worker’s pledge, and sign the “Standards of Behavior.”
2. Authorize Forest Lake Presbyterian to conduct criminal and civil background checks; such checks include references, a statewide criminal background search and/or a statewide sexual offender search (from each state which the volunteer previously resided), and a national criminal background search.

If the applicant’s background check is “accepted unconditionally” (see section D), then the following must be completed before approval to work with minors:

3. Attend a training session led by the appropriate staff member. See Section IV for more information about this training.
4. Complete any additional requirements set forth by the Education Ministry. These requirements will be clearly defined in the training.
5. Any newly-approved volunteer must serve alongside a previously-approved adult for the first six months after initial approval.

The staff person who recruits/supervises a volunteer/employee who has access/proximity to minors is responsible for receiving a completed application before the volunteer/employee begins his/her duties. In addition, this staff person will complete, document, and return all reference checks to the Director of Operations.

B. Youth Volunteer

Youth members of the church family who are under the age of 18 may volunteer to work with minors under adult supervision, but they are not counted as a second adult. Referred to as "youth volunteers," these members are wonderful church resources in many situations. To volunteer the youth volunteers must:

1. Be at least 13 years old and a member of FLPC.
2. Be at least 3 years older than the minors with whom they are interacting; and
3. Complete and sign the Youth Volunteer Application, which includes the Standards of Behavior.
4. Complete any additional requirements set forth by the Education Ministry.
5. In compliance with the FLPC Nursery Policy, youth volunteers must be at least 16 years of age to work with infants and toddlers.

C. Employee Applications

All employees are required to submit to all background checks (in addition to the regular employment application and reference checks).

D. For Church employees and volunteers:

The Director of Operations will review the application and confirm its completion, complete background checks, and maintain the application and additional supplemental materials in a secure location.

The results of any individual's reference check and background checks are to be kept strictly confidential. If information of a cautionary nature is revealed through a reference or background check, the person conducting the check shall note this information in writing. This information shall be considered by the Pastor, the immediate supervisor of the employee/volunteer, and the Director of Operations. This group shall decide on a course of action. The decision must be documented in writing, dated, and placed with the completed application in the Director of Operation's office. In such a case, the person's volunteer application may be:

1. Accepted unconditionally.
2. Accepted with clearly defined restrictions; or
3. Denied.

If the application is accepted with clearly defined restrictions or denied, the appropriate supervisor shall inform the volunteer/employee of the decision and its implications.

Forest Lake Presbyterian Church reserves the right to review applications from volunteers and/or employees at any time. In addition to completing a new background check on all volunteers every three years, background checks or new reference checks may be requested either randomly or because of some concern.

III. STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

In order to carry out our mission of protecting the children and youth entrusted to our care, we commit ourselves to the following guidelines.

FLPC activities will be supervised by employees and/or adults who are at least 18 years of age.

- A. **Two Adult Rule:** Two unrelated (biologically or by marriage) adults shall be present and supervising minors at all times. This requirement applies to every church function and applies in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving minors. No minors or group of minors will be left in the care of only one adult. Same-sex adult supervision will be provided for all overnight trips. In situations like a retreat, the required adult supervision may be provided with adult supervisors from other churches.

Per the Forest Lake Presbyterian Church Nursery Policy, the following caregiver/children ratios should be followed:

- A. Infant Nurseries - 1:4
 - B. Toddler's/Two's & 3's/4's Nurseries - 1:5
 - C. Care for children ages 5 and up - 1:8
- B. **Rule of Three:** In cases of unforeseen circumstances or exigencies when the Two Adult Rule cannot be implemented, at least three individuals, one of whom must be an adult, shall be present at every church function and in each classroom, vehicle or other enclosed area during all activities involving minors. If the Rule of Three cannot be achieved, written parent/guardian consent must be immediately obtained and the appropriate supervisor notified.
- C. **The Two Adult Rule is normally required for the supervision of minors and the Rule of Three should be used only in exceptional circumstances when it is not feasible to implement the Two Adult Rule.** If the Rule of Three is implemented for specific circumstances and that those circumstances involve a classroom or enclosed area equipped with a door (not including an automobile), the door should remain open and adult supervisors in adjacent rooms should be alerted so that those supervising adults are able to monitor the situation in the adjacent classroom. In implementing the Rule of Three in a particular circumstance, the ages and capacities of the two non-adult members involved in the Rule of Three must be considered. If the Rule of Three is employed for an activity involving the entire church building or many rooms in various parts of the church, an adult premises monitor, or monitors shall be designated to patrol the hallways and common areas within the church where the activities are taking place. The premises monitor(s) shall rove the entire church building and observe the activities in the classrooms and other spaces to ensure the safety of minor participants during the activities.
- D. **Limited exception to Two Adult Rule and to Rule of Three:** Neither the Two Adult Rule nor the Rule of Three is required in one-on-one spiritual counseling with a minor or in emergencies involving the safety of a minor or others involved in the activity with a minor. Should one-on-one spiritual counseling be conducted by anyone other than the teaching elders of the church, the supervisor of the person intending to conduct the

counseling must be notified in advance and the supervisor must approve the counseling. Normally, one-on-one spiritual counseling will last no longer than thirty minutes per session and will normally be limited to four sessions.

- E. **Restroom use by minors:** When using the restroom, minors, under the age of 10, will be accompanied by an adult to and from the restroom. Before any minor, under the age of 10, enters the restroom, the adult will enter the restroom to ensure it is safe. If a minor under the age of 10 requires assistance in the restroom, an adult of the same sex as the minor requiring assistance will assist the minor in the restroom with the restroom door propped open so that a second adult can visually monitor the assisting adult. If a restroom is directly accessible from the room where the minors' activities are taking place and the restroom is not accessible to the general public, minors may use the restroom alone. If a restroom is located in a building normally locked and secured from access by the general public but the building has been opened for an activity involving minors, the restroom(s) may be checked before the activity begins and need not be checked each time a minor requests to use the restroom so long as the building remains locked and secured during the activity involving the minors.
- F. **Attention shall be given to ensure children and youth involved in our programs feel safe and avoid even the appearance of impropriety.**
- G. **Any allegations of suspected abuse will be handled according to the provisions of this policy.**
- H. **Church employees, volunteers, and members are to uphold appropriate and faithful communication with minors** in all ~~electronic~~ contexts, including digital/electronic, while at church or in relation to all church attendees or activities. Adults are to refrain from using explicit language, the exchange of sexual imagery or sexually explicit discussion, the promotion of illegal activities (i.e., drug use, underage drinking), and all other inappropriate material in images, social media posts, shared videos, comments or remarks on other's posts. This requirement extends to phone (voice and text), social media, email, and ALL other forms of electronic communication, including blogs, chats, and texts. All communications, photos, comments, or replies via electronic methods should be appropriate to share publicly.
- I. **Normally, electronic communications between adults and minors takes place using a public platform such as Facebook group page, a GroupMe group message, etc.**
When a public platform is not appropriate or possible, electronic communications (such as emails, texts, social media direct messages, or any other kind of non-public message) between adults and minors should employ the two-to-one rule: 2 youth to 1 adult or 2 adults to 1 youth. If the need arises to contact a youth directly, the church staff member must receive approval from the parent/guardian before initiating contact.
- J. **If a minor has a critical, confidential need to communicate directly with an adult electronically,** the receiving adult will preserve the communication in a digital or physical file. This file may be compiled by taking a "screenshot" of the electronic communication, by printing out a hard copy of the electronic communication (most appropriate for email), or by typing a log/report of the phone call conversation. A log of critical communications will be submitted to the supervisor upon preparation of the file and will be discussed with the designated staff member when needed.
- K. **Education for electronic communication usage between minors and adults will happen at least annually,** to clarify the importance of open communication.

- L. **If an adult employee, volunteer, or member feels they have been inappropriately contacted by a minor**, they are to report the incident in writing (email is acceptable) to the supervising staff member and the Senior Pastor. If a minor feels they have been inappropriately contacted by an adult, they are to share this information with a trusted Adult Advisor, Pastor or Staff member.

IV. EDUCATION/AWARENESS PROGRAMS OR TRAININGS

Information about the Child Protection Policy shall be available in the church office lobby and included in each new member packet.

The Education Ministry will communicate annually with the entire congregation regarding the Child Protection Policy at the beginning of the Fall program year.

Annual training on FLPC's Child Protection Policy, which will be led by the appropriate staff supervisor, is required for:

1. Employees of the church
2. Volunteers who wish to work with children under 18
3. New elders and deacons

Training will include the following at minimum:

- A review of the Child Protection Policy and Standards of Behavior
- A review of FLPC's emergency, evacuation, and active shooter procedures

Upon completion of the training, volunteers and staff must complete the following:

- Signature verifying the volunteer or staff member has read and understands the Child Protection Policy and Standards of Behavior.
- Any additional requirements set forth by the Education Ministry. These requirements will be clearly defined in the annual training.

In addition, all volunteers and staff will be required to resubmit the Child Protection Volunteer Application and authorize Forest Lake Presbyterian to conduct criminal and civil background checks every three years after their initial service begins.

V. REPORTING PROCEDURES

When a member, volunteer, or employee of the Church receives allegations of abuse or neglect, the procedures set forth below should be followed. Occasionally, unique circumstances of an allegation may require a change in the order of procedures except that statutory mandated reporter requirements must be followed in every circumstance to which they apply.

In addition to the procedures of the Church's child protection policy, South Carolina has a mandated reporter law. That law requires certain professionals to report when, in their professional capacities, they receive information that gives them reason to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected. The Pastors and staff who have been identified as mandated reporters in their position descriptions are mandated reporters. In addition to specified professionals required to report child abuse and neglect, any person who has reason to believe a child has been or may be abused or neglected may report the suspected abuse or neglect. South

Carolina law provides protections for mandated reporters and for other people who make reports based on the law.

In the case of suspected abuse against a child:

1. When an employee or volunteer has reason to believe that a child is the victim of abuse or neglect, the employee or volunteer must immediately report this information to a member of the church office staff. Church employees or volunteers who have reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, either by someone within the church or outside, should listen and offer support to the child at the time of disclosure and/or observation. Under no circumstances should an employee or volunteer of the church attempt to personally investigate or resolve any allegations through any method including interviews of the child or other potential witnesses.
2. The staff person shall immediately report any allegations to the Pastor. The Pastor shall immediately provide all necessary information to the appropriate authorities. The Pastor, or his/her designee, shall at all times serve as the spokesperson for the Church in case of public requests for information unless otherwise determined by Session.
3. The Pastor, or designee, shall also immediately contact the child's parent or guardian and inform them of the allegation and the steps taken. If the report alleges abuse or neglect by the parent or guardian, the Pastor shall have the appropriate authorities contact the parent or guardian.
4. Within 24 hours of a report of abuse to authorities, the Pastor shall inform the members of Session of the allegation and report without reference to the names of those involved.

In the case of an allegation of abuse against an adult or youth aide:

If an allegation of abuse is received against a church employee or church volunteer, the Pastor or immediate supervisor shall report the allegation to the appropriate authorities for investigation.

Allegation against a Church Staff member:

If the allegation of abuse is against an employee of the church, the Pastor, the immediate supervisor, and the Personnel Ministry's designee will review the facts known to them and determine in their discretion whether it is in the best interest of the church for the employee to be:

1. Suspended during the course of the investigation (with or without pay as determined by the Personnel Ministry).
2. Terminated; or
3. Retained with job functions that do not involve contact with minors.

If the investigation is concluded with no charges or findings filed against the employee, the Pastor, immediate supervisor, and the Personnel Ministry's designee will review the information revealed during the investigation. Based on this information, this group will determine whether it is in the best interests of the church for the employee to be terminated or retained.

Allegation against a Church Volunteer:

If the allegation of abuse is against a volunteer, that volunteer shall be relieved of responsibilities involving minors served by the church for the duration of the investigation. The status of the volunteer may be revisited upon conclusion of the investigation at the discretion of the Pastor, Clerk of Session and immediate supervisor. If the investigation is concluded with no charges or findings filed against the volunteer, the Pastor, Clerk of Session and immediate supervisor should review the information revealed during the course of investigation. Based on this information, the Pastor, Clerk of Session and immediate supervisor may reinstate the volunteer if they believe it to be in the best interests of the church. However, if the investigation results in either charges being filed against the volunteer or a finding of abuse or neglect filed against the volunteer, the volunteer may not be reinstated. The outcome of the investigation shall be noted in writing in the member's confidential file.

Allegation against a Pastor:

If the allegation of abuse is against an ordained PC(USA) pastor serving or worshipping with our congregation, the Clerk of Session shall immediately contact the General Presbyter of Trinity Presbytery, the Chair of the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry and the appropriate law enforcement. The Clerk shall ask the Committee on Ministry to assign a pastor from the Presbytery to moderate a called Session meeting to apprise the Session of the steps and provisions in the *Book of Order* and the Presbytery's own Abuse Prevention Policy which governs such a situation.

In this case, the Clerk of Session or Presbytery appointed moderator are the only persons who may speak for the church in case of public requests for information, statements, interviews, etc.

VI. CHURCH RESPONSE AND MINISTRY

Victim Protections

1. Upon receiving information of abuse or neglect, involving an employee or volunteer of the church, the person who reports the allegation should immediately take steps to ensure the child is not placed in the presence or proximity of the named church employee or volunteer. For the duration of the investigation the Pastor, or his/her designee, shall continue to ensure the subject child is not placed in a situation where the named employee or volunteer is present.
2. Any volunteer or employee of the church who becomes aware of an allegation of abuse or neglect will maintain confidentiality and will not share any information regarding the allegation except to the Pastor, immediate supervisor (if appropriate), the appropriate investigating authorities, and as ordered by a court. The Pastor, or designee, is the only person who may speak for the church in the case of public requests for information, statements, interviews, etc.

Session Response

Once the local authorities have determined that there are sufficient grounds for an investigation of the alleged abuse, the Pastors and Session shall have a called Session meeting for the purpose of outlining a congregational response plan. This plan shall include, but not be limited to:

1. The language and information to be included in a public response.

2. An explanation of what the congregation can expect during an investigation by local authorities.
3. A call to compassion and a call to refrain from extraneous discussion and gossip as unbecoming the body of Christ (John 8:7 and 1 John 1:8).
4. A reminder to the congregation that the Pastor is, by Session policy, the only person who may officially speak for the congregation.
5. A plan for continued pastoral support by both pastors and congregation for both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator (assuming that both are parts of our family of faith). Such pastoral care shall not interfere with any investigation by appropriate authorities.
6. Determine that the insurance carrier has been contacted.

Pastoral Response

In the case of any allegation or suspicion of abuse or neglect that involves a member or visitor of our faith family, it is the desire of the Session and Pastors that all involved parties will be given equal and appropriate pastoral care and support. As painful as such an allegation or suspicion may be, we recognize that the realities of the situation may not be easily discerned. Therefore, we intend to treat both the alleged perpetrator and the alleged victim as Children of God needing support and prayer, and to leave the discernment of the facts to those in the law enforcement community who are better trained to investigate such a painful situation. Our goal is to express the love and concern of God for all involved in any allegation of abuse or neglect. In order to achieve that goal, the following guidelines have been adopted by Forest Lake Presbyterian Church:

When an allegation has been received, the pastoral staff shall meet and decide how best to proceed in providing pastoral care for the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator and the congregation at large.

- The pastoral staff shall attempt to assign each individual/family to a member of the pastoral staff. This staff person shall be the person's primary pastoral care giver during the time of investigation and beyond. A different pastoral staff person or their designee shall be assigned to ~~both~~ the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator when both are in the same family.
- Appropriate deacons can be invited to coordinate pastoral care for each individual and family.
- If both parties are members of our congregation, the pastor(s) or appropriate staff member assigned to each of the parties shall counsel the individual/families on the importance of maintaining distance and separation during the course of the investigation. The Pastor(s) or appropriate staff member shall try to ensure that worship, education and fellowship opportunities for both parties are made available.

Convicted/Registered Sex Offender Protections

- A. No convicted/registered sex offender may participate in any church activity until the convicted/registered sex offender executes the Limited Access Agreement approved by the church.

- B. Prior to attending any church activities, a convicted/registered sex offender shall meet with the Pastor for a formal interview. The Pastor shall explain the Limited Access Agreement which is required by this policy. Once the Pastor conducts the interview, the Pastor will follow the procedures outlined in the Limited Access Agreement. The convicted/registered sex offender may participate in church activities as set forth in the Agreement. Should the convicted/registered sex offender fail to follow any provision of the Limited Access Agreement, the convicted/registered sex offender shall be denied access to all church functions and church property.

VII. **Maintenance of the Policy**

The Education Ministry will assign one of its members to be responsible for assisting the designated Education Ministry staff members and the Director of Operations or other appointed staff in implementing this policy. The Education Ministry will review this policy and its procedures on an annual basis to propose changes or amendments that allow the policy to function most efficiently. An annual report will be reported to the Session in May, which includes, but not limited to, background checks completed, reference checks completed, and approved applications on file.