

PC(USA) launches Abuse Prevention Helpline

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Toll-free number to help families and churches prevent child sexual abuse

by Rick Jones | Presbyterian News Service



LOUISVILLE –

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, has teamed with the [Insurance Board](#) and [Praesidium](#) to help PC(USA) church councils and church members prevent child sexual abuse. The partnership has launched a toll-free Abuse Prevention Helpline (866-607-SAFE) to help keep predators away from children.

“Statistics show that one out of four girls and one out of six boys will be abused before the age of 18,” said former Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, who worked to make the helpline a reality. “We know that sexual predators seek out trusting environments where children are

present and churches are vulnerable because of close relationships and immediate access to children.”

Parsons said the line was established to help victims and church leaders get immediate assistance while giving churches guidelines plus resources for training and support to prevent predators from targeting their congregations.

Praesidium is staffing the helpline, providing expert advice on prevention and how to respond to suspicious behavior and suspected abuse. Callers will also receive guidance on responding to suspicious interactions between employees and/or volunteers and children, and determining when and how to report suspected abuse to authorities.

“Abuse is not a natural disaster. It is not something that happens with no warning signs or knowledge. It is an event that is preventable with the right resources such as policies, screening procedures and training,” said Aaron Lundberg, Praesidium’s president and CEO. “Through our partnership with the PC(USA) and Insurance Board, we are able to offer these resources so churches can protect their congregations from the devastating effects of abuse.”

PC(USA) churches and individual members can call the helpline to discuss concerns and incidents of abuse, seek criminal background checks and utilize an online self-assessment tool to identify potential gaps in risk management practices within their organization. Resources can be found at www.InsuranceBoard.org/abuse_prevention.

“We want our churches to continue to be a safe haven for our children. The new helpline gives church leaders another line of defense to protect our most innocent and vulnerable citizens,” said Sara Lisherness, director of the church’s Compassion, Peace and Justice ministry. “Abuse in the church not only shatters families’ lives, but can destroy the church’s ability to provide effective ministry to that family.”

Helpline experts can assist churches on how to respond to victims, families and congregations in the midst of an abuse allegation, provide tips on screening employees and volunteers, manage high-risk areas such as bathrooms and social media interactions and develop a safety plan.

“It is extremely important that congregations protect both the integrity of the church and our witness for the Almighty by ensuring that we are protecting victims and potential victims from abusive behaviors,” said the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk for the PC(USA). “Our effort through the helpline is a step toward making the church a safer place to develop and expand human relationships for the kingdom of God.”

Insurance Board President and CEO Timothy Harris believes the helpline is one of the most important things churches can provide to the people they serve. “Our obligation to protect the most vulnerable among us cannot be overstated.”