

NEW COVENANT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child 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 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, and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abuse acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches 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 in their churches.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved; the child; the family, the local church and the leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional and monetary consequences of 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 UMC 2000 p. 180)

The 1996 Book of Resolutions, Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church, makes the following statements:

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church are incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing in accordance with the 1996 Book of Discipline (Par 65. F). All human beings, both male and female, are created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-19, states all are one in Christ, we support equality among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation or gender.

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth, to protect our teachers, workers, staff, and congregations from allegations of sexual misconduct, and to confirm that sexual misconduct will not be tolerated.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

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

CONCLUSION

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment within the church.

PART II: TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

1. Physical Abuse

Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.

Possible Signs of Physical Abuse

- a. Hostile and aggressive behavior toward others.
- b. Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults.
- c. Destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property.
- d. Inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child's developmental stage.
- e. Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises.

2. Sexual Abuse

Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

- a. Unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age and developmental stage.
- b. Depression - cries often for no apparent reason.
- c. Promiscuous behavior.
- d. Runs away from home and refuses to return.
- e. Difficulty walking and sitting.
- f. Bruised/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas.
- g. Exhibits frequent headaches, stomach aches, extreme fatigue.

3. Emotional Abuse

Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

Possible signs of Emotional Abuse

- a. Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal.
- b. Exhibits severe lack of self-esteem.
- c. Failure to thrive.
- d. Threatens or attempts suicide.
- e. Speech and/or eating disorders.
- f. Goes to extremes to seek adult approval.
- g. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns

4. Neglect

Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

Possible Signs of Neglect

- a. Failure to thrive
- b. Pattern of inappropriate dress for climate
- c. Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger
- d. Depression
- e. Untreated medical conditions

f. Poor hygiene

5. Ritual Abuse

Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals, repeated threats of harm to the child, other persons, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem too grim to be true. Children making such reports must not be ignored.

Possible signs of Ritual Abuse

- a. Disruptions of memory or consciousness.
- b. Unexplained mistrust and mood swings.
- c. Flashbacks.
- d. Eating disorders.
- e. Fear of the dark, especially at sundown or full moon.
- f. Agitation or despair that seems to occur in cycles.
- g. Fear of ministers or others wearing robes or uniforms.
- h. Nightmares or sleep disorders.
- i. Any of the systems of sexual abuse

MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

I. Sexual harassment

Any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. (The Book of Discipline, Pa., 161.1)

2. Sexual abuse within the Ministerial Relationship

Occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer. (1996 Book of Resolutions, p.130)

PART III: PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT A SAFE SANCTUARY

1. EDUCATION

All individuals working with the children and youth (any child under 18 years old) of our church should have a clear understanding of the types and signs of child abuse as well as what constitutes misconduct of a sexual nature. Workshops to review and discuss policies and procedures will be held.

2. SCREENING

All workers (paid and volunteer, clergy or lay) who work with children or youth in any area of ministry should undergo appropriate screening. The following guidelines will be followed in regard to screening.

- a. All volunteers working with children or youth will complete a Volunteer Application Form.
- b. All paid workers working with children or youth will complete an Employment Application Form.
- c. All information gained through the screening process will be confidential.
- d. All information will be kept in a locked file by the church secretary and available only to those *designated by NCUMC* with a need to know.

3. GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- a. Windows in interior doors of class rooms and offices should be unobstructed.
- b. Bathroom doors should be propped open when a worker is helping a child use the bathroom.
- c. No child or youth should be taken to or from the church grounds on any church-sanctioned activity without the awareness and consent of their parent(s) or guardians. Additionally, the staff member responsible for the activity is to be informed of any arrangements that are made.
- d. No adult should spend unsupervised time alone with a child or youth without the awareness and consent of the child's parent(s) or guardians.
- e. At least *two* adults should supervise all church-sanctioned youth, children's, Sunday School, and/or Nursery activities.. At least two adults should also be present at church-sanctioned activities that take place on church premises at times other than regular activities (i.e. parties, overnights, etc.). One of these adults should be at least 21 years old.
- f. One person 24 years of age or older should be in each classroom unless waived by pastor. *Assistants* below the age of 24 may be present. Assistants will not be any younger than 5 years above the age of the oldest child/youth in the classroom (“+5 Rule”).
- g. All Children’s Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, children's church leaders, toddlers workers and nursery workers should be a member of our church for at least 6 months, submit to the application process, and been approved by NCUMC staff.
- h. ANY PERSON observing inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult employee or volunteer worker and a member of a youth group or a child should report this behavior immediately to the pastor.

4. RESPONDING TO ALLEGED ABUSE

- a. North Carolina's Mandatory Reporting Law requires EVERYONE to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the social services in the county where the juvenile resides.
- b. Take any and all measures to care for and safeguard the alleged victim.
- c. Immediately report the incident to the Minister, Chairperson of Staff-Parish Committee or your leader.
- d. Document all efforts of handling the incident.
- e. Notify the parents and guardians of the alleged victim.
- f. Contact the insurance company.
- g. New Covenant United Methodist Church (NCUMC) will follow all directives from law enforcement and legal authorities. Their directives will supersede any of the following procedural steps.
- h. The Church Representative (Pastor or Lay Leader) will notify the alleged perpetrator of the allegations.
- i. Within 48 hours of being notified of the incident, the Church Representatives will meet with the person(s) making the accusation(s). The person(s) making the accusation(s) has the right to have a witness present. (The alleged perpetrator will not be present). The Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and recommendations for counseling and support will be offered.
- j. Within 48 hours of being notified of the incident, The Church Representative(s) will meet with the alleged perpetrator. The alleged perpetrator has the right to have a witness present (neither the alleged victim nor the alleged victim's family will be present). The Church Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and recommendations for counseling and support will be offered.

k. The Pastor or another designated person will be the spokesperson to convey news to the press and the congregation in a prepared public statement.

5. RESPONDING TO ALLEGED MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

a. Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved informally between the parties.

b. In all other instances, misconduct of a sexual nature should be reported to the chair of the Staff-Parish Committee and the pastor in charge.

c. If the misconduct involves a clergy or staff person, it should be reported to the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee, the district superintendent or the presiding bishop.

ENFORCEMENT OF THIS POLICY AS WELL AS TRAINING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STAFF-PARISH COMMITTEE.