

Safe Sanctuaries Policy for Asbury United Methodist Church, for Youth and Young Vulnerable Adults

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 welcome [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...if 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” (§162C).

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 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 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 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 United Methodist Church-2000*, pp. 180-181.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy of 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 of 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 if 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:

Pastor: Ordained and Appointed clergy of Asbury UMC

Staff: Any person who is paid, either hourly or by salary, by Asbury UMC.

Volunteer: A person who engages in unpaid work at or in the name of Asbury UMC, including but not limited to Sunday Program teachers, Childcare Volunteers, Youth Group helpers or leaders and parent chaperones.

Supervisor: The staff member or lead adult assigned as the lead adult by the staff

Staff, Pastor, Parish Relations Committee (SPPRC): The committee that hires, counsels and supports staff.

Child/Children: A person ages birth through completion of 5th grade

Youth: A person who has completed the 5th grade through 18 years old

Vulnerable Adult: A person over the age of 18 whose mental, emotional or physical condition makes him or her susceptible to abuse (temporary or permanently)

Part 1: Policies for reducing the risk of abuse in the Church

Hiring and Screening Staff

1) Paid Staff

- a) All staff will be interviewed by the Pastor, Associate Pastor, a representative of SPPRC, and/or Director(s) of Children's/Youth/Adult Ministries
- b) All staff shall be required to fill out background screening information that shall include but not limited to:
 - i) Standard contact information
 - ii) Experience and qualifications for the position
 - iii) Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions.
 - iv) Background check authorization form
 - v) Valid social security number
 - vi) Listing of 2 non-relative references with complete contact information (addresses and phone number). If staff position includes direct work with children or youth, one of these references must be related to the staff's previous care of or work with children.
- c) Any staff that has had a break in service of more than one year shall resubmit the background screening and will re-interview with the Pastor, representative of SPPRC and/or Director(s) of Children's/Youth/Adult Ministries.
- d) All staff, with the exception of Childcare staff, must be at least 18 years old. Childcare staff must be at least 16 years old.
- e) All records shall be kept in a secured location in the church.

2) Volunteers

- a) The Teams of Children's/Youth/Adult Ministries are responsible for recruiting volunteers.
- b) All volunteers shall be required to fill out background screening information that shall include but not limited to:
 - i) Standard contact information
 - ii) Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions.
 - iii) Background check authorization form
 - iv) Valid social security number
- c) Any volunteer that has had a break in service of more than one year shall resubmit the background screening and will re-interview with the Pastor, representative of SPPRC, Director(s) of Children's/Youth/Adult Ministries.
- d) All volunteers, with the exception of Childcare staff, must be at least 18 years old. Childcare staff must be at least 16 years old.
- e) All records shall be kept in a secured location in the church.

- f) People shall demonstrate an active relationship with Asbury UMC for at least one year before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

3) Updates for Background Check

- a) Background checks should be completed every year for staff and volunteers.

Background Check Review

- 1) If a background check is clear then the applicant may volunteer
- 2) If the background check or other documents contain information that states the volunteer or staff has been charged with, convicted of, or plead guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or felony, including but not limited to crimes against minors, child molestation, crimes involving pornography, sexual or physical abuse, other crimes of violence, or theft, the applicant should not be allowed to work with minors
- 3) If the background check or the other documents contain anything questionable that should require special consideration, reasonable efforts will be made to investigate the matter. The information shall be presented to a panel of the Senior Pastor, Youth Ministries Director, and Chair of the SPRC. At that time it will be determined if the applicant may work with minors
- 4) If at any time the applicant refuses to submit a background check form or consent to release confidential information, then the applicant may not be permitted to work with minors
- 5) Applicants will be notified if they are or are not approved to work with minors.

Supervision of Children and Youth (all people under the age of 18)

1) Two Adult Rule

- a) No fewer than 2 people (at least 18 years of age) should be present during all church sponsored programs, events or ministries involving children and/or youth. If only 2 adults are present for the event or program, they should be unrelated to each other.
- b) If a properly screened and compensated staff has to be alone in a room with children and youth (including but not limited to childcare, Children's Church and choir rehearsal) they shall be in a room where either:
 - i) The door will remain fully open
 - ii) The door will have the top half open
 - iii) The door will have a clear glass window, which shall remain unobstructed.
- c) If 2 people over the age of 18 are not able to be present, an adult "roamer" should move in and out of the childcare, education or youth rooms or wherever the program is taking place.

2) Five Year Older Rule

- a) All staff and volunteers in a supervisory role must be 5 years older than the oldest child or youth attending the event, program or ministry.

3) Procedures specific to Childcare

- a) In all childcare rooms, the half doors will be used (bottom half closed, top half open) any time there are one or more children in the room.
- b) Other adults
 - i) Only properly screened and compensated childcare staff will supervise children in the childcare rooms.
 - ii) The exception to this is a child's parent, grandparent or other direct relative may volunteer in their child's childcare room.
 - iii) Only people directly supervising children shall be present in any of the childcare rooms during times when children are also present.
- c) No child will be left unsupervised while attending a church event or program.
- d) Diaper Changing/Bathroom Usage
 - i) All diaper changes for babies/toddlers will take place in an open area (such as the changing table in the nursery).
 - ii) If a child needs to use the bathroom during an event or program, a properly screened staff member or volunteer (preferably one of the same gender) shall accompany them and wait outside of the bathroom for the child to return (if the child is independent in using the bathroom).
 - iii) Only properly screened staff may provide hands on assistance to children in the bathroom (such as unfastening belts, buttons, etc.) but hands on assistance should be as minimal as possible.
 - iv) A sign-in, identification, and paging process must be followed for infants and children in the nursery.

4) Procedures Specific to Youth (Middle and High School)

- a) Supervision during off-site travel
 - i) All regular supervision rules will apply (where appropriate) if a group of youth are at a Asbury UMC sponsored event or program.
 - ii) No youth will ride one on one in a vehicle alone with any staff or volunteer. There must always be 3 to a car.
 - iii) The **"Two Adult Rule"** and **"Five Year Older Rule"** will apply if a group of youth are at an Asbury UMC sponsored event or program.
- b) Supervision during overnight events
 - i) At any overnight event (at Asbury UMC, overnight mission trip type events, Church retreats, etc.) both male and female leaders will be present.
 - ii) If the overnight event is taking place at Asbury UMC, once all youth have arrived, the exterior doors to the building shall be locked.
 - iii) Youth will be separated by gender into different sleeping quarters with at least one same-sex leader overseeing each group.

- iv) If two sleeping quarters are not available, boys will sleep on one side of the room, girls on the other with leaders sleeping in between the groups and near the exits.
 - v) All regular supervision rules will apply (where appropriate) if a group of youth or vulnerable adults are at an Asbury UMC sponsored event or program.
- c) Other
- i) Due to the nature of Youth Group (grades 6-12) activities (including off-site and overnight trips), any person who wishes to volunteer with this group in a supervisory role will submit their personal information for a background check.
 - ii) Only people who have been properly screened (both paid staff and volunteers) will supervise a group of youth, regardless if the event, activity or ministry area is on or off-site.

Additional Policies

1) Cyber-Safety

- a) Have parental permission information for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in writing for:
 - i) Posting photos on any websites or sending e-mail or text messages or making videos
 - ii) E-mailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, PDA, or cell phone
 - iii) The sharing of any full name or contact information.
- b) Never post easily identifiable information online.
 - i) Use "Bcc" options in sending mass e-mails.
 - ii) Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information.
 - iii) Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests.
- c) Limit individual communication with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
 - i) Conduct any communications in a professional manner.
 - ii) Save all communications you have with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. (An electronic "paper trail" can be important.)
 - iii) When emailing, texting, tweeting, or Facebook messaging a minor, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the "two adults present" Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media.
 - iv) If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.
- d) Social Networking (Facebook)

- i) Adult employees and staff must not post photos or video that identify children, youth or vulnerable adults on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
- ii) All Facebook groups and pages associated with Preschools, Children's or Youth Ministry areas will be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the page administrators.
- iii) All church-related Facebook groups and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
- iv) Photos of minors may only be published or posted after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twit pics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors.
- v) Photos may only be posted to the Facebook page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. "tag") themselves.
- vi) When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only "check in" yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation. (See the Best Practices section of this document for more information on the use of hashtags.)
- vii) In the case of clergy and parishioner online connections, Friend Requests, Follow Requests, Circle Requests, etc. should be initiated by the parishioner, especially if the parishioner is a minor or vulnerable adult.
- viii) No adult shall initiate Facebook contact with or "friend" a minor or vulnerable adult.

2) Special policies for Vulnerable Adults

- a) Special care should be taken when staff or volunteers are working with vulnerable adults. Volunteers often go to a vulnerable adult's place of residence or hospital as part of that specific ministry area.
- b) Any volunteer that carries out this work in the name of Asbury UMC should be screened by the Pastor and/or Loving Care Ministries Coordinator and should be active in the church for at least 6 months before working with a vulnerable adult in a 1:1 role.
- c) When a vulnerable adult is receiving pastoral care, the door to the room shall be left part way open.

3) Counseling

- a) Any one-on-one counseling with a person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult, regardless of who is providing counseling, shall take place in a room with a partially open door. The door should remain partially open during the entire counseling session.

- b) Ideally, counseling sessions with a person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult will take place when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.
- c) If a person under the age of 18 requests one-on-one counseling, the parents/guardians should be notified as to where and when counseling sessions will be taking place.

4) Appropriate Types of Discipline

- a) The only physical force that may be used by an adult on a child or youth must be reasonable force intended to restrain the individual under these circumstances:
 - i) To quell a disturbance or prevent an act that threatens to harm another person
 - ii) To obtain possession of a weapon or other dangerous object in a child's or youth's possession.
 - iii) For purposes of self-defense or to defend the safety of others
 - iv) To protect a child or youth from self-inflicted harm.
- b) Adult staff and volunteers will use appropriate language and not swear or raise their voice in anger.
- c) If a child or youth is creating a disturbance for the entire group, the child or youth shall be separated from the group and the parents/guardians shall be informed.

Part 2: Policies Regarding Incidents of Abuse Toward Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Reporting Allegations and Instances of Abuse

PRELIMINARY STEPS:

The person reporting an incident of abuse on church property or in conjunction with a church-sponsored program or event (normally an eye-witness or the first adult informed of the abuse, usually by the alleged victim or victim's parents) should first:

- Secure the safety of the victim. This may include an immediate call to emergency services as deemed necessary.
- Secure the safety of others and stabilize the environment in which the incident occurred. The area should not be left unsupervised by an adult in order to report the incident. The reporting adult may have to employ the help of another adult to inform the adult in charge of the event ("adult-in-charge") and one of the Pastors.

INITIAL REPORTING:

- The reporting adult will report the incident to the adult-in-charge and Pastor. If the accused is either the adult-in-charge or the Associate Pastor, the reporting adult must report the incident to the Senior Pastor. If the accused is the Senior Pastor, the reporting adult must report the incident to the adult-in-charge and SPPRC chair.

- The reporting adult should complete the “Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse” in the Appendix.
- If the incident or allegation is consistent with requirements for mandatory reporting to local, state, or federal authorities, the adult-in-charge or the Pastor must report the event to the local police department and/or the Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS).

Responding to Reports of Abuse

INITIAL RESPONSE:

If the accused is an Associate Pastor or the adult-in-charge the initial response must be made by the Senior Pastor. If the accused is the Senior Pastor, the District Superintendent must respond. In all other cases the adult-in-charge must make the initial response. He/she should:

- Gather pertinent information from the victim, accused, and witnesses. Treat all involved with respect. An allegation is not a presumption of guilt.
- Preserve whatever evidence is available.
- Ensure the continued stability of the environment.
- If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff member, the Senior Pastor must relieve that person of duties relating to children and/or youth until the investigation is completed and further disposition is made by the SPPRC. If the individual is a paid staff member and the relief of duties amounts to a suspension from all work, the suspension shall be with pay.
- Inform the parents or legal guardian of the victim and of the accused if a minor.

FURTHER RESPONSE:

Primary responsibility for further response is with the SPPRC and a Pastor. If the accused is the Senior Pastor, the District Superintendent must remain involved. They will work together to further investigate the allegation or incident to ensure that all aspects are covered completely, accurately, and fairly to all parties. They will:

- Extend pastoral care to the victim(s) and their family (ies), if appropriate.
- Extend pastoral care to the accused, and family, if appropriate.
- Seek legal advice and counsel.
- Avoid prejudging a situation. The accused shall be afforded full due process in handling the complaint. The accused should be supported and treated with dignity.
- Continue the investigation to conclusion, with recommendations to the Discipleship Team, Church Council, and SPPRC for action.
- Cooperate with any investigations being conducted by law enforcement and/or the IDHS.
- Document the results of the investigation and file in the main office storage area.

- Inform appropriate individuals of results of the investigation and action taken. Such individuals may be the victim, accused, and parents.
- Keep the Asbury insurance agent informed of the incident or allegation, investigation progress, and conclusions/actions taken.
- Ensure that the Senior Pastor responds to the media. He/she must utilize a prepared statement in his/her initial report to the media which will state Asbury policy on child abuse and that the allegation is being thoroughly investigated.

Part 3: Training and Education

- 1) All workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults are required to attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the:
 - Church's policies for the prevention of the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults
 - Procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
 - Appropriate steps to follow for reporting an incident of abuse of any of the children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
 - Details of our state's laws regarding the definitions of child/youth abuse and the requirements of reporting abuse when it is discovered.

- 2) All infant and nursery workers shall have a current certification in First Aid and Child/Infant CPR. It is recommended that all workers with children and youth have first aid and CPR training. The church shall make this training available on a regular basis.

Part 4: Administration of Policy

The Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be responsible for periodic reviews of this Safe Sanctuaries policy.

The Church Council will endorse and approve the policy and any changes to the policy.