

*Safe Sanctuaries Policy submitted to Church Council, March 8, 2007, as revised and approved  
by Church Council November 2008*

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES**

### **A BASIC POLICY STATEMENT for Mary Taylor Memorial 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" (~ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse<sup>1</sup> 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 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> "Ritual abuse" refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2000*, pp. 180-181. Copyright @ 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

## Statement of Purpose and Covenant

Our purpose in adopting this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and its accompanying resources and procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

When a child is welcomed into the church through the sacrament of baptism, the congregation vows to “surround this child with a community of love and forgiveness, that he/she may grow in service to others” and to “pray for him/her, that he/she may be a true disciple who walks in the way that leads to life.”<sup>3</sup>

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we resolve to fulfill this promise by making the following covenant:

- 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 who work with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of classroom discipline).
- We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.
- We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

## Scope

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising, directing, coordinating, teaching and/or assisting the activities of preschoolers, children, youth, and mentally handicapped persons.

## Definitions

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. “Preschooler,” “child,” “children,” “youth,” and “minor” shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) (or a vulnerable adult, whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. “Adult” shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age who is of sound mental capacity and who is not considered to be a vulnerable adult in the previous definition.
3. “Worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer, including parent volunteers and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors.
4. “Employee” for purposes of this policy shall be all persons who are paid by the Church, whether full or part time, and whether employee or independent contractor, and all unpaid volunteers who work with children and youth in a supervisory (staff) capacity such as Sunday School and Youth program coordinators, administrators or superintendents, and the chairperson(s) of the Church committee(s) that oversees those programs.

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<sup>3</sup> United Methodist Hymnal, page 40.

5. "Teenage Worker" shall be defined as any worker at least fourteen (14) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of minors.
6. "Superintendent" shall be defined as the person or persons responsible for planning, oversight, and supervision of the Sunday School or other Christian Education program.
7. "Child Abuse" shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, ritual, spiritual, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, minor, or vulnerable adult. For a legal definition, see Child Abuse Prevention Reporting instruction sheet.
8. "Criminal Background Check" ("CBC") is the procedure used to perform a national check of the background of adult employees and volunteer workers for criminal activity using the on-line product service "Trak 1" through the New York Annual Conference. In addition, a motor vehicle violations check will be conducted for any volunteers that may transport children or youth.

## General guidelines

- **Two adult rule**

No fewer than two adults shall be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. The adults should be non-related.

The nursery will be attended by two adult leaders, who may be a paid staff person and a parent. All Sunday school classes will be led by two adults. A youth bible study will be attended by two adults. The youth fellowship group is always staffed with at least two adult leaders. Note additional provisions related to driving on page five.

If a child up through grade 5 needs to use the restroom, the Superintendent or a teenage worker to escort the child. Classrooms must not be left unattended.

- **Five year older rule**

All leaders are to be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth in the classroom or program.

Student Nursery Assistant (student in Grade 5 through 8):

May serve only in the nursery with two other adult leaders present, but the children can be no closer than 5 years to their age and no younger than 1.

Youth Leader (student Grade 9 through age 17):

May serve any class with two adult leader, but the children can be no closer than 5 years their age and no younger than 6 months.

Adult Leader (Ages 18 and above):

May serve in any class or group, but children can be no closer than 5 years to their age.

- **Windows in all doors**

There shall be windows in all class-rooms and counseling doors, and these windows are not to be covered. If the door to the room does not have a window, the door should remain open for the entire session.

- **Open door counseling**

Any counseling session with a child or youth shall be held in a room with an uncovered window. If the door to the room does not have a window, the door should remain fully open for the entire session. Counseling sessions with children and youth should be conducted when others are present in either building

- **Advance notice to parents**

Parents should always have advance notice and full information about the events that their children will be participating in.

- **Volunteer application and participation covenant**

All volunteers and leaders must have a volunteer application on file, along with a Participation Covenant. These forms may be found in the MTMUMC Safe Sanctuaries Resource Manual.

- **Six months involvement rule**

An individual must be affiliated with the church for at least 6 months before they can serve as a Worker, voluntary Employee, or Teenage Worker, activity involving children, youth or a vulnerable adult.

## **Guidelines for Sunday School and Nursery**

All General Safe Sanctuary Guidelines will be in effect for the Sunday School Program and the Nursery, along with the following:

### **Sunday school**

#### **Senior High**

All classes will be held within the designated church school building(s). The Senior High class should be conducted by 2 Adults at least 5 years older than the oldest student. If an additional leader is not available a floater will be assigned to monitor the classroom.

Youth may not leave the building or classroom prior to the designated end of an event without written permission from a parent or guardian. In case of accident or illness, the organizer of the event must have on file an emergency profile.

#### **2 year old – 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

All classes will be held within the designated church school building(s). Advance notification must be provided to the parents if the children will be somewhere other than the classroom at the time of pickup. Children must have permission slips from their parent/guardian in order to be allowed to leave the building during an event. Children through grade 5 must remain in the classroom until they are picked up by a parent or a person previously identified by the parent through a signed statement. Classrooms must not be left unattended. If children age 2 through 8<sup>th</sup> grade are at an event after sundown, they must be picked up by a parent or guardian. In the case that the parent or guardian is delegating this responsibility to another adult, they must

identify and give written permission to the person picking up their child and the person picking up must show their drivers license to the person leading the event.

### **Nursery, and Child Care when parents are attending worship**

Child care will be provided by at least two unrelated adults, one of whom may be a paid staff person and one of whom may be a parent volunteer.

Parents must sign their children in and out, and place a label on their belongings. The adult leader(s) and the student nursery assistant youth volunteer(s) that have signed up for the day are the only ones allowed in the nursery beside the parents

Parents will sign in on a clipboard, leaving their names and cell phone number for emergency contact. Parents will be asked to set their phone on “vibrate”.

If a parent must be contacted to pick up a child, call the cell phone number or notify the ushers by two way radio. Parents will be summoned if a child is ill, has been injured, or is inconsolable.

If a child has soiled the diaper and it is necessary to change them the following procedures should be followed:

- Only the paid child care worker or other adult leader Primary responsibility remains with the paid child care worker
- Another adult must be present. .
- Protective gloves are to be worn
- Wax paper is to be placed on the changing table; hand sanitizer and wipes will be provided. Diapers will be provided by parents
- Soiled diaper and wax paper are to be placed in a plastic bag and removed from the room as soon as possible.
- Be sure to wash hands and disinfect changing table when finished.
- Be sure to tell the parent that you have changed the diaper.

Note: In the event the parent does not wish the nursery staff to change diapers, this must be noted on the nursery registration form.

### **Guidelines for Youth Ministry**

All general Safe Sanctuary Guidelines will be adhered to along with the following:

Youth Group meetings are held within the church. Advance notification and permission slips must be obtained if there is an activity away from the building. Permission slips are found in the MTMUMC Safe Sanctuaries Resource Manual. If the child will be transported by anyone other than themselves or their parent, parents must be notified as to who will be driving.

Any adult that will be driving the youth must be at least 21 years of age or older, provide proof of insurance, a valid driver’s license, current registration and be willing to have a motor vehicle background check done annually. (See definition of Criminal Background Check on page 3)

When conducting an overnight or other trip, it will be planned with the children’s safety being the absolute concern, and all details will be provided to the parents in advance.

## **What to do if you witness or suspect child abuse**

1. If you believe that the abuse is occurring *outside* of the church never assume that someone else has reported it. If you witness or suspect that a child is being abused please contact the Parents and the Pastor and he/she will contact the proper authorities.
2. If you suspect that a child has been abused *within* the church by a member, volunteer, or employee:  
Notify the Sunday School Superintendent, one of the Lay Leaders, or the Pastor. The Safe Sanctuary Task Force will then:
  - Notify the parents of the victim and take all appropriate steps to assure the child's safety until the parents arrive. The safety of the child is the church's primary concern.
  - The accused abuser must be confronted with dignity, and is to be immediately removed from further involvement with children or youth.
  - Proper law enforcement and child protective services will be notified
  - Annual conference authorities, the church's insurance agent, and lawyer will also be notified.
  - Prepare a written report in response using the forms provided.
  - A designated spokesperson will be assigned to make any necessary statements or response to the news media
  - A brief and honest statement will be prepared for the congregation.
  - The church will fully cooperate with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

## **Oversight Responsibility**

1. The Safe Sanctuaries Task Force will oversee and monitor the implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries policy. For this purpose it will meet at the beginning of the school year in September and check for compliance in January/February.
2. The Task Force will report to the Staff Parish Relations Committee, and through the SPRC to the Church Council.
3. A Confidential Screening Committee, composed of the pastor and the chair of Staff Parish Relations, will oversee the implementation of Criminal Background Checks, which will be done on an annual basis, or as otherwise needed, and receive the reports from such checks. Reports will be held for a period of 2 years at which point they will be destroyed.
4. The Task Force will present an annual budget request to the Finance Committee and the Church Council.
5. In consultation with the Trustees, the Task Force will review the liability insurance coverage held by the church to be sure it is sufficient and meets the requirements of limited immunity.

6. The Trustees will review the child abuse prevention program of any group renting church space for children's activities. The Task Force will provide assistance to the Trustees if needed.
7. First aid and CPR training will be offered on an annual basis for all church workers with children and youth as a basic step to assure their safety.

## APPENDIX

*The following information is provided to add to an understanding of the nature of inappropriate behavior, neglect, and / or child abuse and the forms it may take.*

### What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a church, a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person known or unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.”

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

### TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

Children suffering abuse will often not tell anyone about it. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognize the signs of abuse. The following **may** be indicators of abuse, and the presence of the following can be considered prompts for further investigation.

#### 1. Physical Abuse

Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples include violent battery with a knife, belt, strap or other weapon, burning, shaking, kicking, choking, or any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child’s body.

Possible signs that should be considered as warnings:

- hostile and aggressive behavior toward others
- fearfulness of parents and or other adults
- destructive behavior toward self, others, and or property
- inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate relative to the child’s developmental stage
- burns, facial injuries, patterns of repetitious bruises
- Signs of regressive behavior

#### 2. Emotional Abuse

Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. This abuse communicates a message that the child is worthless, bad, and not only unloved but undeserving of love. It may occur by locking a child in a closet, depriving a child of affection, or allowing a child to engage in self-destructive behavior.

Possible signs that should be considered as warnings:

- Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal, or severe lack of self-esteem
- Failure to thrive
- Threatens or attempts suicide
- Speech and/or eating disorders
- Goes to extremes to seek adult approval
- Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns
- Signs of regressive behavior

### **3. Neglect**

Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. It may involve withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, affection and affirmation.

Possible signs that should be considered as warnings:

- Failure to thrive
- Pattern of inappropriate dress for the climate
- Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger
- Depression, untreated medical conditions, or poor hygiene
- Signs of regressive behavior

### **4. Sexual Abuse**

Abuse in which sexual contact between a children an adult occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact. Often the child is physically or emotionally dependent on the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples include overt sexual behavior and exposure of the child to pornography or prostitution.

Possible signs that should be considered as warnings:

- Unusually advanced sexual knowledge or behavior; promiscuous behavior
- Depression – crying for no reason
- Running away from home and refusing to return
- Difficulty sitting or walking
- Bruising/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas
- Exhibiting frequent headaches, stomachaches, extreme fatigue, or has an STD
- Signs of regressive behavior

Possible Signs if abuse has occurred at church.

- Unusual nervousness about being left in areas where abuse has occurred
- Reluctant to participate in church activities where there was excitement before
- Comments that they do not want to be alone with a certain adult/leader
- Nightmares that include a childcare worker or volunteer
- Unexplained hostility towards a childcare worker or teacher
- Signs of regressive behavior

## 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.

Possible signs that should be considered as warnings:

- Disruptions of memory or consciousness
- Unexplained mistrust and mood swings
- Flashbacks
- Eating disorders
- Fear of the dark
- Agitation or despair that seems to occur in cycles
- Fear of ministers, priests, or others wearing robes or uniforms
- Nightmares or sleep disorders
- Signs of regressive behavior
- Excessive gargling, mouthwash use. (sign of oral sexual abuse)

The child victim is **never responsible** for causing the abuse, and the child victim is **never to be blamed** for the abuse. The child victim is **never capable of consent to abusive behavior**, either legally or morally. Child sexual abuse is **always** wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser. The child victim needs calm and constant reassurance that he or she is not at fault.