

Safe Sanctuaries Policy of Haygood Memorial UMC

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church
for Children, Youth and 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 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” (§162 C).

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 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 by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults at Haygood Memorial United Methodist Church.

Purpose

HMUMC’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 children, youth, and adults.

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 of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all people—members, constituents, participants, volunteers, visitors, professional staff, and clergy. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent

operation procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and venerable adults 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.

RECRUITING/SCREENING VOLUNTEERS AND WORKERS

1. All paid and volunteer workers with children and youth (persons under age 18) will complete Safe Sanctuaries Participation and Covenant Statement and may be asked to provide current references.
2. All workers will give permission to run a criminal record check and driver's license records check.
3. All workers will demonstrate an active relationship with this church of at least 6 months before being allowed to work with children, or with the approval of the Church Council be assigned to a position supervised by a "cleared" person, or provide name of staff in former church who can be called for reference.
4. A criminal background check will be performed on all paid staff and all unpaid supervisors of children, youth, and venerable adult teachers, leaders, and volunteers.
5. All workers will attend Safe Sanctuaries training and complete a background check once every three years.

CHURCH STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Provide application and reference forms
2. Make sure resulting information is kept strictly confidential
3. Conduct Safe Sanctuaries training
4. Supervise paid and volunteer workers to see that procedures are being followed
5. Review policy and procedures annually

TRAINING CONTENT

1. Overview of abuse
2. Types and signs of abuse
3. Procedures for response to incidents of abuse and for reporting incidents of abuse, and accidents
4. Practical policies and procedures specific to our facilities and programs

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Use *Safe Sanctuaries Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form* and/or *Safe Sanctuaries Accident Report Form*.

A worker who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred should secure the child, if possible, and then immediately report the incident to the Director/Supervisor of the ministry event.

If you are a mandated reporter by profession, we ask that you consult with a Director/Supervisor of the ministry event to report together.

It is never the responsibility of a worker with children or youth to investigate allegations of child abuse

GENERAL OPERATING PROCEDURES

1. Children and Youth, ages 18 and under, should never be unattended on the church property, including but not limited to our gym, hallways, playgrounds and classrooms.
2. Two Adult Rule – There will be two unrelated adults in each classroom. If this is not possible, there will be a roving teacher who moves among the classrooms during the program period.
3. No person under age 18 shall be considered as one of the adults.
4. No person shall supervise an age group unless she/he is at least 5 years older than the oldest person.
5. All doors will be windowed or will be open.
6. Parents sign children age 6 and under into room. If child is moved, parent will be informed of new location for pick-up.
7. Appropriate touch rules observed at all times.
8. Release child age 6 and under to appropriate adult only.
9. Program information given to parents in advance.
10. If both boys and girls are participants, then the adult leaders should also include both men and women.

OFF-SITE OR OVERNIGHT TRIPS

1. Give and get all contact information to and from parent.
2. Provide adequate supervision ratios adult to child and gender:
 - a. 1:5 for elementary age
 - b. 1:8 for youth
3. Get written or documented oral parent permission.
4. Make sure at least 2 children ride in personal vehicles. If there are not 2 adults in a vehicle, permission for exclusion to our policy form must be signed by parent for the trip.
5. No adult shares a bed with a child. Adults have separate rooms in hotels.

DIAPER AND RESTROOM ACTIVITY

1. Diapering must be done with another adult present and in a visible area.
2. In restrooms, adult supervises but allows child independence.
3. Do not allow a child to go to restroom alone. Take at least two children together.
4. Tell another adult, and leave the classroom door open.
5. Check restroom before children go in.
6. Do not assist child unless there is an emergency.

DISCIPLINE

1. Use positive words.
2. Establish rules and expectations.
3. Involve church staff when necessary.
4. Plan strategy with staff when child threatens self or others.

Conclusion

We take our policies to reduce the risk of child abuse seriously and we are committed to their enforcement for the safety and security of all our children, youth, and those who work with them. In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that every person is "... 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).