

Salem United Methodist Church Fayetteville, NC

Safe Sanctuaries 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 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 and vulnerable adults. 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 and other 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 families, 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 – 1996*. Copyright 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [pp. 384-386]). *Italicized words added.*

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 this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

Members of Salem United Methodist Church recognize the need to have a formal, written policy and procedures to help prevent the opportunity for abuse or the appearance of abuse of children and youth. The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers but, instead, are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers,

employees, volunteers, and the entire church body. It is our intent to fully implement this Policy in the fall of 2007.

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 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 of children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid). 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." ("Baptismal Covenant II," *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

I. Recruitment, Screening and Selection of Workers

The following forms are included in Salem's recruitment, screening and selection process for volunteer and hired workers of children and youth:

- Participation Covenant Statement - [Appendix A](#)
- Volunteer Application – [Appendix B](#)
- Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check - [Appendix C](#)
- Form for Reference Check - [Appendix D](#)

Position Descriptions - Volunteer coordinator positions will be developed within one year of adoption of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Ministry areas are encouraged to develop specific responsibility guidelines and distribute these to parents and workers.

Once a volunteer or paid worker is selected, he/she must complete and sign the Participation Covenant Statement. All completed Participation Covenant Statements and any accompanying records will be maintained in a locked, fireproof file cabinet by the Senior Minister in his/her office.

Criminal background checks and reference checks should be done on all workers (volunteers and employees). Persons convicted of child neglect, child abuse, child molestation, incest, or some other crime against a child or teenager shall be rejected as a worker with children or youth. If information indicates that charges were filed against an applicant but that there was no conviction, the church shall investigate to find out how the issue was resolved. In addition, persons convicted of a felony or drug-related misdemeanor within the last ten years from the date of conviction shall not be allowed to serve in any of the ministry areas involving children or youth. In all such cases, the ultimate goal will be the best interests, safety and well-being of the children.

Prior to beginning work as a volunteer or paid staff member of children or youth, every volunteer or staff member should complete Safe Sanctuary training as described in Section III of this policy. Completion of this training will be documented and records of this training will be kept in the Senior Minister's office.

II. Procedures and Rules for Working with Children and Youth

The following procedures should be a part of the prevention strategy in this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

1. The Two Adult Rule

No fewer than two adults shall be present with each group of children or youth for any church sponsored program, event or ministry. For the purpose of this rule, married couples working with the same group are considered one adult. If a second adult is not available during times of major use at the church (Sunday school, Wednesday nights), the classroom door should remain open and an adult may supervise the groups by "floating" in the area. Youth group

meetings at the church should have two adults present. In the event that two adults are not available, parents should be notified that only one adult is present. Two adults, one of whom must be 21 years or older, shall be required on all trips and outings. One adult (who has undergone a satisfactory background check) is required for watching ("babysitting") infants and children while parents attend other functions at the church.

2. Open Door Counseling

At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Ideally, the session should be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

3. The 18-Age Limit Rule

Persons hired to work with children and youth must be at least 18 years of age. At least one volunteer or paid worker in each nursery, preschool or children's area must be age 18 or older. Teen helpers who are in Senior High School may substitute as one of the adults required under Rule 1. No elementary children will be allowed in the nursery or preschool areas unless they are children of the volunteer or worker.

4. Five Year Older Rule

Every worker – whether youth or adult, volunteer or paid -- must be at least five years older than the group which he or she is leading/supervising. The only exception to this relates to workers of senior high youth, who must be at least 21 years old. This rule shall not prevent persons who do not meet these requirements from participating in events, trips and outings with younger persons.

5. Van Rule

There shall be two adults – both of which are at least 18 years of age and have a valid drivers license – present in all vans that transport children or youth to church-sponsored events, programs or ministries. *Drivers* of vans must be at least 21 years of age and have a good driving record. Before driving a church-owned vehicle, drivers must complete the Application Form for Van Drivers ([Appendix G](#)) and be approved by the church's insurance carrier. For each trip, a complete list of riders should be recorded and maintained in both the van and the church office.

6. Six-month Rule

In order to be eligible to work with children and youth in a leadership role, volunteers should be an active member of Salem for six months. This rule shall not prevent parents from visiting and participating in activities of their children.

7. Advance Notice Rule

Children and Youth ministry leaders shall always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate.

8. Parental Permissions

For off-site events, overnight trips or those that require transportation, parents must give written permission for their child's participation. Generally, Child/Youth Program Participation Forms ([Appendix I](#)) serve as written permission and shall be completed annually and updated as needed. These forms should be maintained by the staff or volunteer person responsible for age-level ministries. When traveling off-site for events outside of Fayetteville, the leader of the event should carry copies of permission slips and forms with them.

9. State Reporting Rule

Any suspected cases of child abuse must be reported to the proper authorities. Salem United Methodist Church will use the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form ([Appendix F](#)) to capture necessary information regarding allegations of abuse. See details in Section IV.

10. Photographing Children

Parents may give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped when they fill out annual Child/Youth Program Participation Forms ([Appendix I](#)). No identifying names shall be displayed on the church website. Parents are not required to give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped in order to participate in programs.

III. Implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures

The following procedures will be used as a part of the Implementation Strategy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

1. There will be an annual orientation for hired and volunteer workers, staff and parents regarding the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures. This orientation should occur at the beginning of each new school year. Parents of youth and children should receive a brief statement of the Policy and appropriate guidelines (forms, handouts, etc). This information should also be a part of visitor packets, ministry handbooks and information given to new members. A videotape of the training may be used to train hired and volunteer workers who cannot participate in the annual orientation. All children and youth ministry workers (volunteer or paid) must read the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and sign the appropriate Participation Covenant Statement ([Appendix A](#)). The Associate Minister or Youth Leader shall be responsible for ensuring that annual orientation takes place.
2. Information about annual First Aid/CPR training for Salem staff shall be given to all volunteers and hired workers and, if space is available, volunteers shall be invited to participate at their own cost. First aid kits should be available in each ministry area. Program staff shall maintain First Aid and CPR certification. Such training shall be paid for by the church. Participation in First Aid and CPR classes shall be encouraged and may be offered as a program by the church to volunteers and the congregation.

3. When an accident involving a child or youth occurs resulting in an injury or which has the potential for serious injury, the lead person should complete the Accident Reporting Form (See [Appendix J](#)). An accident review should be convened by one of the ministers as soon after the accident as possible. The review should focus on developing steps that would prevent a similar accident from reoccurring. The Accident Report Form and the minutes from the Accident Review Meeting should be filed with the Senior Minister. Blank copies of the Accident Report Forms will be kept in the offices of the Associate Minister, Youth Director and other ministry areas. Extra forms should also be kept in the vans.
4. Other serious incidents, excluding abuse (which shall be documented according to directions in Section IV of this Policy) should be documented on the Incident Reporting Form ([Appendix E](#)). (Examples of such incidents might include fighting, stealing, alcohol or drug use.) Incident Reports shall be maintained in a confidential file in the Senior Minister's office. Blank copies of the Incident Report Forms shall also be kept in the same manner as Accident Report Forms.
5. There should be windows on all classroom doors where children or youth are actively in class. Door windows should remain uncovered. If the door does not have a window, the door should remain open while the room is in use. In the event of counseling or one-on-one sessions with youth or children, an "open door" policy should be maintained. Another staff member or volunteer should remain in the vicinity even if he/she is not within actual listening distance.
6. At no point in time should a youth or child be alone in a staff member or volunteer's home without the presence of a second, non-related adult -- regardless of the nature of the church-sponsored event, program or ministry. This is not intended to prevent youth group meetings at a staff member or volunteer's home. For further clarification, refer to the Two Adult Rule in Section II.
7. This Safe Sanctuaries Policy should be reviewed and revised, as needed, each year by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and the Senior and/or Associate Minister. Changes should be approved by the Council of Ministries.

IV. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Every volunteer and staff member that works with children and youth at Salem should be trained regarding North Carolina requirements for reporting abuse. Allegations of abuse that occur on church property should be reported to the Cumberland County Department of Social Services at 910-677-2450 (or 910-323-1500 after business hours). If an alleged incident of abuse involving church activities happens away from the church, then the incident must be reported in *that* jurisdiction. Volunteers or staff members who suspect abuse of a child or youth in a non-church situation are also obligated to report the alleged incident to the appropriate authorities (See [Appendix F](#) for additional information).

The manner in which an adult responds to a child when he or she attempts to disclose abuse can influence the outcome of the child's victimization. The adult should remain calm and reassure the child of his or her concern about what happened. Allegations must be reported

to the proper authorities, and the child or youth should be told that the proper authorities will be advised. It is very important that no one except child protective services (and, if applicable, one of the persons listed below) be told about allegations of abuse - if the allegations cannot be substantiated, one can be sued for defamation of character.

When reporting to law enforcement authorities, one is not required to know for certain that a child has been abused, only to have a reasonable suspicion and make the report in "good faith." When these requirements are met, all states provide immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting child abuse. However, it is important to understand that no immunity is afforded for reporting or mentioning the suspicion or allegation to other persons.

Allegations by a child concerning abuse in a church-related activity must also be reported to one of the individuals listed below. This occurs immediately following the notification of state authorities of an allegation of abuse. A Committee will be immediately convened to investigate the allegation. The Committee will be composed of the following people:

- Senior or Associate Minister
- Director of Christian Education or Youth Director
- Lay Leader
- Safe Sanctuaries Committee Chairperson
- Salem's Legal Counsel

This Committee will not wait for a time when everyone can be present, but will, instead, initiate a meeting as soon after the alleged incident occurs as possible, but no more than 24 hours after the initial report. Proceedings shall be conducted confidentially in a way that protects the rights of the alleged victim, the family and the accused, including their privacy. Legal immunity only exists for initial reporting directly to a child abuse hotline, law enforcement or child protective services.

The Committee will first make sure the alleged abuser has been removed from contact with the alleged child or youth victim. The Committee will then make sure that all reporting requirements have been met. The Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (See [Appendix F](#)) shall be used to record action taken. Before taking action or completing a report, it is imperative that the person completing this report be familiar with North Carolina laws regarding defamation of character and invasion of privacy. The Committee will take action to gather all necessary information regarding the incident, while taking precautions not to interfere with any official investigation.

The Senior Minister, or his/her designee, will contact Salem's Legal Counsel, who will be responsible for dealing with the media. The Senior Minister or his/her designee will be the spokesperson within the congregation. If the alleged abuser is a minister, the North Carolina Conference Reporting Procedure shall be followed. With guidance from a legal professional, the Senior Minister shall initiate appropriate ministries and actions to enable healing by all affected persons. Our goal is to always strive to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.

[Appendix A](#) – Participation Covenant Statement

[Appendix B](#) – Volunteer Application

[Appendix C](#) – Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check

[Appendix D](#) – Form for Reference Check

[Appendix E](#) – Incident Reporting Form

[Appendix F](#) - Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

[Appendix G](#) - Application Form for Van Drivers

[Appendix H](#) – Annual Renewal Form

[Appendix I](#) - Child/Youth Program Participation Form

[Appendix J](#) - Accident Reporting Form