

**SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**  
**Wheeler United Methodist Church**  
**Blountville, Tennessee**  
Adopted on February 19, 2006

**Introduction**

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, "Let the children come to me." Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find unconditional love and care so desperately needed to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy is designed to set procedures for the safety of the children and youth of Wheeler United Methodist Church. This is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

**Requirements for Staff and Volunteers**

**General Requirements**

1. Written permission shall be received from all paid staff and volunteers for a background check prior to that person assuming the position working with children or youth.
2. No one shall serve the congregation who, in the belief of the leader, sponsoring agency or event director may represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy.
3. No one shall serve if he/she is known to have previously been convicted of, pled guilty or no contest, to any crime involving sexual abuse, or any act or guilty conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. This includes, but is not limited to, crimes involving pedophilic behavior (molestation of pre-adolescent child), rape, incest, assaults involving adults with special needs, murder, kidnapping, pornography, and the physical abuse of an adult with special needs.
4. No one shall serve as a care provider who has had a verdict or judgment rendered against him or her in any civil action arising out of any personal act or conducts related to sexual abuse of an adult with special needs or child. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago the civil verdict occurred and judgment was rendered.
5. Outside groups shall be asked to sign a statement acknowledging their compliance with WUMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

### **Responsibilities**

1. The Pastor and/or representative from the SPRC shall be responsible for screening all paid staff employees.
2. The SPIRIT Team (Program Area Chairpersons) shall be responsible for screening all Sunday School and Children's and Youth Program volunteers, and nursery volunteers.
3. The Director of the Child Care Center shall be responsible for all employees of the center.
4. The Director of Music Ministries shall be responsible for all volunteers in the Music Ministries area.
5. Outside groups will not be screened by Wheeler UMC and are responsible for ensuring compliance with our Safe Sanctuary Policy while using our facility

### **Procedure**

1. The persons noted above shall be responsible for receiving, reviewing, confirming and processing employment or volunteer applications.
2. References shall be requested of all applicants for employment and it will be left to discretion of the SPRC to follow up on specific references listed.
3. A check for arrest and convictions records shall be made for all applicable people, performed by the persons noted above.
4. The Safe Sanctuary Compliance Form and consent to perform background check shall be signed by the applicant or volunteer and maintained in secure files.

The maintenance of such documents shall reside in a locked file or cabinet in the church office.

### **Training**

1. Initial training shall be coordinated/performed by the SPIRIT Team Chairperson and/or Senior Pastor (or responsible person in charge), then performed on an annual basis or when a new staff member is hired or volunteer is invited to be in service. This shall include a review of the policies and procedures. The consent forms for background checks shall be signed at that time.
2. Outside groups, as described previously, will not receive any training from Wheeler UMC.

## 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. Wheeler UMC adopts the following standards for Authority Figures and Assistants.
1. Authority Figures—the primary leaders of youth and children's activities.
    - a. To work with youth (grades 6<sup>th</sup> and above), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
    - b. To work with children (infant to 5<sup>th</sup> 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 WUMC staff member, competent to assist in the activity.
- B. **The Open Door Rule**
1. Whenever reasonable, the Open Door Rule will require that no adult is ever engaged in an activity with youth or children in a room with the door closed. If circumstances (such as noise) necessitate that the door be closed, the door must have a window. At least two unrelated workers (authority figure or assistants) must be present in the building during any church sponsored event or ministry involving children or youth. Emergency situations may arise in which at least two unrelated adults may not be present, however, at no time shall an adult be one-on-one with a youth or child in isolation or closed situation.
  2. In all church sponsored programming with youth and children, adults and authority figures shall 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/closed doors
    - A cabin at camp, or motel room
  3. No adult shall share a hotel room or tent with an unrelated youth or child unless unrelated adults are present. Under no circumstances shall an adult and an unrelated child or youth ever share a bed.
- C. **Six Month Rule**—All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been active participants in 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 qualified adult. The Safe Sanctuary Board shall consider exceptions to this rule.
- D. **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 qualified adult and under the stipulation that they

attend the next policy instruction session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session and to sign a new Policy Compliance Statement kept on file at the church.

- E. **Scouts**—Although the Boy Scout, Cub Scout, and Girl Scout Troops are youth programming supported by Wheeler UMC, they abide by protection policies adopted and implemented by those organizations.
- F. **Building Requirements**—All offices and classroom doors shall have an uncovered window. Any counseling that occurs behind a closed door shall allow for the viewing of the counselor through the office door window. When children are present, doors shall be opened or their windows uncovered.

## **Responding to Allegations of Misconduct**

**Reporting**—All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to The Department of Children’s Services, or the Sheriff.

**Investigation**—Whenever child abuse is suspect, the following information should be obtained and reported first to The Department of Children’s Services (877-542-2873 or 877-237-0004) and then reported to the 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 the information to be obtained is attached in Appendix A.

In the event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Pastor, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) Chairperson. The SPRC Chairperson may be reached by contacting the church office at 211 N. Sanders Street. If the abuse has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Pastor and/or SPRC Chairperson shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

The Pastor and/or SPRC shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in conjunction with the Safe Sanctuary 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 finding, this may include termination of employment or the volunteer ministry.

## **Safe Sanctuary Board**

The Safe Sanctuary Board will consist of 3 members of the SPRC to be elected within that group to serve for two years as a time.

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

## Appendix A

### Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Wheeler United Methodist Church Blountville, Tennessee

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Victim's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Victim's age/date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date/place of initial observation with/report from victim: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Name of person accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Call to local and children and family service agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Call to local law enforcement agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Reported to pastor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Call to victims parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Other contacts: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date