

# Safe Sanctuaries Policy

## Union United Methodist Church, Irmo, South Carolina

(Approved August 23, 2010, revised April 2013)

### Covenant Statement

Union United Methodist Church pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that ensure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers who serve in these capacities. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

### Our Responsibility

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children 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 children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for child sexual abuse in the church. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." (Paragraph 162C, *2008 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. 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.—

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each Baptism; that we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our Baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and surround children and youth with a "community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p.96).

### Classifications:

**Children:** infants to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. **Youth:** 6<sup>th</sup>—12<sup>th</sup> grade. **Vulnerable Adults:** those over 18 years of age and are mentally and or physically challenged.

**Primary Workers:** Primary workers are staff and volunteers in roles with a greater responsibility or risk. Primary workers have responsibility for, more interaction with, and greater access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A primary worker must be a minimum of 25 years of age. Primary workers must have Safe Sanctuaries training. They must have read and signed the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and have successfully completed a national background check. It is strongly recommended that primary workers have current CPR and First Aid certification.

**Secondary Workers:** Secondary workers are volunteers who work with children and youth and are supervised by a primary worker or staff person. A secondary worker must be at least 18 years old. Secondary workers must read and sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. It is strongly recommended that secondary workers complete Safe Sanctuaries training and CPR and First Aid certification.

**Workers:** Workers are those under 18 years of age. Workers are welcome to assist with ministries involving children and youth. However, they must be supervised by a primary or secondary worker. Workers must also read and sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

## I. Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

### A. Four Year Older Rule

In recruiting and hiring primary and secondary workers and paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, primary workers must be at least 25 years of age and secondary workers must be at least 18 years of age. Both primary and secondary workers must be at least 4 years older than the age of the persons they are serving.

### B. Six Month Rule

Union United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a worker for children or youth in the church unless he or she has been a member of the church or a steady visitor for at least six (6) months. In some situations this rule and may be waived only by the senior minister or designee, with appropriate reference checks.

**C. Background Checks**

Background checks shall be made of all clergy, ministry staff, and primary workers to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment or service.

**D. Interview**

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used.

**E. Confidentiality of Information**

The chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will make arrangements to store securely all confidential records from the background checks and Safe Sanctuaries Covenants.

**F. Required Forms and Signatures**

Each person who serves children, youth, or vulnerable adults will sign a "Safe Sanctuaries Covenant." Primary workers must sign a permission form to have a Background check.

**II. Staff Supervision Guidelines:** All meetings of children, youth, and vulnerable adults affiliated with Union United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines. The preschool is required to abide by the Department of Social Services guidelines. The preschool must abide by the stricter of this policy or DSS guidelines when applicable.

**A. Two Adult Rule**

It is strongly recommended that at least two approved adults be present at all times during youth and children's activities. This applies to church activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth. When feasible, both male and female leaders should be present. The preschool is required to hire two adults for each of their classes. If an adult has to accompany a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to the bathroom, the bathroom door must be left slightly open. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and there should be both male and female chaperones present if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in section **II-C** of this document.

**B. Floater Rule**

This rule allows for only one primary or secondary worker to be in a classroom when there is another approved primary worker floating through the building regularly. When using this rule, the classroom door must remain open at all times.

**C. Outings Away From Church Property**

All children and youth participating in activities off church property must have consent by a parent /guardian. If the activity is out of town or overnight, each youth or child must have written parental/guardian consent and a medical release form. (Medical release forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually). If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, a primary worker must supervise the activity. When transporting youth, children, or vulnerable adults in church buses, the driver must be approved and trained to drive the bus and there must be another worker on the bus. (For more on the two adult rule, see **Section II-A** above.)

Under no circumstance is one adult to take a child or a group of children on an overnight outing alone. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a worker and child/youth/vulnerable adult will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

**D. Goals For Worker to Child Ratios**

Union United Methodist Church has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children . These ratios are goals. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of children showing up for an event. No children (ages infant – 6<sup>th</sup> grade), however, should be left in a room without supervision of a ministry worker

<b>On Church Campus:</b>	<b>Off Church Campus—Day Trip</b>	<b>Off Church Campus—Overnight Trip</b>
Infant: 2:10	4-5 years 2:8	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:10
2-3 years 2:14	1 <sup>st</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:10	6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:17
4-5 years 2:16	6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:14	
1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> grade 2:16		
4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:20		
6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade 2:30		

**E. Nursery Checkout Procedure**

All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/check-out procedure as outlined in the nursery guidelines. The preschool will use their own procedures approved by Church Council.

#### **F. Open Door Policy**

Parents of the children served and the church staff have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

#### **G. Outside Access**

There must be access to a phone, cell phone, or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

#### **H. Doors and Windows**

All classroom and office doors should have a window for visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows should be kept free from adornment that would obstruct clear view into the room.

#### **I. Shower Usage:**

Whenever youth under the age of 18 are using the shower, a same gender adult must be in the bathroom or in the hallway right outside of the bathroom door in case of emergencies. Persons using the showers will undress and dress behind the privacy curtain at the front of each shower stall. At no time will a person be undressed outside of the privacy curtain. There are to be no youth and adults in the shower room at the same time unless there is an emergency. At no time will two persons occupy the same shower stall at the same time.

Children below 6<sup>th</sup> grade will not use the showers.

People who use the showers must provide their own soap, shampoo, and towels. Any personal items left in the shower area will be kept in lost and found. Any locks left on lockers overnight will be cut off and items will be placed in lost and found. Personal hygiene items will not be kept in lost and found.

Any outside groups must abide by these procedures, the person in charge of the outside group is responsible for enforcing these procedures with his/her group.

Any persons who violate these rules may forfeit their use of the showers.

#### **J. Confidential Discussions**

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts. Children and youth who have confidential discussions with a staff member should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the discussion with a parent or other adult. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with **Section III** of this policy.

#### **K. Touch**

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a three-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)

Touching should not be initiated by an adult. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It is strongly recommended that side hugs, with only one arm, be used. Touching and affection should only be given in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry staff person.

#### **L. Classroom Discipline**

No physical punishment or verbal abuse will be used at any time to discipline children, youth, or vulnerable adults. If isolating the child or youth within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the teacher will notify the Children's Minister or Youth Minister. The preschool will abide by their classroom discipline procedures that have been approved by Church Council.

#### **M. Gifts**

No staff or workers are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible staff. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts should not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

#### **N. Addressing Known Offenders in the Congregation**

Union United Methodist Church welcomes all people into its doors. Those who have a history of child abuse are welcome to participate in adult worship, adult Christian Education, and adult social events. However, they are not to initiate direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults on church property and/or church sponsored events. No person convicted of a felony or misdemeanor involving physical or sexual abuse or neglect will be allowed to work with children, youth or

vulnerable adults. The pastors will work with the individual to discuss and sign a Covenant of Conduct in order to clearly communicate the church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy and abuse protection expectations.

**O. Training**

Prior to working in the Youth or Children's Ministries, primary workers should undergo Safe Sanctuaries Policy training. The training will include a thorough reading and explanation of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and teaching and discussion on the law and issues of child sexual abuse in church settings.

It is strongly recommended that ministry staff and primary workers maintain current certification in basic first aid and CPR. The church will pay expenses for this training. New employees must get this certification within 90 days of the start of their employment. It is strongly recommended that primary nursery workers must undergo training in infant and toddler CPR. Other workers are encouraged to get training if they frequently accompany children or youth on such activities as: water sports, camping, home-building mission trips, etc.

Annual Safe Sanctuaries training for new and existing volunteers will be provided by the church. Existing workers will renew their Safe Sanctuaries Covenant at least every three years or when Church Council advises. It is the worker's responsibility to attend training when it is offered.

**P. Annual Review**

This Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be reviewed annually to make any needed changes by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

**Q. Additional Limits**

Additional limits may be added to this policy by a primary worker. At no time may this policy be reduced or relaxed.

**III. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR**

It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a worker and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor who will then contact the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee. They will then follow specific procedures. (If the accused is the pastor, contact the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.)

## Safe Sanctuaries Policy Procedures

If abuse is seen or suspected:

- A. **IMMEDIATELY**: ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
- B. **IMMEDIATELY** contact the senior pastor or pastor on call (803)781-3013. If a pastor is the accused party, the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee is to be notified. The chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will then notify the district superintendent.
- C. If deemed necessary, the senior minister or chairperson of the Staff Parrish Relations Committee or designee will notify the proper authorities.
  1. The senior minister or designee will make sure that written documentation concerning the incident is recorded on the designated form
  2. Notify the Richland County Office of DSS: 3220 Two Notch Road, Columbia SC 29204. (803)714-7300, Emergency: (803)714-7444. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.) If necessary, contact local law enforcement. Irmo Police Department: (803) 781-8088
- D. The senior minister or chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above.)
- E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraphs 361-362 of The 2008 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.
- F. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff and church members at all times.
- G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- I. Any contact with the media should be handled by the Sr. Minister or designee. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation. Any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.