



Aldersgate United Methodist Church

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

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Safe Sanctuaries Policy

“This policy statement is superseded by The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and is meant to support the disciplinary process where appropriate.”

Introduction

The intent of this *Safe Sanctuaries* policy of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference is to prevent child abuse in local churches and within the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and to protect local churches, their staff and clergy from allegations of improper conduct. Further, the policy is intended to provide requirements for laity, clergy, and lay employees of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and the local church in the adoption of Safe Sanctuaries policies and the implementation of operating procedures for each church and for Peninsula-Delaware Conference events. These policies and operating procedures must respond to the expectation that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, The Social Principles ¶162C, page 106, *see Appendix I*) and the requirements of local churches and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences adopted by the United Methodist Church in 2004 (The United Methodist Book of Resolutions 2004, 65. Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church, ADOPTED 1996, READOPTED 2004, *see Appendix II*.)

In addition, this *Safe Sanctuaries* policy reinforces the commitment of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and its laity, clergy and staff to the demonstration of the love and care of Jesus Christ affirmed in the Baptismal covenant, so that each child and youth will be “nurture(d)... in Christ’s holy church...” (The United Methodist Hymnal, Baptismal covenant II, page39-43, *see Appendix III*.)

Theological Foundation

“Whoever welcomes [a] child . . . welcomes me. 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 18:5-6, NRSV.)

“The Lord answers you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.” (Psalms 20:1-2, NRSV)

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, NRSV)

Policy Statement

The Peninsula-Delaware Conference is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and adults who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by local churches and within the Peninsula-Delaware Conference. Therefore, the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and each local church or charge shall adopt a *Safe Sanctuaries* Policy and Operating Guidelines and forms that are substantively based upon and conform to the materials presented in the document, “*Safe Sanctuaries for Youth*” written by Joy Thornburg Melton and published by Discipleship Resources (ISBN 0-88177-404-9.) These policies and operating guidelines will require that all adult clergy, staff and volunteers working with children and youth be trained in understanding and conformity to those policies and guidelines. This policy requires each church to obtain a copy of this resource to use as a reference and to make it available to local church leadership.

Operating Guidelines

1. The local church will adopt and implement a *Safe Sanctuaries* policy. This policy may be combined with the local church Sexual Ethics policy.
2. The local church will identify the responsible entity (“SAFE” Team) for ensuring implementation of the *Safe Sanctuaries* policy. This team may include the pastor and representation from Staff Parish Relations Committee, Trustees, and a person responsible for educational ministries.

3. The local church *Safe Sanctuaries* policy will be reviewed annually by the SAFE Team. Modifications shall be made, as necessary, to the Church Council or Administrative Board.

4. Annual training in *Safe Sanctuaries* Policy and Operations and First Aid* and CPR* will be encouraged by the Staff Parish Relations Committee for every adult volunteer or employee interacting with children. Trainings are recommended to be held twice a year as needed. (*First Aid and CPR may be coordinated with other community groups such as Fire companies or the Red Cross or local health department.)

5. Annual review of all church facilities accommodating children and youth activities will be made by the Trustees, including but not limited to Sunday school rooms & doors, age and activity appropriate equipment; first aid kits & fire extinguishers, and 9-1-1 postings by all telephones. (*Monthly Fire Prevention Inspection Checklist*)

6. The SAFE Team and will oversee *Safe Sanctuaries* Operations ensuring procedures are adhered to:

A. The *six month membership rule* advises newcomers that they must get to know us and we must get to know them before we offer them responsibility for our children. *Safe Sanctuaries* Operating Guidelines should be included in all new member orientations.

B. Each volunteer or employee must complete the following forms* and meet with the SAFE Team, or their designee, prior to assignment to a child or youth program: written application, personal reference forms, combined driver's license & criminal background check, participation covenant. (*Sample forms are found in *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth*.) These confidential records must be kept in a locked file in the church office.

C. Individuals who have been convicted of any crime against a child or teenager will not be accepted as a worker with children and youth.

D. Renewal of Background Check will be done every five years.

Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry

1. *Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries* are to be maintained between adults and children so youth may experience relationships that are healthy physically and spiritually. Adults must role model respectful and nurturing behaviors that do not interfere with another person's privacy. Examples include appropriate: dress, language, and demonstrations of affection. "If it is not yours, don't touch it."

2. *The Two-Adult Rule* means no fewer than two adults [unrelated by blood or marriage] will be present at all times during any church sponsored program or event.

3. *The Five-Years-Older Rule* requires adult volunteers to be at least 5 years older than the youth they lead.

4. *No Worker under the Age of Eighteen* may serve in an adult capacity. Younger youth willing to assist a teacher may serve as an extra set of hands, but may not replace the second adult and they must be at least 5 years older than the children.

5. *Windows in All Classroom Doors* removes the opportunity for secrecy and isolation. Each room set aside for use by children and/or youth should have a door with a window or half-door.

6. *Open-Door Counseling* is required for youth and, when confidentiality concerns allow, other people must be present. Any counseling need of any youth or the youth's family should be reported to the Pastor.

7. *Limited Counseling Sessions* requires referral to a counselor with expertise in the need of the youth beyond two to three sessions.

8. *Advance notice to parents* with full information about the event youth will be participating in is required. Before

the event, parents must give written permission for their child to participate and must be notified if a worker will be alone with a child, such as on the last leg of a transportation route.

9. *Participation Covenant for All Participants and Leaders* should be adopted for establishing behavior standards.

10. *Parent and Family Education* about the local church's *Safe Sanctuaries* plan to prevent abuse within ministry is required.

11. *Appropriate Equipment and Supervision* includes *transportation considerations* such as ensuring that personal vehicles are properly functioning and properly insured; *sleeping arrangements* if an overnight stay is involved; and *Youth Group Websites*. Any activity that will take place away from the church must be brought to the SAFE Team for detailed planning before is it presented to the children or youth.

12. *Bathroom procedures* for children and youth include: children under five should be escorted to the bathroom. A buddy system for children should be practiced.

13. *Reporting Procedures for Allegations of Abuse*. The Book of Discipline (2004 ¶341.5) requires that Pastors report suspected abuse wherever it occurred and whether it is physical, sexual, psychological, ritual or neglect. Information about local child abuse/child advocacy services should be included in the church policy. Any suspected abuse identified in the church must be reported to the other pastor, SPRC member, District Superintendent or to members of the SAFE Team if it is alleged to involve the pastor.

If abuse is alleged to have occurred at a Peninsula-Delaware Conference or church event or on church property, the following steps should be taken by the pastor and/or SAFE Team:

- A. Notify parents/guardians of victims and assure the victim's safety.
- B. Treat the alleged abuser with dignity, not anger and remove him/her from further involvement with youth.
- C. Report the alleged abuse to the local child abuse service or local police.
- D. Notify the District Superintendent, the church's attorney, and the church's insurance agent.
- E. Do not speak with the media. Refer the media to the Peninsula-Delaware Conference.
- F. Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to allegations of abuse.
- G. The Pastor or District Superintendent will handle notification of the congregation as appropriate.
- H. Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation.

14. *Additional forms to be used in implementing Safe Sanctuaries* which can be found in *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth* (Pages 75-94) are: Note to Outside Groups Using our Facility, Report of Suspected Incident of Youth Abuse, Accident Report Form.

Bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include: An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people. Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Types of Bullying:

- 1) Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes: teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting and threatening to cause harm.
- 2) Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes: leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone and embarrassing someone in public.

- 3) Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes: hitting/kicking/pinching, spitting, tripping/pushing, taking or breaking someone's things and making mean or rude hand gestures.
- 4) Cyberbullying takes place using electronic technology such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles. Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience.
- 5) Sexual bullying is unwanted touch of a sexual nature, unwanted talking about private parts, and unwanted comments about target's sexuality or sexual activities.

Reporting ~ Any suspected incident of possible abuse or bullying in the church should be reported to a member of the SAFE Team, Pastors, Children's, Youth or Music Directors. These persons must be verbally informed immediately and in writing within 24 hours with persons involved- bully, target and bystanders roles, time and place and alleged number of incidents, potential child/youth or volunteer/staff witnesses and any actions taken.

Policy Oversight and Implementation

Policy oversight and implementation will be shared by the Peninsula-Delaware Conference Director of Young People's Ministries and the Peninsula-Delaware Conference CARE Team.

FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES:

Appendix I: The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, Social Principles

¶ 162. III. THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY, C) Rights of Children

The rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or economic status...

C) Rights of Children— Once considered the property of their parents; children are now acknowledged to be full human beings in their own right, but beings to whom adults and society in general have special obligations. Thus, we support the development of school systems and innovative methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual person of worth. All children have the right to quality education, including full sex education appropriate to their stage of development that utilizes the best educational techniques and insights. Christian parents and guardians and the Church have the responsibility to ensure that children receive sex education consistent with Christian morality, including faithfulness in marriage and abstinence in singleness. Moreover, children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being as do adults, and these rights we affirm **as theirs** regardless of actions or inactions of their parents or guardians. In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Appendix II: The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2004, 65. Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church

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 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse" (¶ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse 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 Peninsula-Delaware Conferences can cite specific incidents of child

sexual abuse and exploitation within 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.

1. "Ritual abuse" refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be.
2. 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. In response to this church wide challenge, the following steps should be taken to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse:
 - A. Local churches should:
 1. Develop and implement an ongoing education plan for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention;
 2. Adopt screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, reference checks, background clearance, and so forth) for workers (paid and unpaid) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children and youth;
 3. Develop and implement safety procedures for church activities such as having two or more non-related adults present in classroom or activity; leaving doors open and installing half-doors or windows in doors or halls; providing hall monitors; instituting sign-in and sign-out procedures for children ages ten or younger; and so forth;
 4. Advise children and young persons of an agency or a person outside as well as within the local church whom they can contact for advice and help if they have suffered abuse;
 5. Carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage;
 6. Assist the development of awareness and self-protection skills for children and youth through special curriculum and activities; and
 7. Be familiar with Peninsula-Delaware Conference and other church policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.
 - B. Peninsula-Delaware Conferences should:
 1. Develop safety and risk-reducing policies and procedures for conference-sponsored events such as camps, retreats, youth gatherings, childcare at conference events, mission trips, and so forth; and
 2. Develop guidelines and training processes for use by church leaders who carry responsibility for prevention of child abuse in local churches. Both sets of policies shall be developed by a task force appointed by the cabinet in cooperation with appropriate conference agencies. These policies shall be approved by the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and assigned to a conference agency for implementation. It is suggested that the policies be circulated in conference publications and shared with lay professionals and clergy at district or conference seminars.
 - C. The General Board of Discipleship and the General Board of Global Ministries should:
 1. Cooperatively develop and/or identify and promote the following resources;
 2. Sample policies, procedures, forms, and so forth for reducing the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and youth in local churches, both in relation to their own sponsored programs and to any outreach ministries or other programs for children or youth that use church space;
 3. Child abuse prevention curriculum for use in local churches;
 4. Training opportunities and other educational resources on child sexual abuse and exploitation and on ritual abuse; and
 5. Resources on healing for those who have experienced childhood sexual trauma.

ADOPTED 1996, READOPTED 2004 See Social Principles, ¶ 162C.

Safe Sanctuaries Checklist for Operating Guidelines/Procedures for the Charge Conference

Persons completing this Form: (SAFE Team chair, Pastor, SPRC Chair, Trustees Chair, Director of Children's and /or Student Ministry). At the June 2008 Annual Conference of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference a Safe Sanctuaries Policy for Children and Youth was passed. All churches are expected to become compliant with the policy as soon as is reasonably possible. The full Safe Sanctuaries policy is available on the conference website at: <http://www.pen-del.org> under "Ministries/CARE team". Training opportunities will be provided on each district.

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Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant Statement

The congregation of Aldersgate is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and adults who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following statements reflect our congregations' 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.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
2. Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his/her willingness with one of our church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
3. Adults working with children and youth shall observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is ever left alone with children or youth.
4. Adults working with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adults shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions: *Please sign and return to the Director of Children's or Student Ministry mailbox.*

1. As an adult in this church, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth? Yes No
2. As an adult in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" to the best of your ability? Yes No
3. As an adult in this church, do you agree to abide by the six-month rule before beginning a volunteer assignment? Yes No
4. As an adult in this church, do you agree to participate in training and educational events provided by the church related to your assignment? Yes No
5. As an adult in this church, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor? Yes No
6. As an adult in this church, do you agree to discuss with a minister of this church your experience, if any, as a survivor of child abuse? Yes No
7. As an adult of this church, do you agree to inform a minister of this church if you have ever been convicted of child abuse? Yes No

I have read this **Participation Covenant** and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Print Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

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