

Safe Sanctuary Policy

****Please note:** For purposes of this document:

Children= ages 11 and under

Youth=ages 12-18

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 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 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 in their 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. (*The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church—2008*, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008.)

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

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing a Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

Confidentiality

The Program Coordinator will keep all criminal background checks and related forms completely secure and confidential.

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 of our children and youth as well as all 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 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.

Staff & Volunteers

- The Program Coordinator will perform a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety background check on all staff and volunteers who work directly with children and youth. This check will be updated every three years;
- All people working with children and youth, including paid and volunteer staff, must agree to the Participation Covenant Statement, as well as the Safe Sanctuary Policy via completing the Volunteer and Leader Application. Both must be signed prior to working with children and youth;
- Support Volunteers will work under the direct leadership of either staff or volunteers who have had background checks.

Program Policies

- Whenever reasonable, there will always be two adults present during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children and youth. The two adults must not be related and 18 years or older and must be at least five years older than the eldest child. The nursery care attendant will require a helper when the number of children in her care exceeds 4;
- When situations arise, however, when the two-adult rule is not feasible or practical, at no time will an adult be one on one with a child or youth in an isolated or closed place. An exemption to the two-adult rule would be counseling or mentoring session; however such a session should take place in a room with an open door or in a public place (such as a café or library) and only when other adults are present in the nearby church area;
- Doors to any room where children or youth are present should be open, have a window, or be a half-door (e.g., the nursery room);
- A training and orientation workshop will be held for those that work with children and youth at the start of each school year.

For offsite programs

- The Program Coordinator will maintain First Aid Kits (in conjunction with Carter Nursery School for those kits in Sunday School classrooms). Four portable kits will be available for all road trips;
- All youth group trips and events will require signed parent/guardian permission slips and medical information forms for all youth prior to departure. Adults attending trips lasting for more than (2) nights will also provide medical information;
- For all car trips over 90 minutes in length, there will be at least one extra adult (driver) for every two cars. The two-adult rule will be maintained by driving caravan style where all cars are in sight. Walkie-talkies are recommended, and a list of all mobile phones and numbers will be available in each vehicle. Medical information for each person will be in the car in which they are a passenger as well as a master list with the event coordinator.

Report Procedure

- Any accident, regardless of whether or not a First Aid Kits is used, will require filling out an Accident Report Form to be returned to the Program Coordinator on the day of the incident;
- If there is any suspicion of abuse or neglect volunteer and staff are obligated to report such to the Senior Pastor and/or Program Coordinator (i.e., the one with whom one feels most comfortable). All reports are confidential and private. An Incident Report Form must also be completed. Staff are mandatory reporters for abuse and neglect in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts;
- The safety of the alleged victim must be the church's primary concern.

If the allegation is deemed probable and there is substantive evidence (not just possibility of wrongdoing), the Senior Pastor will:

- Notify the proper law enforcement and/or Child Protective Services;
- Notify the District Superintendent and/or Bishop;
- Notify church leadership and the SPRC;
- Work with the SPRC to determine a plan to notify the entire congregation. Issues such as privacy of the alleged victim must be taken into account in this process;
- Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church to investigate and to respond to the allegation;
- Cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or Child Protective Services;
- If deemed appropriate, the Senior Pastor will prepare a statement to the congregation in consultation with the Staff Parish Committee and the District Superintendent;
- Pray for everyone involved.

It is a core value at Carter Memorial UMC that the safety and protection of our most vulnerable participants, namely children and youth, will always be foremost in the life of the church.