

HAVRE DE GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Adopted February 24, 2010
Revised April 23, 2012

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls for all churches to welcome children and also make our churches safe places for them to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to provide an environment where caring adults work with children in a way that protects the children from potential abuse and the adults from false accusation. It is our responsibility to have effective policy, procedures, and training for our adults in place in order to achieve that environment. If an accusation arises, it is also our responsibility to have a response plan which protects our children and provides rights and due process for the accused. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have in place a policy for protecting children.

PURPOSE

Havre de Grace United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we pledge to conduct all activities and ministries in such a way that ensure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the accused and the perpetrator.

PROCEDURES

We adopt these standards for our ministries with children and youth:

1. Screening and recruiting
 - a. All workers and volunteers with children and youth will have completed the required Baltimore Washington Conference Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire annually.
 - b. All Questionnaires shall be reviewed by the SPRC and the Questionnaire forms shall be kept in a confidential locked file under the care of the SPRC.
 - c. No one will serve who, in the belief of the Pastor(s), may represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy.
 - d. All workers and volunteers shall authorize Havre de Grace United Methodist Church, in compliance with both state and federal law, to obtain a criminal records check.

- e. All workers will demonstrate active participation in Havre de Grace United Methodist Church for at least 6 months before being allowed to supervise children or youth. Exceptions to the 6 months requirement may be made at the discretion of the Pastor(s).

2. Supervision

- a. An adult must be 18 years of age or older. Youth assistants must be 13 years of age or older.
- b. Teams of two adults or one adult and one youth assistant will be the desired norm for each classroom or activity involving children and youth. If this is not possible, there will be an adult who circulates among the classrooms and /or activity during the program period.
- c. Two adults or one adult and a youth assistant will be required for nursery coverage during church services.
- d. At no time will an adult be one-on-one with a child in an isolated or closed location. If there is only one adult, the door will be left open.
- e. No person should supervise an age group unless he/she is an adult and at least four years older than the oldest student.
- f. Training shall occur at least annually for teachers, substitute teachers, youth assistants, and nursery attendants. They shall be trained on safe procedures and how to recognize signs of abuse, as well as how to respond to allegations of abuse. The Education Team is responsible for providing this training.

3. Reporting

- a. If a worker or volunteer suspects that a child is being abused, he/she will report immediately to the Pastor. Together they will call the Harford County Department of Social Services Child Abuse and Neglect hotline at 410-836-4713. The pastor will witness and document the call. If the pastor is out of town, the lay leader or the SPRC chair will assume the reporting role.
- b. If church volunteers or staff are accused, the above procedure in Section 3a. will be followed. In addition, the accused shall be immediately removed from contact with children and youth until the incident reported has been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner and he/she shall not be banned from other church ministries.
- c. If during a church outing, stranger abuse is alleged, the police will be notified immediately and then the Pastor(s).

4. Responding

- a. A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse will be initiated. All allegations will be taken seriously.
- b. All requests for media contact or statements should be directed to the lead Pastor.
- c. If the allegation is against a staff person or Pastor, the District Superintendent will be contacted immediately.
- d. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as appropriate.