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Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy

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”.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse 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.

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

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute 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 conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all 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 all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid 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 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”.

Safe Sanctuary Guidelines

1. All volunteers or staff serving in a supervisory capacity for children/youth on site shall:

- Be at least 21 years of age or at least 5 years older than the children/youth being served (In certain circumstances, 18 years shall be the acceptable minimum age when combined with adequate training in the Conference Policies and procedures and competent oversight by a qualified adult)
- Be a member of this congregation for at least 6 months
- Complete an information sheet
- Meet with the committee/ committee chairperson responsible for the volunteer position or activity
- Must complete Safe Sanctuary Training at ELUMC
- Have appropriate conduct and contact with children/youth
- Consent to a criminal records check and a driver's license record check.
- The door will be left open where children/youth meet
- Two unrelated adults must be present at all times where children and youth meet

2. All meetings of children/youth shall be governed by these guidelines:

- Have access to a telephone
- Have a first aid kit in every building that children/youth are present
- Classrooms/offices or meetings will not be in an isolated area of the building
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with the group
- A supervisory adult is to walk around during meeting times to check all areas of the church campus
- Children/youth shall not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision

3. Offsite activities guidelines for children /youth:

- Written permission must be obtained from parent before child/youth leaves with individual(s) or a group on a church sponsored event, with emergency contact information provided.
- Adequate supervision must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc.
 - Ratio of adult to children – 1:5
 - Ratio of adults to youth – 1:10
- Gender ratio of leaders shall be in line with gender ratio of children and /or youth.
- Trip information, including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure/return times, must be provided to the parents before departing.
- When taking children/youth out of state for any activity medical releases must be notarized
- When transporting children/youth 2 adults must be present in the vehicle at all times
- If personal vehicles are used to transport youth offsite location, at least two children/youth should be present.
- When sleeping away from home, no adult may share a bed with a child/youth other than his/her own.
- Adult and children/youth should not change clothing in the same area. Separate changing areas should be provided.
- At the conclusion of offsite activities, and before leaving the facility, supervising adults should make sure the appropriate person has claimed all children/youth.

4. Standards to be applied to diapering or restroom activities:

- Procedures for all workers with children in diapers
 - Make sure another adult is in the room when a diaper is being changed.
 - Diapering should occur in a visible area.
- Procedures for all workers with preschool children using restrooms
 - If a toilet adjoins the room in use, teachers must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
 - If there has been a potty “accident” and a worker needs to assist a child (changing clothes, clean up etc.), two adults must be present and a parent may be notified if further cleaning is necessary.
- Procedures for all workers with elementary age children
 - Tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom.
 - Take more than one at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible.
 - Inform other adult when you have returned.

Guidelines for Social Media

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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, twitpics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors.
- 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.
- 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.)
- 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.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse

For church sponsored events on or off the church premises, should an adult in charge suspect abuse by, or should a child or youth report abuse by:

- Any member of the church: staff, volunteer or employee, or
- Any person present at a church sponsored meeting/activity, the following procedures shall apply:
 - ✓ The adult in charge shall document the incident in writing. Documentation shall be signed and dated
 - ✓ The adult in charge shall present the documentation
 - to the Minister in charge, or if the Minister is the accused party,
 - to the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent
 - ✓ The Minister/Chair of Staff Parish relations Committee shall notify
 - Georgia Department of Family & Children's Services
 - District Superintendent
 - Insurance carrier
 - ✓ The Minister/Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee may notify:
 - Attorney
 - Pastoral care Consultant

Should an adult in charge suspect abuse, or should a child or youth report abuse occurring away from church at non-sponsored functions, the following procedures shall apply:

- ✓ The adult in charge shall document the incident. The documentation shall be signed and dated
- ✓ Notify the Minister
- ✓ The Minister shall notify the Georgia Department of Family, Children's Services & the District Superintendent.

Response to Abuse

If allegations of abuse are made, our response will be guided by the following principles:

- All allegations will be taken seriously
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained
- Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused and the congregation
- The needs of the victim(s) will be given high priority
- Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities
- The Executive Bishop shall be the church's spokesperson with the media