GREAT CONEWAGO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SAFE CHURCH POLICY – Children and Youth
Amended 08/16/2026

Purpose

The Great Conewago Presbyterian Church adopts this policy on abuse prevention for church use. The intent is:

To establish ethical standards of behavior which are consistent with scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and civil law; to provide training for our members and staff about child abuse; to establish a procedure for prevention of child abuse; to establish a process for reporting and responding to allegations of child abuse; and to do everything reasonable to assure a caring, loving, open environment where everyone can worship, study, and continue his/her spiritual journey.

Statement of Faith and Practice

God's people are called to be faithful. Christ's mission and ministry is one of compassion and love. Abuse is not something unique to our time. However, in our generation, we have learned more than our predecessors about how these actions affect victims and predators. As a Christian family, we exist to glorify God, and we must address acts that violate the individual and our church family.

Sexuality is a God-given gift and, when used as intended, leads to wholeness and fulfillment. Those who serve through offices of the church bear particular responsibility for upholding its goodness. The conduct of our pastors and lay church staff should be living examples of this ethical standard.

We affirm that:

Human sexuality is God's gift. Through the people of Israel, God entered into a covenant relationship with us. This covenant was based on God's act of liberation and the people's response through obedience to ethical standards on which the community would order itself. To live in a relationship with God is to live in wholeness, peace, unity and health. To break the covenant is to destroy and separate from God, which brings the consequences of sin. God calls us to repent, and God forgives. We are all sinners who fall short of the ethics of the Kingdom. Through grace we are saved. God has particular concern for the poor and oppressed, the abused and harassed. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the church today, enabling us to follow faithfully the desires of God as we live out our lives.

Recruiting and Screening of Volunteers

All policies and procedures on the recruiting and screening of church volunteers who work specifically with children and youth should be in compliance with the state regulations on child abuse as mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

To protect the church, its members, and persons participating in activities under the control and supervision of the church, the procedure for recruiting and screening all those who work with children and youth will consist of the following:

- A volunteer application;
- PA State Police criminal record check (www.epatch.pa.gov);
- PA child abuse history clearance (www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public);
- Either a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Background check including fingerprints (www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe/child-abuse-clearances, or a statement signed by the volunteer indicating that s/he has been a resident of Pennsylvania for the past ten consecutive years.

Note: There could be a fee associated with some of the clearances.

Prospective volunteers desiring to work with children and youth will be screened as above. A volunteer must have attended GCPC regularly for six months before s/he is permitted to work with children or youth. The six months requirement may be waived if said volunteer is working with a current volunteer, with the approval of the Director of Christian Education.

The responsibility of maintaining the files on all volunteers shall rest with the Director of Christian Education.

Any adult who has been convicted of or pled guilty to child abuse or has a criminal conviction noting child endangerment will not be permitted to work with children or youth in any capacity under any circumstances.

Training and Education

The church will provide the following types of training:

- Training by a qualified professional outlining ways to keep volunteers, children, and youth safe within our church. This type of training will be held at least once a year. In addition to volunteers, all church members will be invited and encouraged to attend.
- Access to mandated reporter training, as stipulated by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- New volunteers will be given a copy of the policies and procedures and will be required to sign the statement in the appendix saying they have read this document and agree to abide by the requirements set forth within it.

Following initial training, volunteers will need to renew their screenings every 36 months or as mandated by the laws of Pennsylvania.

Safeguards to Prevent Child Abuse

Persons with inclinations toward sexual abuse or impropriety are less likely to obtain access to potential victims when safeguards such as those listed below are in place:

- A volunteer will not be recruited to work with children or youth until s/he has been attending the Great Conewago Presbyterian Church for at least six months, or unless the new member is paired with a person who has been a current volunteer for a longer period of time, as approved by the Director of Christian Education.
- Volunteers will work with children and youth in teams of two or more.
- All areas of the church shall be lighted, open, and accessible to all during hours when children are present in the church.

Who Is a Mandated Reporter

According to the current Pennsylvania law, church volunteers come under the category of "mandated reporters" if they are individuals, paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of their role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accept responsibility for a child. At the Great Conewago Presbyterian Church, this includes but is not limited to Sunday School teachers, nursery volunteers, youth workers, Vacation Bible School teachers, Kids Club leaders, and those who lead Children in Worship.

Reporting

A mandated reporter must make a report of suspected child abuse if s/he has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- The mandated reporter comes into direct contact with the child in the course of his/her volunteer work. The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child. A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse;
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to Child Line either electronically at www.compass.dhs.pa.gov or by calling 1-800-932-0313. After making the report to Child Line, the mandated reporter is required to notify the Director of Christian Education. Anyone who suspects child abuse but is not a mandated reporter may also make a report, although not required by law to do so. Persons making a report of suspected child abuse are immune from civil and criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith.**Any church volunteer who is a mandated reporter and who is arrested for any reason is required to report that arrest to the Director of Christian Education within 24 hours.**

The executed "Policy-GCPC Screening Form" Must be Attached