

Safe Sanctuaries Policy



WRIGHTSVILLE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Wrightsville United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

In April of 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church 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” (P162C). Tragically, churches haven't 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, 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. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2000*, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission.)

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

PURPOSE

The purpose for establishing the Wrightsville United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy (the “Policy”) and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate the Church’s absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as to all those who work or volunteer with them so that all may grow to be the people God intends them to be.

Please note that the purpose of this Policy is to set forth general guidelines. This Policy may not address the totality of care needed in a specific circumstance, nor may it address the procedures for a particular event. In the event a worker is uncertain of how to address a specific situation, the worker should ask the most regular, or senior person present at the time for direction. Workers are always required to use good Christian judgment and discretion in administering this policy.

APPLICATION

This Policy applies to all church workers, whether staff member or volunteer (“Workers”).

Here are a few key terms:

Workers refers to paid workers and volunteers.

Paid workers are defined as any Church staff member – whether full or part time.

Volunteers are those individuals who volunteer with youth.

Youth Volunteers are those ages 12-18 who work alongside adult volunteers - but are not responsible for other youth and are not counted as supervisors in the supervision ratio.

Youth means anyone under the age of 18 or those adults which might be deemed “vulnerable” due to medical or other conditions which cause physical or mental incapacity or disability. A person under the age of 18 is both a “youth” and a “minor.”

Abuse or neglect of a youth or vulnerable adult means any:

- Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
- Sexual Abuse: Any form of sexual activity with a minor or youth, whether at the church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, a youth or minor.
- Emotional Abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a youth’s spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I. Worker Selection

a. Screening Process for all Workers.

- i. Application – All Workers shall complete an Application as applies to their position (*Appendix I and II*).
- ii. Process – All staff member shall complete the church’s hiring process which includes being interviewed and approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee prior to hiring. All volunteers will meet with the appropriate Ministry Director prior to assuming any position with Youth. The Application and Background Screening Form will be discussed during this interview.

b. Reference Checks for all Workers

- i. Appropriate Reference Checks may be conducted on each staff member and volunteer to determine suitability to work with youth. The Executive Director will obtain and keep this information as confidential as possible.

c. Background Checks for all Workers

- i. Each adult worker will be subject to a Criminal Background Check every three years. Adult workers must complete the Criminal Background Check Form and Release, which will be used to conduct a Criminal Background Check. The Executive Director will obtain and keep this information as confidential as possible. (*Appendix IV*).

II. Preventative Measures

a. General youth safety measures:

- i. Location: To the extent possible, all youth will use classrooms/facilities housed on an exit level, with the youngest children located nearest to the exits.
- ii. Visibility: All rooms used by youth should have a window in the door or a half-door which can be left partially open in order to provide visibility into the space. If it is necessary to use a space which does not meet this requirement, doors will be left open.
- iii. Ratios: Ideally, two workers will always be present. In the event only one worker is present, doors should be left open. In most cases, there will also be a worker floating from room to room, monitoring activities in the building.
- iv. Observation: Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time. Any gatherings sponsored by the church but held in an individual's home should be supervised by at least two workers who are not members of the same family.
- v. Age: All workers shall be at least 5 years older than the youth to whom they minister.

b. Counseling Sessions:

- i. Counseling sessions may be conducted in one of two ways. A worker may provide counseling behind closed doors so long as there is another worker present in the building and the youth/individual being counseled is aware of this additional worker's presence. Or, counseling may take place in a public place where the individuals may be seen by all but not heard.

ii. In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate staff member may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge of at least one other staff member. At any counseling session with youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or a wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another worker is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place where other people are present.

c. Sign In/Out Procedures:

- i. Nursery – Age 3: Each youth to be left in the Nursery shall be signed into the Nursery by a parent or guardian. The person signing in the youth should indicate the name of the authorized person(s) to pick up the child on that particular day. This Sign-In Sheet provides other necessary information pertaining to the care of the youth. The youth should be picked up by the person who is authorized to do so, whose identity should be verified by the worker via visual recognition or by ID. The child must also be signed out of the Nursery by the worker on this same form. (*Appendix VI*).
- ii. Age 3-Fifth Grade: Each youth participating in the Children's programming should be signed in on the Sign-In Sheet by a parent or guardian. Responsible parents and/or guardians should sign their child in and out and via the Sign-In Sheet, and the adult's identity should be verified by the worker via visual recognition or, by ID. (*Appendix VI*).

d. Travel or Overnight Procedures:

- i. Chaperone Rules: Youth chaperones must be 23 years of age or older and members or participants in the active life of the congregation for at least 6 months. Parents of youth who do not meet these criteria cannot chaperone but are encouraged to meet with the youth director prior to leaving their youth with approved personnel.
- ii. Sleeping Quarters: For overnight events and retreats (i.e. cabins, hotels, etc.), youth and adults may not share sleeping quarters, with the exception of parent/child. In some cases, an adult Chaperone may be required to sleep in the same sleeping quarters as the youth, and in this event more than one youth will be present in a room, and the Chaperones should be a member of the same sex as the youth. It is not intended that common areas (i.e. lounges, living rooms, etc.) be used as sleeping

quarters on a group retreat. In the event of large, community sleeping spaces, Chaperones and youth may sleep in the same location, i.e. lock-in, workcamps, mission trips, etc. If known prior to the event, these exceptions to the rule will be explained in advance. Sleeping quarter arrangements are not always known ahead of time, and in that event, the Team Leader of the trip will make the final decision on sleeping quarter rules with these guidelines in mind.

- iii. Transportation: All drivers who drive youth on trips must have a valid driver's license and must undergo a DMV records check. A driver will be specifically appointed as a driver. The driver should only transport the number of passengers that the vehicle can safely carry with appropriate seatbelts. Seatbelts should be used at all times. Drivers should not use phones or electronics (other than maps) while driving. Adult workers should not transport youth one on one. Exceptions to this rule include emergencies or those times when a parent has been asked and permission given by said parent either verbally and witnessed by another adult or in writing.
- iv. Supervision: The ratio for all youth trips will be at least one worker for every seven (7) youth. As there are times when youth are on their own during trips and excursions, the "buddy rule" states that no youth should be in a situation in which he/she is alone. This rule will be strictly enforced and the youth and workers will be reminded of their responsibility for following and enforcing this rule.
- v. Medical: Ideally, the Church will attempt to ensure that someone who is trained in CPR and/or first aid will be present at all youth events.

e Bathroom Support for Young Children:

This section addresses the specific needs of young children who require bathroom assistance in our various children's programs. These include, but are not limited to, Preschool, Sunday School, Joyful for Jesus and Vacation Bible School (VBS). It ensures a safe and respectful Environment for both the child and the supervising adult, whether a paid staff or volunteer.

i. General Principles

- Priority on Safety and Privacy: The well-being and privacy of the child are paramount.
- Two-Adult Rule: Whenever possible, a minimum of two adults shall be present during bathroom breaks for young children who need assistance.
- Open Doors Policy: Bathroom doors shall remain slightly ajar (with a doorstop or other approved method) to ensure visibility but maintain child privacy.
- Communication and Respect: Clear communication with parents/guardians regarding toileting needs and routines is essential. Communicate directly with the child using age-appropriate language and respect their modesty.

ii. Training:

-Staff working with young children will receive training, either from the Director of Children, Youth & Family Ministries or the Preschool Director, on appropriate bathroom support techniques, recognizing potential abuse indicators, and mandatory reporting procedures. Volunteers will be supervised by a trained staff member or have immediate access to a trained staff member. Volunteers may also be required to participate in the above training.

iii. Specific Guidelines:

-Preschool: Staff members shall have students primarily use the bathroom attached to their classrooms. The door should remain slightly ajar to allow for the child's privacy, but also to allow the staff person access to see if the child needs further assistance (i.e. pulling pants up/down, wiping, flushing, etc.). Independence should be encouraged and the staff only need to go into the bathroom to assist when needed (i.e. if the child needs or asks for help, if there is a safety concern or if the child is not using appropriate bathroom behavior).

- Non-Preschool Bathrooms: When traveling throughout other areas of the church, students may need to use other bathrooms. Whenever possible, two adults will communicate what, where and how this will occur, considering privacy, sightlines, and safety concerns for all parties.
- Sunday School, J4J, & VBS: When possible, two volunteers shall accompany children to the bathroom. If only one volunteer is available, another responsible adult shall be informed, and the bathroom door shall remain slightly ajar.
- Diapering and toileting: Staff and volunteers changing diapers or assisting with toileting shall do so on a designated changing table or mat, never on the floor. Wash hands thoroughly before and after.
- Reporting Concerns: Any concerns about a child's toileting habits, discomfort, or inappropriate behavior by an adult shall be reported immediately to the designated Safe Sanctuary Team member or supervisor.

III. Responding to and Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect.

a. Initial Stages:

- i. Listen to the person reporting abuse in a loving and comprehensive manner. If necessary, connect the person and/or the victim with necessary resources for care.
- ii. Listen to the accused (if applicable) in a caring, respectful, and thorough manner.
- iii. Ensure that church leadership has been provided with all information necessary in order to care for the alleged victim and accused, and to make the proper response and reports.

b. Responding: In all instances of suspicion of abuse or neglect, the following procedures should be followed:

- i. The person with firsthand knowledge of the abuse or neglect should timely report to a Pastor of WUMC and the Executive Director.
- ii. The Senior Pastor and/or Executive Director will ensure that all initial steps as listed in this plan have been addressed.
- iii. If substantiated, documentation of the alleged abuse or neglect will be made in the form of completing the Suspected Child Abuse Form within 24 hours of the incident or suspicion (*Appendix VII*).
- iv. No one, and particularly no worker should conduct their own investigation or interview the alleged victim, accused, or other individuals pertaining to the suspicion without the consent of the Senior Pastor and/or the Executive Director.
- v. No one, and particularly no worker, should make any statement to the congregation or to the press. A statement made on behalf of the Church should only be made by the Senior Pastor with the assistance of the Church's attorney.

c. Reporting: In all instances of suspicion of child abuse or neglect, the following procedures should be followed:

- i. The Senior Pastor or his or her representative will report the incident to the appropriate authorities, which in most cases will be either the Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services, or other legal authority in the county where the youth resides.
- ii. If an allegation is made against a member of the congregation, a pastor or a worker, the Pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee will notify the District Superintendent and the church's attorney.

d. Details:

- i. The church will respond to the report on a case-by-case basis in order to ensure the safety and support of the alleged victim, the accused, and the congregation.

- ii. Any forms or notes completed as part of this process should be strictly confidential, unless otherwise required by a legal process and should be held as and treated as such by those involved. It is also ideal that any minor under the age of 18 be referred to by their initials when in writing (Sally May would be referred to as S.M. after the first reference).
- iii. It is also important to know that abuse can occur by and between members of the opposite sex or gender, of same sex or gender, or between members of several different or the same gender or sexual identities or preferences. Therefore, all allegations should be treated the same.
- iv. During the initial stages of the response as described herein, it is not the role of the Church to initiate or encourage criminal proceedings. The church should, however, comply with any criminal investigation or proceeding that occurs together with its implementation of this policy.

IV. Safeguards of Training and Education

- a. The Executive Director will ensure that Safe Sanctuaries and Abuse Prevention training is provided for all Workers on an annual basis. This training will be required. If a worker begins working with Youth during the course of the year, individual training will be required of these individuals and provided by the appropriate Ministry Director.