

## **First Presbyterian Church of Virginia Beach**

### **Youth Ministry Covenant Code of Conduct<sup>1</sup>**

The Youth Ministry of First Presbyterian Church (“FPC”) desires to develop an authentic faith in God through Jesus Christ through our active youth ministries that include: worship, fellowship, Bible study and mission. Just as Jesus walked along the beach and said, “Follow me,” we invite persons to engage in the adventure of serving Jesus Christ as part of our growing seaside community of believers. We share God’s gracious love through joyful worship and challenging preaching. We serve the community through ministries of healing, reconciliation and justice. We teach the faith in ways that stretch the mind, strengthen the spirit and address the needs of all God’s people. We build up the body of Christ, by equipping disciples with the skills and grace to extend Jesus’ invitation- “follow me” -to others.

This Covenant Code of Conduct (“Code”) will be used by Youth Ministry leaders as a basis of accountability for all participating youth and adults. In general, it is expected that all Youth who participate in the church Youth programs will respect the rights and property of others and conduct themselves in a safe and orderly manner. It is important that parents and youth discuss and understand this Code. Youth are reminded that all negative behavior has a detrimental effect on others in the Youth program and also affects the reputation of the church and its programs.

“Youth” are defined as those in grades 6 through 12. Graduated seniors or those over 18 years of age at the beginning of the following school year will move on to college and young adult ministries.

Both youth and their parents/guardians will need to sign below. This Code shall be signed prior to participation in any youth events. Youth Ministry events throughout the year will include regular church activities, meetings, retreats; and special trips and events.

Parent volunteers, designated ministry assistants and staff, and youth leaders may attend all youth events.

Parents are informed of youth activities, trip itineraries, special activities, and projects through email notification, youth news information and other forms of communication. Information will be as specific as possible regarding time of departure and arrival, routes, method of travel, phone numbers, and number of drivers.

#### **Respect Toward Leaders:**

All Youth Ministry Staff and regular Volunteers are required to comply with the Safe Sanctuary Policy. In order to serve, as a regular Volunteer one should be a member for at least six months, submit to a background check and Safe Sanctuary training. Youth agree to follow the instructions of adult volunteers and Youth Ministry Staff and will be respectful to them. Any student who is disrespectful to any adult leader or who violates generally accepted rules of good citizenship and behavior will be referred to the Director of Youth Ministry. The Director will be mindful of our effort to welcome people of all backgrounds and personalities, while also deciding if particular behaviors are disruptive in our effort to grow Disciples. If it is necessary, the Director will contact

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<sup>1</sup> Language for this Code has been adapted from “Marietta First United Methodist Church/Fusion Youth Ministry, Code of Conduct Policy.”

parent/guardian to discuss future participation. The Youth Ministry of the church is to be seen as a gift that the church extends to our Middle and High school youth.

**In Compliance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy:**

- Except in rare circumstances approved ahead of time by the relevant committee, all activities should have more than one youth leader.
- Volunteering minors shall be supervised by an adult youth leader at all times.
- All overnight activities shall require more than one youth leader. All overnight activities shall require separate sleeping quarters for males and females.
- In determining the appropriate adult/child ratio, the relevant committee should also consider the appropriate male/female ratio.
- Youth Leaders will not leave minors unattended while they are waiting for transportation home.

*Guidelines for all youth leadership:*

1. Youth leaders shall not touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with children/youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on back), support (prayer), or physical care-taking (changing diapers, toileting) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon a child/youth.
2. Youth Leaders must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior directly with children/youth or among themselves.
3. Youth leaders are not prepared to support or provide long-term counseling or formal therapy to children/youth. Youth leaders should refer ones they suspect may have a need of serious counseling to the ordained staff. Confidentiality should be maintained.

**Trip Policies:**

Off-site trips are a big responsibility for the Youth Ministry and the church. As a result, obeying and respecting trip leaders and adult volunteers is essential if the Youth Group is to function safely and effectively in an environment which fosters their growth as young men and women.

As detailed further in this Code, any incidents reflecting a breakdown in this area may result in the Youth being sent home at the parents' expense. Parents or guardians agree to support the leaders' decisions about sending a student home, knowing that only those present on the trip can know all the circumstances involved. In the event this situation arises, the parents or legal guardian will come pick the student up or pay for commercial transportation home as soon as possible.

**Confidentiality:**

During Youth Ministries, it is possible and likely that youth may share personal information that is desired to remain confidential. Any serious discussion in confidence with an Adult Volunteer should be reviewed with one of the ministers, who will protect the confidential nature of the discussion. Adult Volunteers must report to the

Director of Youth Ministry or ordained minister if a minor discusses harming themselves or others, committing a crime, or being abused.

**Respect Toward Others:** We recognize that everyone in the group is a valuable part of the team. Together, we will create a “Safe Space” for all who wish to participate. The Youth Ministry will embrace inclusiveness by making sure that everyone feels welcome and important. We will give respect for physical and emotional wellbeing of others as we “do unto them as I would have them do unto me.”

As a Safe Space, we will create a trusting environment. When others share information about themselves, in a group or private discussion, I will not repeat that information to other friends outside of the group without that person’s permission. Additionally, I understand there will be times when I strongly disagree with those in the group. I understand that while lively discussion may be had, on any particular issue, I always have the right to “agree to disagree.”

**Participation:** Youth will be highly encouraged to participate fully in all Youth Ministry activities. However, no person will be “made” to do anything they wish not to do. Adult Volunteers will take care to consider how much encouragement is needed for any particular child on any particular event.

**Property Damage:**

Any participant who damages or destroys property willfully will be responsible for the cost of repair/replacement and any clean up required.

**Inappropriate/Appropriate Language:** No participant is to utilize language, which is crude, offensive, insulting, profane or irreverent. This shall also include abusive language directed at another individual such as name-calling or bullying. We should always treat each other with respect including how we talk to one another. Youth will be highly encouraged to use their manners as they interact with one another and all those we come into contact.

**Smoking/Drinking/Illegal Drugs:**

No alcohol or tobacco in any form is ever permitted on youth trips, by youth or adults. Parents will be notified immediately if a youth is found to be in possession of alcohol or of any illegal or controlled substance. This is a zero tolerance policy and Youth will be sent home immediately at the expense of their parents/guardians.

**Violent Behavior:**

Violent behavior and/or possession of any type of weapon will not be tolerated. Any act of striking, hitting, kicking, or attacking another individual will be cause for immediate removal from the group and a parent/guardian will be required to pick up the offending youth. Repeated offenses will result in the Youth not being permitted to participate in youth activities until the parents and Youth have received counseling from the Minister and/or a professional Youth Counselor. Any adult who displays any act of violent behavior will no longer be permitted to participate in youth activities.

**Dress Code:** Our dress code is modesty in mind. Parents should make sure that their student is dressed appropriately and brings appropriate clothing on trips. Parents should recognize that dress, which may be

appropriate for other activities, might not be appropriate for church-related programs. For most events, a good indicator of appropriate attire would be your school's dress code. We should be reminded that we are representatives of our faith and our church so our dress is especially noted by others when we are together. Adult leaders and chaperones have permission to suggest a change of dress at any time they feel the need to do so.

**Displays of Affection:**

Youth should refrain from excessive displays of affection such as kissing, prolonged embracing, and other contact inappropriate to a church environment. Genuine respect for each other in word, thought, and deed is always encouraged.

**Transportation:**

Generally, driving to off-site events will be provided by designated youth leaders or adult volunteers. Only church approved drivers are permitted to drive the van, the bus, or their own personal vehicles to transport youth. If youth need to drive their own vehicle to an event off-site, the parents must notify the Youth Director in advance. In this case, parents are responsible for the youth's transportation to and from youth functions. Parents are responsible for their child if transported in a vehicle other than those provided by the church. The church, its leaders, staff, or members cannot be responsible or held liable for the safety and quality of either the vehicle or the driver, nor can they be assured that there is insurance on the vehicle. Youth members are not allowed to drive non-related youth or youth who did not arrive in the youth-driven vehicle. In a special circumstance, like when a youth needs a ride home, the Director of Youth Ministry or Adult Volunteer may do so only after receiving written permission from their parent/guardian.

After each Youth Ministry event, where transportation is used, all youth are expected to assist with cleanup and remain present until all cleanups are complete. Director of Youth Ministry and/or Adult Volunteers will give advanced notice to all parents about pick-up times. Parents should pick-up their child promptly at the Youth Center, unless specified otherwise.

**Emergency Medical Release Forms:**

Emergency release forms and medical information (including information with regard to required prescription medication) will be supplied by the parents to FPC Youth Ministry at the beginning of the school year. Any changes should be provided to the Youth director prior to participation in any event. A separate permission slip will be required for each off-site activity. Emergency information will be kept for adult volunteers, leaders and chaperones as well.

**Site Rules:**

"Safe Sanctuary" policies shall apply and extend to activities beyond the walls of the church for any youth events. It is understood that any rule or guideline that is not mentioned here but is required by a camp or retreat where our youth are present will also apply to our students.

**Buddy System:**

The buddy system should be implemented in all situations. For their personal safety, Youth should not be anywhere by themselves.

**Housing:**

Male youth are not permitted in female youth rooms, hallways, wings or cabins nor are female youth permitted in male rooms, hallways, wings or cabins. Discipline, curfew, cleanup and or other housing guidelines will be established for each event and are to be respected by all participants and will be enforced by the adult leaders and Youth Ministry.

**Phone:** Youth are highly discouraged from using their cell phones, during youth ministry programs, for anything other than directed activities. Parents and youth shall see this time as an opportunity to “unplug” and build relationships with one another. The purpose of our time together is to learn how we can be more faithful disciples of Christ in the world and to build community with one another. Constant phone conversations and text messaging with others severely distract from our purpose and decrease the potential for growth and learning. While cell phones will not be taken up at each meeting, adult leadership has the right to do so at any point they feel it is necessary. If there is an emergency, parents should contact the adult volunteers to relay information to their children.

**Photos:** All youth and adults must sign the “Photo-Release” form to participate in our Youth Ministry. The release form permits photos to be taken, reproduced, and published for display in printed materials such as FPC newsletter, FPC’s Webpage, and the Facebook Page. If a parent/child wishes to have their child’s picture not be taken or displayed, extra care will be taken to grant these wishes. However, it shall be noted that we cannot guarantee this desire unless they choose not to participate in the Youth Ministry.

**PDA/Sexual Activity:** Public Displays of Affection should be limited during Youth Ministry, in order that it does not create a distraction. Appropriate PDA, as defined by leadership, should not be discouraged in order to support the building of healthy relationships among our youth. At no point shall youth or adults engage in sexual activity during Youth Ministry. Therefore partners, or potential partners, shall not wander off to themselves as to be tempted to engage in sexual activity.

Sex and Sexuality are important topics in the church for both Middle and High School youth. Youth leadership will create an environment where young people feel comfortable asking the embarrassing and yet, important questions in a Safe Space. While often these are considered private questions, no adult shall answer such questions alone with a child. Parents will be informed on any topics discussed prior to any formal programming concerning sex education. While family values will be highly encouraged, so will be the values of our PCUSA denomination on this topic.

*“The church has a responsibility to guide the youth to whom it ministers. We are called to be reflections of the body of Christ. As much as we deny and sometimes forget/neglect the topic of sex and sexuality, we are doing a disservice to our youth and our calling from God when we don’t acknowledge our sexuality as an important piece of who we are created to be. The church is called to assure young people, in an open and compassionate way, that not only do conversations regarding sex belong within the church, but the church family is exactly where sexuality should be openly discussed” (Ministries with Youth PCUSA).*

**Fundraisers/Church Visibility:** Every youth is encouraged to participate in all youth fundraisers. The funds from our fundraising efforts will go directly to the youth and their programming. It’s extremely important that youth understand how the church and the individual members of the church value and financially support the

Youth Ministry. It is also important for the youth to be present so that members of the church continue to be motivated by the faith lives of our individual youth and in doing so, will respond by possibly giving to the Youth Ministry. When youth are asked to lead or help in worship, they are encouraged to respond with enthusiasm as a way to serve God and support their church. The parents, adults and staff shall help encourage and practice with the young people so that they feel confident and enthusiastic leading in worship.

**Meals:** Parents are asked to help support the Youth Ministry by providing meals for our regular Life Line Ministry. Information will be given to each parent at the beginning of the year, in order that they may sign-up at their convenience. Parents are asked to partner with another family to provide at least 2 meals a year.

**Scholarships:** FPC has been committed to helping our youth to be able to participate no matter their financial circumstance. We are grateful to the donors of our congregation that give specifically to our youth in need. It will be expected that each youth will pay for any activity. However, a youth or parent should not hesitate to seek assistance from the church to participate in any activity. Those seeking scholarship should do so by contacting the Director of Youth Ministry. Those in need will be encouraged to give as much as they feel they are able and, they will be encouraged to give fully when they are able to do so.

### **Formal Discipline Policy**

#### **Actions that warrant immediate removal:**

The use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco or pornographic material, violence and/or sexual misconduct will result in immediate removal from the group or activity. The FPC Youth Director or trip leader will notify parents/guardians to arrange for the student's return home.

#### **Procedure for Inappropriate Behavior:**

Students are expected to follow the Covenant Code of Conduct as set forth above. In the event of an incident or situation in which the Youth has exhibited inappropriate behavior, the consequence of such action will be as follows:

1. First Occurrence: Formal Warning

Adult Leader/Chaperone will notify the trip/youth director of the situation. The trip director/youth director will offer a serious verbal warning to the Youth, discussing the inappropriateness of the behavior.

2. Second Occurrence: Formal Notification

Trip/youth director will notify the parents and/or guardian of the seriousness of the situation with a reminder of the potential consequences of said action.

3. Third Occurrence: Dismissal from event or program

The trip/youth director will send the youth home according to the policies stated above.

I have read, discussed, and understand the First Presbyterian Church Youth Ministry Covenant Code of Conduct. By signing this form, along with my parent/guardian, I agree to follow each of these rules. I understand that such policies help to ensure the physical and spiritual safety of all who participate in the Youth Ministry programs of the church.

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**Youth Signature** **Date**

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**Parent Signature** **Date**