

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
2004

I. 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 invitation- 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. Many 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. (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])

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

A. 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.

B. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Saint Luke's United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as SLUMC) pledges 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 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.

C. 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)

II. DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse - any act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, Caregiver, Sunday School teacher, Pastor, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a child's welfare, physical, spiritual or mental health.

We recognize child abuse may fall into four categories:

1. Physical Abuse - Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Instances of physical abuse include any physical act of undue force such as assault with a knife, strap or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped or thrown. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.
2. Sexual Abuse - Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.
3. Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.
4. Neglect - Not hearing or addressing a minor's basic needs for health, welfare or safety resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment:

- Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
- Abandonment
- Refusal to seek treatment for illness
- Inadequate supervision

- Health hazards in the home, school, or church

Ignoring a minor's need for contact, affirmation, stimulation and nurture

III. STANDARDS

A. Minimum Age

The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the Authority Figure's role. SLUMC adopts the following standards for Authority Figures and Assistants.

1. AUTHORITY FIGURES-- the primary leaders of youth and children's activities.

To work with youth (grades 6th and above), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 21 years of age.

(b) To work with children (infant-5th grade), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

2. ASSISTANTS--persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and act at the direction of the Authority Figure, including volunteers. Whether working with youth or children Assistants must be:

(a) A minimum of 12 years of age; and

(b) In the judgment of a SLUMC staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

B. Two Adult Rule

Two adults not related or married are to be present during all church sponsored programming with children and youth. All adult/child ratios must be followed. (See III. C.) Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, an additional adult must serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas. This can include, but is not limited to:

An automobile while taking a child home

A classroom with windowless/locked doors

A cabin at camp

C. Adult to Child Ratios

1. Nursery/Child Care

An adult is defined as an Authority Figure/Assistant who is also at least 18 years of age. Adults must meet the Authority Figure/Assistant guidelines. (See A. 1. & 2.)

For these programs, SLUMC adheres to the following Tennessee State Codes:

- Infants (non-handicapped & not walking) - 1 Adult to 4 Infants
- Toddlers (walking, non-handicapped) - 1 Adult to 6 toddlers
- 2 years of age - 1 Adult to 7 children
- 3 years of age - 1 Adult to 9 Children
- 4 years of age - 1 Adult to 13 Children
- 5 years of age - 1 Adult to 16 Children
- 6 years of age & above - 1 Adult to 20 Children

Mixed Age Groups:

6 wks to 30 months - 1 to 5		2 to 3 year old - 1 to 8
2 to 4 year old - 1 to 8		2 1/2 to 3 year old - 1
	to 9	
2 1/2 to 5 year old - 1 to 11		3 to 5 year old - 1 to
	13	
4 to 5 year old - 1 to 16		5 to 12 year old - 1 to
	20	

2. **SLUMC Events** – These are our preferred ratios. They are meant to be guidelines that will be followed at all possible times.

- Grades 1 - 4 - 1 Adult to 8 Children
- Grades 5 - 8 - 1 Adult to 10 Youth
- Grades 9 - 12 - 1 Adult to 12 Youth

A parent and/or staff person must be present at all events.

3. Participants With Special Needs

In the judgment of SLUMC staff, and in consultation with the parent, the above ratios may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of a participant's special needs.

D. Rooming

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or other similar situation, there must be two adults that are not related. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth.

E. Six Month Rule

All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with another trained adult. The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consider exceptions to this rule.

F. Policy Instruction

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session and to sign a new participation statement kept on file at the church.

G. Written Record of Departure

A written record of any departure from this policy will be kept on file by the Church Business Manager. Authority figures are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible.

H. Boy Scouts

Although Boy Scout Troop 40 and Cub Scout Pack 40 are youth programs supported by Saint Luke's, they abide by the Youth Protection Plan, a policy of the Boy Scouts of America that has been reviewed by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and has the same goals as this policy.

IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES

An essential component of preventing abuse by Authority Figures, Assistants and Staff is careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of an overwhelming number of the persons with discerned calling to ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons, we realize that abuse may occur in the church. Therefore, we believe that all Authority Figures, Assistants and all Employees must be properly screened. It will be the responsibility of the Business Manager and the Senior Pastor to ensure compliance.

The following steps are used for screening volunteer and paid applicants:

A. Complete an application form [Appendices A & B]

A completed application form will be required for Authority Figures, Assistants and all employees and will be kept on file.

B. Conduct an interview with applicants [Appendix C]

An interview will be conducted with all applicants. Refer to Appendix C for sample interview questions.

The interviewer should not ask for information about marital status or handicapping conditions as stated in Federal/State discrimination guidelines. The interviewer should also be sensitive to age and sex discrimination guidelines; however adequate information may be requested to ensure compliance with this policy's minimum standards.

The interviewer should be aware of red flags. These are indicators of issues that must be explored further in order for one to be assured that all information is collected concerning a prospective employee/volunteer. Red flags might include but are not limited to:

Many addresses over a short period of time

This could indicate that a person is trying to be anonymous, but it could also indicate that they were a college student who moved a lot to keep rent low.

Wants to work with only one age group

If someone would like to work with only one specific age group, it could indicate that the person has targeted that age group for molestation, or it could mean that is the age group for which they are trained and that experience has shown that they are not as gifted with other ages. Also be aware of anyone who seems overly committed to one age group. For example, someone who simultaneously leads a scout troop, coaches Little League, serves as a Big Brother and now wants to teach Sunday School may be neglecting their own age appropriate peer relationships in order to cultivate potential victims.

Does not want/need/like close supervision

The interview may indicate that the person does not like to be closely supervised which might raise questions about motivation for applying for this work.

The interviewer needs to be able to explore issues as they arise during the interview and to depart from the set of prepared questions to do so.

D. Complete Reference Checks [Appendix D]

A minimum of two references must be contacted on all applicants. It is further recommended that the reference of a church official (pastor, Staff-Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC), youth director, etc.) from the church of the applicant's membership be obtained. A recommended reference form is attached in Appendix D.

E. Complete Background Checks

Background checks include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal histories
- Motor vehicle record
- Registered sexual offenders

The Background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Church Business Manager. Only concerns will be reported to the Senior Minister who in turn will decide how the situation will be handled.

F. Federal and State Law

The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment and child abuse.

V. REPORTING ABUSE/ALLEGED ABUSE

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Department of Human Services and the Senior Pastor. In the event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Senior Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Senior Pastor, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC).

The SPRC may be reached by contacting the church office at 480 South Highland Street. If the abuse reported has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

VI. INVESTIGATION [Appendix E]

Whenever child abuse is suspected, the following information should be obtained and reported to The Department of Human Services (877-237-0026) and then reported to the Senior Pastor and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson:

- (1) Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused
- (2) The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible

- (3) The factual details of the report
- (4) The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received. A sample form of information to be obtained is attached in Appendix E.

The Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in conjunction with the Safe Sanctuaries Board. Interim measures may be taken during the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may include termination of employment.

VII. SAFE SANCTUARIES BOARD

The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consist of four members made up of two classes of two that will each serve two-year terms. At least one member of each class will be elected from within the Staff Parrish Relations Committee. Any At-Large Members will be appointed by the Lay Leadership Committee. All Safe Sanctuaries Board Members will be listed by class annually in the Report of Committee on Lay Leadership.

Its responsibilities include:

1. Educating Authority Figures, Assistants and all employees about the policy
2. Answering questions about the policy
3. Ensuring compliance with the policy
4. Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances
5. Assisting, as needed, with investigations
6. Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed
7. Evaluating board function
8. Other duties as needed