GREAT CONEWAGO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

VULNERABLE INDIVIDUAL PROTECTION POLICY

ADOPTED 08/16/2026

I. RATIONALE

The purpose and documentation of a Vulnerable Individuals Protection Policy strives to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect for the following reasons:

- Individuals of any age are a gift from God and the Church has a divine mandate to provide for their safety and nurturing. As a Presbyterian church, in all activities, we should be a place of safety and nurture.
- Any type of abuse involving vulnerable individuals has lasting and devastating effects on the life of the victim. The Church should be a place of hope and healing and not a place of harm.
- The larger Church suffers with the victim/survivor and his/her family whenever abuse and neglect occurs. If that abuse occurs within the Church, there is immeasurable spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical harm and there is a loss of integrity and credibility of God's call within the Church.
- Vulnerable individuals of any age are not only persons of care and service in the church; they are also recipients of the grace and love of God. Following Jesus's own teaching and example, the Church should bless these "Children of God" in providing for them a safe, nurturing and thriving environment in which to grow in every way.

- "Any member of the church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian Educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, "Trust and Confidentiality", (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse." G-4.0302, "Mandatory Reporting".

II. BACKGROUND and DEFINITIONS

The Law

Protecting vulnerable individuals of any age from abuse and neglect is a shared responsibility. We are called by God to create a safe haven for all such vulnerable individuals in our care. The members of Great Conewago Presbyterian Church are committed to doing what is not only required by law, but is our call as Christ's followers to reduce the risk to people in our care. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has adopted laws which place specific requirements upon church employees and volunteers who work with children. It is reflected in part in the Act titled Domestic Relations Code 23, HB 431. These laws impact: reporting, investigation, assessment, prosecution, and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse, as it pertains to this Policy and PA State Law, means intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly doing any of the following:

- Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Fabricating, feigning, or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.

- Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- Causing the death of a child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent (within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine) acts include any of the following:

- Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing, or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
- Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
- Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
- Interfering with the breathing of a child.
- Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
- Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.

Mandated Reporters

At Great Conewago Presbyterian Church, all pastors (Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders) and volunteers who work regularly with Vulnerable Persons of Any Age in a church-related activity are considered mandated reporters, as per PA State Law, and are required to report any suspected “child abuse”.

Permissive Reporters

Permissive reporters are encouraged to report suspected “child abuse”. Anyone acting on behalf of the Great Conewago Presbyterian Church who suspects a vulnerable individual of any age is a victim of abuse should make a report to ChildLine. A permissive reporter does not have to know for sure that the individual was abused. They are able to make a report when they suspect a “child is a victim of abuse”.

Volunteers

Any person designated with leadership responsibilities in a church-related activity that is not compensated for participation with the exception of allowable recorded expenses.

II. Requirements

Clearances

COM /the Presbytery Event Coordinators and/or Great Conewago leadership are responsible for assuring proper clearances have been obtained prior to their employment or any event/activity that involves vulnerable individuals of any age.

All TEs, CREs and Presbytery volunteers performing regularly supervisory services in churches where children under the age of 18 are present are required to obtain/submit clearances and then update all required clearance every 60 months. These include the following:

- Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance;
- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check; and
- Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Background Check if a Teaching Elder. Commissioned Ruling Elder or the volunteer has lived out of the state of PA in the past ten years. If the volunteer has not lived out of the state of PA, an affidavit may be used as an alternative.

Process for Obtaining Clearances for TEs,

Persons currently in active service in Great Conewago Presbyterian Church (a subsidiary of the Presbytery of Carlisle) shall have required clearances on file in the Presbytery office. Based upon requirements of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, these clearances include:

- PA Child Abuse History (www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis)
- PA State Police/Criminal History Record (https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp)
- Federal Criminal History/FBI Fingerprinting (www.pa.cogentid.com/index.htm)

The Presbytery office is required to see the original certificate and can retain a copy of the certificate.

III. Reporting

Mandated reporters are required to make a report of suspected child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- They come into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.
- They are directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or are affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that 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 or exploitation.

It is not required that the child come before the mandated reporter in order to make a report of suspected child abuse nor are they required to identify the person responsible for the child abuse to make a report of suspected child abuse.

Concerns related to the safety of children including, but not limited to inadequate housing, clothing and supervision, can be referred to ChildLine or the county children and youth agency for assessment as general protective service cases.

Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313.

If an oral report was made to ChildLine, a report of suspected child abuse (CY 47) must also be completed and forwarded to the county children and youth agency within 48 hours after making the report. This form can be obtained at **www.KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov** or from the children and youth agency. If a report is made electronically, no CY-47 is required to be completed. The law requires that the mandated reporter identify themselves and where they can be reached. The identity of the person making the report is kept confidential with the exception of being released to law enforcement officials or the district attorney's office. The penalties for a mandated reporter who willfully fails to report child abuse range from a misdemeanor of second degree

to a felony of the second degree.

Mandated reporters may receive information from the Department regarding the final status of the report, whether it was unfounded, indicated or founded, and the services planned or provided to protect the child.

After making the report to ChildLine, mandated reporters acting on behalf of the Presbytery at a Presbytery related event shall immediately report the suspect abuse to the person in charge. Any Teaching Elder or Commissioning Elder receiving a report of suspected child abuse will also follow the Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) polity and the Redstone Sexual Misconduct policy.

Permissive reporters can make a report to ChildLine by calling 1-800-932-0313. There are no additional requirements for the permissive reporter after making a report to ChildLine. Permissive reporters are not required to give their name however, providing this information is helpful so that if clarification on the situation or additional information is needed, the children and youth caseworker can contact the reporter. The identity of the person making the report is kept confidential with the exception of being released to law enforcement officials or the district attorney's office. Permissive reporters are not provided with any investigation processes or results.

Great Conewago Presbyterian Church requires reporting of suspected abuse of ANY vulnerable individual of ANY AGE.

IV. Background clearances and training

Clearances

All TEs and CREs currently in service within the Presbytery who fail to meet the established requirements may be subject to disciplinary action at the discretion of COM following counsel with the individual. TEs and CREs desiring to enter into service after the adoption of this policy must complete all requirements prior to entering active service. Any suspected cases of abuse will follow the procedures outlined in the Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order and the Sexual Misconduct policy of Carlisle Presbytery and the policy of Great Conewago Presbyterian Church.

Volunteers will not be eligible for service if clearances and investigations are not complete prior to the scheduled event or if the clearances indicate there is a record of abuse. Volunteers with a criminal history not related to child abuse will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the event coordinator in collaboration with the Great Conewago Session Board or designee.

A record of all clearances will be kept in the Church office in a designated location and will be made accessible only to those with supervisory or policy compliance responsibilities. Current laws in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania require that clearances must be updated every three years. Volunteers will be notified of the required update by the Session Board or assigned designee. The Presbytery Office will notify TEs and CREs a minimum of 6 months prior to their expiration so new clearances can be obtained.

Training

All TEs, CREs are required to attend an initial Mandated Reporter either through scheduled events or through online resources. The scheduled training within the Presbytery will be provided every three years. All mandated reporters within the Presbytery should either participate in that training or provide documentation (certificate) of the completion of online training. This training is approved in accordance with Act 126 of 2012

and Act 31 of 2104, for mandated and permissive reporters and can be found at **www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu.**

V. Events or Activities

The following practices should be in place and communicated as expectations to any event/activity volunteers prior to participation. These practices include event/activities with vulnerable individuals of ANY AGE.

- Two-adult rule: Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of children. The only exception is if an emergency situation deems this not immediately possible. All volunteers must be a minimum of four years older than the age group they lead or supervise. When possible, all youth volunteers under the age of eighteen (18) should be paired with an adult volunteer.
- Ratios: The adult to child ratio for all child-related events/activities is 2:10. 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 ratios and gender diversity be compromised.
- Privacy: Adult workers/volunteers should respect the privacy of the children to whom they provide care. Responsible use of digital devices and cell phones is required in all situations. For overnight events, no single adult may room or sleep with a single child (other than his or her own child).
- Environment: The Presbytery will strive to provide a physical environment that minimizes the risk of harm and supports the careful supervision and appropriate interactions with the leaders between children and youth. Physical surroundings and group size should allow adequate space and visibility for monitoring. All considerations need to be taken such as leaving doors open.
- Transportation: Event leadership shall not provide transportation for youth alone without written permission from the youth's parent.

VI. Policy Communication and Education

All TEs and CREs serving in the Presbytery will receive a copy of the Presbytery of Carlisle Policy upon beginning their service. All TE's and CRE's that serve Great Conewago Presbyterian Church and volunteers serving in leadership during any Presbytery/Church event will receive a copy and attest to his/her understanding of this policy prior to being permitted any supervisory or leadership roles in programs for vulnerable individuals of any age.

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