**Trinity Presbyterian Church**

**Child Protection Procedures**

The following procedures will guide us in how we do child protection at Trinity Presbyterian Church.

***Definitions we use:***

Child - Any person under the age of 18 years old or any person whose mental capacity is that of a minor.

Adult - Any person at least 18 years of age.

Student Volunteer - Any person, under the age of 18, who supervises children at a church-sponsored activity or program.

Employee - Any adult paid for their work at Trinity Presbyterian Church.

Child Abuse - Any willful act, omission, or threatened act that results in any physical, psychological or sexual injury or harm.

Child Sexual Abuse - Any sexual act between an adult and a child, or between two children, when one exerts power over the other; forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act; sexual abuse also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or internet.

Emotional Abuse - When a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, but instead endures an environment of constant criticism, belittling, persistent threatening, or bullying.

Mandated Reporter - Any person who is required by law to report when they have a reason to believe child abuse has occurred; Minnesota mandated reporters are listed below under Reporting; however, in keeping with biblical principles, for the sake of vulnerable children who cannot protect themselves, all adults are morally obligated to report abuse.

***Screening and Eligibility for Service***

(1) All adults (including staff) who work with children will submit the necessary information for a national, criminal background check before being allowed access to children. This information must be updated by all adults who work with children every three years. Any adult who has been convicted of child abuse or other violent crimes will not be eligible for employment at Trinity Presbyterian Church or service as a volunteer within Trinity Presbyterian Church’s nursery, children’s and student ministries.

(2) All new adults (including staff) and student volunteers who work with children will give three non-related, personal references who can answer questions about how said staff or volunteer interacts with children. A designated person shall check all references.

(3) All new adults and student volunteers who work with children will interview with the employee who supervises their work.

(4) All adults and student volunteers who work with children must be regular attenders of Trinity Presbyterian Church for six months prior to service (with exceptions made for paid staff). Christian Education policy requires that all Sunday School teachers are members, unless special approval is given by the Session.

***Training***

(1) Before supervising children in any capacity, all adults, including staff, must attend child protection training presented by the church or some other Session-approved child protection training. All adults working with children must attend an approved child protection training every 3 years of service in the church.

(2) Before supervising children in any capacity, adults and student volunteers must read and agree to follow the child protection plan of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Every year, all adults and student volunteers who work with children must read and agree to our child protection procedures and code of conduct.

***Reporting***

God has ordained civil authorities to be his servant. As God’s servant, he gives civil authorities the power of the sword to punish those who do evil. God calls us to submit to these authorities as they carry out their God-ordained role to punish evil (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-14). A key aspect of our submission to the God-ordained civil authorities is to report the crime of child abuse. Child abuse is not only a sin, but a civil crime. Furthermore, our state’s mandated reporting laws make it a crime for mandated reporters to know about child abuse and refuse to report it.

Mandated reporters in Minnesota include professionals and their delegates in fields such as child care, clergy, education, health care, mental health, and social services.

The law requires mandated reporters to make a report if they know of or have reason to believe a child is being neglected or abused or has been in the last three years. Verbal reports must be made immediately.

In Olmsted County reports should be made to Olmsted County Child and Family Services or by calling the police.

All staff and adult volunteers are required and all adults s at Trinity Presbyterian Church are encouraged to report child abuse in the following circumstances (In all cases there should be no interference with law enforcement authorities):

(1) *Witness* – you witness or discover an act of abuse. In this situation you must demonstrate courage. You must intervene and move the child to a safe place and call the authorities immediately. Then, contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form. The pastor can then ensure the perpetrator has no further access to children at the church and can initiate appropriate pastoral care for all parties.

(2) *Disclosure –* a child tells you of abuse they experienced. In this situation, remain calm and keep the child talking with open-ended questions rather than leading questions (for example, “What happened next? Can you tell me more?”) as long as the child feels comfortable. When the child has finished the disclosure, tell the child you believe them, it is not their fault, and you are going to help them. After the initial disclosure, do not try to conduct a lengthy interview, but as soon as is practical, while being sensitive to the child, call the authorities. Then, contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.

*Special Note*: When there is a disclosure of abuse, no one, not even the parents or the pastor ought to conduct another interview of the child or conduct an internal investigation. The authorities or child advocacy center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview. The more interviews the child has, the harder it is on the child and on those tasked with investigating and potentially prosecuting the crime.

(3) *Reasonable Cause* – you have reasonable cause that child abuse has occurred. Reasonable cause does not require absolute proof. Instead, reasonable cause means one or more signs of child abuse are present. After reporting the reasonable cause to local authorities, contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form. Sometimes there are no visible signs of child sexual abuse even though abuse has taken place.

***Incident Response***

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Trinity Presbyterian Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. After contacting the authorities, all employees and volunteers at Trinity Presbyterian Church should document their actions and knowledge with the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form and turn the form into the church office in a sealed envelope.

Any adults who report suspected child abuse to the authorities should then contact Trinity Presbyterian Church’s senior pastor. The senior pastor will initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measures that may need to be taken. The senior pastor will also inform the clerk of the Session, the church’s legal representative, and the church’s insurance company. Any media inquiries should be directed to the senior pastor. In the event that the senior pastor is personally involved in the incident, as the accused or family of the victim, the clerk of the Session will fulfill these duties.

After all the necessary reports have been made, Trinity Presbyterian Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While Trinity Presbyterian Church does not require strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone involved to use their knowledge of the incident for a godly purpose, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all involved. Only a member of the Session will respond to media inquiries.

***Internal Investigations***

When suspected abuse is reported to the civil authorities and the suspected abuse occurred on Trinity Presbyterian Church’s property or during a ministry event, Trinity Presbyterian Church’s Session will perform an internal investigation of the incident. The Session’s investigation will seek to discover if the child protection plan was implemented correctly and if not, why not. The Session’s investigation will also seek to discern what actions, if any, should be taken by the church regardless of actions taken or not taken by the civil authorities.

***Boundary Violations***

Trinity Presbyterian Church takes any violations of our child protection plan very seriously. Abusers are rarely caught in the act of harming a child, but they’re often seen breaking the rules and crossing boundaries. Every incident of boundary and rule violation does not necessarily signal that child abuse has occurred. However, every incident of boundary violation requires responsible action to ensure children’s safety. Adults and student volunteers should intervene when they see anyone breaking the child protection plan, ensure all children are safe, and remind the violator of appropriate behavior around children.

***Regular Evaluation of our Procedures and Code of Conduct***

The Trinity Presbyterian Church Session will regularly evaluate and update the child protection plan.