

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY OF ENON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child... welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea," *Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse." (¶ 162.C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse ["ritual abuse" refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abuses are often related to cults, or pretend to be] occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences or litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church - 2000*, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our strong and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries in an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "... surrounded by steadfast love, ... established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." ("Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

Definitions

- **Child** (also 'youth' or 'minor'): a person under 18 years of age
- **Volunteer**: a person not employed by the Church who serves in a leadership role over minors under the Church's care
- **Staff**: a person employed by the Church who serves in a leadership role over minors under the Church's care
- **Leader**: an individual, whether volunteer or staff, who is responsible for a group of minors or vulnerable adults
- **Abuse**: harm or threatened harm to a minor's health or welfare by a person responsible for the minor's healthy or welfare or be a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. Abuse may include, but is not limited to, sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and verbal abuse.

Screening and Training

- All volunteers and staff working directly with children or youth shall be required to complete a background check to include a Social Security trace, National Criminal Record File, Department of Justice National Sex Offender Registry.
- Background checks shall be valid for three (3) years from the date on which they are completed.
- Volunteers and staff shall be required to complete training on the local church's Safe Sanctuaries policy prior to serving and should complete refresher training at least every three (3) years thereafter or within six (6) months of a change to the Church's Safe Sanctuaries policy.
- At least once per year, there should be an opportunity for volunteers and staff responsible for the care and supervision of minors to complete Safe Sanctuaries training.

- “Quick-trains” may be offered to allow new volunteers and staff to begin serving prior to the next scheduled training using materials provided during the last training presented by a ministry leader or the current pastor. At a minimum, the new volunteer or staff member should read through the current Safe Sanctuaries policy and sign a Participant Covenant.

Supervision Requirements

- Volunteers and staff serving as leaders shall be not less than eighteen (18) years of age.
- Volunteers and staff serving as leaders shall be no less than five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group for which they are responsible, provided that paid staff who do not meet this requirement may serve as a leader if they are at least three (3) years older than the oldest member of the group and supervising minors is included in their job description as approved by the staff/pastor-parish relations committee (SPRC).
- A volunteer may be less than eighteen (18) years of age as long as they receive permission from the ministry supervisor and given that they (1) are paired with a properly screened and trained adult, (2) have read the Safe Sanctuaries policy and signed a Participation Covenant, (3) are five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group for which they are helping with.
- At no time shall a leader person be responsible for more than ten (10) minors, notwithstanding other requirements of the policy.
- **Two-Adult Rule:** no fewer than two adults present, who have been properly screened, at all times during any church-sponsored program or ministry involving children.

Transportation/Overnight Events

- Drivers shall be required to be qualified as leaders.
- Drivers should be required to complete a motor vehicle record check and provide current proof of insurance.
- Chaperones shall be required to be of the same gender as the children or youth being chaperoned.
- Adults shall not share a bed or be alone in a room with any child, including their own.
- Overnight accommodations should be selected in accordance with this policy. Where possible, hotels with doors opening to an interior hallway should be selected over motels with doors opening to the outside.
- For all overnight events and any non-overnight events that will take place away from church property, the leader should obtain medical/liability release forms, contact information for parents/guardians, and other relevant information. Copies of this information should be kept in the church office, with the leader, and in the vehicle in which the minor is riding.

Reporting Procedures

Volunteers and staff of the Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with Ohio statute on reporting of known or suspected abuse/neglect of children. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the Department of Human Resources or local law enforcement.

Nothing in this policy is intended to call upon a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationships. Nonetheless, clergy are considered mandatory reporters under state law and must report known or suspected abuse unless disclosed within confidentiality of confession or clergy relationships. However, pastors are permitted by law, and are encouraged, to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect even if the pastor learns of the abuse or neglect in the course of a confidential communication. If possible, the pastor should alert a person of the pastor's obligation and commitment so that the person, during a counseling session or other confidential communication setting, may choose not to share the information about the child abuse or neglect with the pastor.

The individual who observes or suspects abuse is responsible for making a report to law enforcement or the county Department of Human Resources. Immediate notification of the report must also be made to the volunteer or staff member's supervisor. It shall be the pastor's responsibility (or chair of SPRC in the event the pastor is implicated) to notify the district superintendent.

Response Procedures

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. Church volunteers and staff are not to undertake an investigation of an alleged incident. Reporting procedures outlined above are to be followed. However, in all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies after the procedures for reporting listed above are followed.

The district superintendent and/or his/her designee are the only persons/(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Conference Director of Communication.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a Church-related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the leader in charge of the Church activity to follow reporting procedures outlined above.

Safe Sanctuaries Policy Review and Update

The current Safe Sanctuaries Policy shall be reviewed annually by the pastor, administrative board chair, trustee chair, and SPRC chair prior to the annual Church Conference meeting. The policy shall be updated every two years by the Safe Sanctuary Task Force.

ADOPTED the ____ day of _____, 20__