



**SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS**

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

In the story of Moses in Exodus, the baby Moses is hidden by his mother in a basket in the Nile River because of the Egyptian Pharaoh's order that all Hebrew boy babies be killed. Moses' mother entrusts Moses' older sister with the responsibility of watching over her infant brother to help keep him from harm. Moses' sister rises to the occasion, and Moses is spared the harm intended him and goes on to be the leader of the Israelites as God delivers them from bondage in Egypt. Although Moses' sister is not named in this episode, later in the story Moses' sister Miriam plays an important part, and by tradition Miriam is considered the sister who watched over and protected the baby Moses in the bulrushes of the Nile. In the spirit of Miriam who lived up to the task of protecting one of God's special children from harm, the policies and guidelines for Second Presbyterian Church for protection of children, youth, and at-risk adults is named the Miriam Project.

COVENANT STATEMENT

The members of Second Presbyterian Church believe that we are called by God to be the body of Christ in our community and that involved in this calling is the responsibility to create and maintain safe and supportive environments for all children, youth, and at-risk adults in our care. During each baptism of an infant, child, or adult into this covenant community of faith, the members of this church promise to support and encourage that person by nurture and fellowship. Creating and being faithful to thoughtful guidelines for protection of children, youth, and at-risk adults is part of our promise of support and nurture. In the midst of efforts to provide such protection, we acknowledge that we are all dependent upon God's grace and mercy and are not called to condemn but to treat all persons, including those who may have caused harm to others, with compassion, respect, and fairness. We, the members of Second Presbyterian Church, therefore, commit ourselves and our actions to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children, youth, and at-risk adults participating in the activities and programs of this church.

POLICIES

All Second Presbyterian Church (hereinafter "church") activities and programs involving children, youth, and at-risk adults, regardless of location, will be subject to the following policies. These policies address the preventable risk of any form of abuse or harassment, whether physical, mental or sexual, by any of the staff, teachers, or volunteers of this church while on church property or while engaged in church activities or programs. As used herein the term "child," "children," and "youth" refer to all persons under 18 years of age and the term "at-risk adult" refers to all persons 18 and older who are particularly vulnerable and in receipt of sensitive ministry through specific programs of the church including, but not limited to: Stephen Ministry; Respite Care; Friends at Home Visitation; support groups for grief and divorce; and youth ministry.

- **Rule of Three.** Situations in which one adult and one child/ youth are alone should be avoided. Whenever practicable, there should be at least three people (one adult and two children/ youth, or two adults and one child/ youth) present at situations where children or youth are present.
- **Open-Door Counseling.** During counseling of children or youth, doors may be closed if there is an unobstructed window viewing into the room. If there is no window, the door must remain open for the entire counseling session.
- **Windows in All Classroom Doors.** It is recommended that all rooms used for children or youth have a window in the door or to the side of the door or contain a dutch door. All windows viewing into rooms used for children or youth must remain unobstructed at all times. No room decorations or signs are permitted to cover door windows.
- **Advance Notice to Parents.** Parents will be given advance notice and full information regarding events in which their children will participate. In the event that a leader will be alone with a child or a youth, the parents will be notified and will be required to give verbal or written permission in advance for their child's participation.

LEADER CRITERIA

A leader is a person charged with the care and supervision of children and youth, or volunteers for ministry to at-risk adults of the church. Leaders include both paid and volunteer staff, clergy and laity.

In order to be eligible as a leader, persons must:

1. Be 18 years of age or older at the time of the event;
2. Submit a completed Leader Application Packet which includes: Leader Application Form, Authorization and Request for a Criminal Background Check, Authorization For Release of Confidential Information, and Covenant;
3. Interview with the staff person in charge of the event/program, if requested by the staff person;
4. Provide references if requested;
5. Be at least three years older than the youth and children with whom they work. This does not apply to paid staff.
6. Be a member of Second Presbyterian Church for at least six months prior to submitting a Leader Application Packet. With approval of the Head of Staff and appropriate Program Staff, a person who meets all other criteria and has actively attended Second Presbyterian for at least six months but is not a member may submit a Leader Application Packet. This does not apply to paid staff.
7. Attend mandatory leader training.

In emergency or extenuating circumstances that could result in the cancellation of an event, persons may serve as leader without meeting all of the above criteria if approved by the Head of Staff and appropriate Program Staff. In such cases, the person should satisfy criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 above. The person would complete a Leader Application Packet (#2), and if time permits would receive leader training before the event. If not, the person would attend leader training after the event to fully comply with the Leader Criteria.

At the discretion of the appropriate Program Staff, volunteers who do not meet all of these criteria may serve as a "helper" under the supervision of a certified leader.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Leaders of the church will be required to complete a Leader Application Packet providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background checks on each individual. Employees of the church will be required to complete a Leader Application Packet providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background checks and reference checks on each individual. While this process

understandably intrudes into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children, youth and at-risk adults outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background and reference checks or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be considered confidential.

Security background checks will be conducted by a staff person designated as the "Administrator" with the assistance of the appropriate agency. The Administrator shall be a currently serving Pastor designated by the Head of Staff. Additionally, character references for church employees will be checked by a person designated by the Session. The results of the security background checks initially will be reviewed by only the Administrator. After this initial review, if the Administrator determines that further review should be made, the Administrator will consult with the Head of Staff. The Administrator and Head of Staff may consult with the appropriate program staff if in their determination additional review is required.

Without the written permission of the employees and Leaders, the information contained in the Leader Application Packet, the results of the security background check, and the results of the reference check will be disclosed only to the persons designated in the previous paragraph (except as may be required by law).

The Administrator will maintain a locked storage cabinet in the church for all Leader Application Packets and other records. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any children or youth activity or program or ministry to at-risk adults:

Any indictment or charge alleging the offense of, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child.

Indictments or charges made more than 10 years ago and resulting in acquittal will be reviewed at the discretion of the Administrator. All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Administrator as described in the second paragraph of the section entitled Background Checks. If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history record transcript, he or she may appeal through the appropriate governmental agency.

PROHIBITED ACTS

The following acts are prohibited by this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any church activity or program. Any observations or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to the Administrator, Head of Staff, or appropriate program staff after the safety of the child, children, youth, or at-risk adult involved has been assured.

- **Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child, youth, or at-risk adult;**
- **Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child, youth, or at-risk adult;**
- **Physically abusive behavior to a child, youth, or at-risk adult;**
- **Physical neglect of a child, children, youth, or at-risk adult including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the church;**
- **Intentional actions causing mental or emotional injury to a child, children, youth, or at-risk adult;**
- **Possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of the church;**
- **Possession of, advocacy of the use of, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs;**
- **Consumption of, or being under the influence of, alcohol while leading or participating in a children's or youth function or while engaging in ministry with at-risk adults at the church.**

VIOLATION REPORTING POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for all children, youth, and at-risk adults, the staff, employees, teachers, parents, and volunteers of the church must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected abusive behavior or harassment shall be directed to the Administrator, the Head of Staff, or the appropriate program staff, or in extenuating circumstances, the Presbytery of Arkansas' General Presbyter.

Anyone who witnesses an occurrence in violation of this Policy should take the following steps to insure the security of the child, youth, or at-risk adult involved and to protect against physical, emotional or psychological injury, to all persons involved.

- **PERSONALLY SECURE THE SAFETY OF THE CHILD, CHILDREN, YOUTH, OR AT-RISK ADULT.**
- **REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY!**
- **COMPLETE A WRITTEN SUSPECTED INCIDENT REPORT FORM.**
- **DO NOT LEAVE THE CHILD, CHILDREN, YOUTH, OR AT-RISK ADULT ALONE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT.**
- **DO NOT PERSONALLY CONFRONT THE ALLEGED OR ACCUSED VIOLATOR OF THE POLICY.**
- **ALLOW THE DESIGNATED PERSON TO PROVIDE YOU WITH INSTRUCTIONS FOR REPORTING OF THE INCIDENT TO THE PARENTS OR GUARDIAN.**
- **THE HEAD OF STAFF OR THE DESIGNATED PERSON ON THE RESPONSE TEAM WILL BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH.**

In the event a child, youth, or at-risk adult reports abusive conduct while engaged in a church-sponsored activity or involving the staff, employees, teachers, parents or volunteers of the church, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child, youth, or at-risk adult should contact the designated person (Administrator, Head of Staff, appropriate program staff, or General Presbyter). Then that person must complete a written Suspected Incident Report recording verbatim the specific words first spoken by the child, youth, or at-risk adult and the conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a Prohibited Act, whether a staff member, employee, member or volunteer, will immediately be suspended from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church and all ministries to at-risk adults of the church. Such suspension shall continue during any investigation by the church or law enforcement or child protection agencies.

Any person found to have committed a Prohibited Act shall be prohibited from future participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church and all ministries to at-risk adults of the church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment. Restrictions of participation may be removed if the accused person is found not to have committed a Prohibited Act.

As required by Arkansas law, all reports of abuse of children or youth will be timely forwarded to the appropriate child protection and law enforcement authorities. Such reporting must be accomplished in addition to complying with this Miriam Project Policy.

Failure to timely report a Prohibited Act to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of this Miriam Project Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church and all ministries to at-risk adults of the church by any person.

POLICY REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE

The Administrator of The Miriam Project has responsibility for: ensuring that all groups subject to this Policy are in compliance with its procedures; making an annual review of the Policy; and bringing any needed changes to the Policy to the Session for approval.