

WEST JEFFERSON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

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 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 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 milestone 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 protections to the little ones, the children. The social Principals 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 abuse act committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, 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 sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and the 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 UNC—200 p. 180)

The 1996 Book of Resolutions, Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church, makes the following statements:

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church are incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with the 1996 Book of Discipline (par. 65.F), all human beings, both male and female, are created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3: 26-29, states all are one Christ, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation or gender.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth, to protect our teachers, workers, staff and congregation from allegations of sexual misconduct and to confirm that sexual misconduct will not be tolerated.

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 our children, youth, teachers, staff and congregation. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all our programs and events; we will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the rise of appropriate policies and methods of discipline; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspect incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law and Conference Rules; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

Thus in covenant with all United Methodist Congregations; we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse, sexual abuse and sexual harassment within the church.

WEST JEFFERSON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT A SAFE SANCTUARY

1. EDUCATION

All individuals working with the children and youth (any child under 18 years old) of our church should have a clear understanding of the types and signs of child abuse as well as what constitutes misconduct of a sexual nature. (See Appendix I) Workshops to review and discuss policies and procedures will be held.

2. SCREENING

ALL workers (paid or volunteer, clergy or lay) who work with children or youth in any area of ministry should undergo appropriate screening. The following guidelines will be followed in regard to screening.

- a. All new volunteers working with children or youth will complete a Volunteer Application Form. (See Appendix II)
- b. All paid workers will complete an Employment Application Form. (See Appendix III)
- c. All teachers supervising children/youth **MUST** have a complete criminal background check from local and when appropriate state and national law enforcement agencies. (These may be provided by law-enforcement agencies if available or by the use of an approved investigative agency, such as Trak -1 who has a discount arrangement with United Methodist Churches in Western North Carolina.) Effective January 1, 2006, all paid employees of the church will be required to have a criminal background check. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee must check out all references for paid staff. All information gained through the screening process will be confidential.
- d. All information will be kept in a locked file by the church secretary and available only to those with a need to know.

3. GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- a. All classrooms or areas being used by children/youth should have a glass panel to allow for outside monitoring. This panel must allow monitoring of all spaces within the classroom or area. In addition one person must be designated as a "roamer" and should make unscheduled visits to check on all classrooms or areas. This person will be the superintendent of Sunday School or a designee. If a children/youth activity is held in any room not having a window in the door, then the door to the room must remain fully open and unobstructed during all aspects of the activity.
- b. Bathroom doors should be propped open when a worker is helping a child use the bathroom.
- c. No child or youth should be taken from the church grounds on any church sanctioned activity without the awareness and consent of their parents or guardians.
- d. No adult should spend unsupervised time alone with a child or youth without the awareness and consent of the child's parents or guardians.
- e. At least two adults should supervise church sanctioned youth or children's activities which take place off church property. At least two adults should also be present at church sanctioned activities that take place on church premises at times other than regular services (i.e. parties, over-nighters, etc.). One of these adults should be at least 21 years old. Any teaching or educational experience that requires travel from the church or overnight travel **MUST** have the approval of the Pastor, Sunday School Superintendent, and the written permission of the parent or guardian of the child/youth.

WEST JEFFERSON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT A SAFE SANCTUARY

- f. One person 18 years of age or older should be in each classroom unless waived by a pastor.
- g. All Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, children's church leaders, toddlers' workers and nursery workers who volunteer their time should have been a member of our church for at least 6 months unless waived by the pastor.
- h. ANY PERSON observing inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult employee or volunteer worker and a member of a youth group or a child should report this behavior immediately to the pastor.
- i. The Pastor's Study should have a small glass window in it, as well as any other room where pastoral counseling or consultation is common. An open door policy may also be used when necessary. Pastoral counseling is expected to be confidential in nature, but it is preferred that such sessions take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance.

4. RESPONDING TO ALLEGED ABUSE

- a. North Carolina's Mandatory Reporting Law requires EVERYONE to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the social services in the county where the juvenile resides.
- b. Take any and all measures to care for and safeguard the alleged victim.
- c. Immediately report the incident to the Minister, Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee or your leader.
- d. Document all efforts of handling the incident. (Appendix IV)
- e. Notify the parents or guardians of the alleged victim.
- f. Contact the insurance company.
- g. West Jefferson United Methodist Church (WJUMC) will follow all directives from law enforcement and legal authorities. Their directive will supercede any of the following procedural steps.
- h. The Church Representative (Staff Parish Relations Committee) will notify the alleged perpetrator of the allegations.
- i. Within 48 hours of being notified of the incident, the Staff Parish Relations Committee will meet with the person(s) making the accusation(s). The person(s) making the accusation(s) has the right to have a witness present. (The alleged perpetrator will not be present). The Church Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and recommendations for counseling and support will be offered.
- j. Within 48 hours of the incident, the Staff Parish Relations Committee will meet with the alleged perpetrator. The alleged perpetrator has the right to have a witness present (neither the alleged victim nor the alleged victim's family will be present). The Church Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and recommendations for counseling and support will be offered.

WEST JEFFERSON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

PROCEDURES TO SUPPORT A SAFE SANCTUARY

- k. A designated person will be the spokesperson to convey news to the press and the congregation in a prepared public statement.

5. RESPONDING TO ALLEGED MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

- a. Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved informally between the parties.
- b. In all other instances, misconduct of a sexual nature should be reported to the chair of the Staff Relations Committee and the pastor in charge.
- c. If the misconduct involves a clergy person, it should be reported to the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, the district superintendent or the presiding bishop.

6. ENFORCEMENT OF THIS POLICY AS WELL AS TRAINING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STAFF PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE.

Approved _____ Date _____
Church Council Chairperson

Volunteer Covenant Statement

Page 1

The congregation of West Jefferson United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- A. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse shall be permitted to work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
- B. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall, whenever possible, observe the "two-adult rule" so that no adult is alone with children or youth.
- C. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall receive written information and instruction concerning church policy and state laws regarding child abuse.
- D. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to the Church Pastor or other Church Staff Member any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions and X your response:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?
I do I do not Need to discuss

2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to stay informed of church policy and state laws regarding child abuse by attending scheduled training sessions and carefully reading all policies and letters on the subject sent to you by the church?
I do I do not Need to discuss

3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report any suspected abusive or inappropriate behavior to the Church Pastor or other Church Staff Member?
I do I do not Need to discuss

Volunteer Covenant Statement

Page 2

4. Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to a crime, either misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to: drug-related charges, child abuse, other crimes of violence, and theft, but NOT including speeding tickets and other traffic violations)?

Yes

No

If yes, will you discuss this matter with the Church Pastor or other Church Staff Member?

Yes

No

If any of this information changes, I will report it promptly to the Church Pastor or other Church Staff Person.

Yes

No

5. I hereby give my permission and social security number to perform a background check.

Signature of Applicant

Print Full Name

Social Security Number (for background check)

Date