

The Vine Church Chateau Elan and Flowery Branch Campuses

Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Protection of Children and Students

Approved by Leadership Accountability Team: (January 21, 2017)

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 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 [“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 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 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.

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—2000, pp. 180-181. Copyright © 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children and students in our church.

The Vine Church believes that the spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of our children and students is imperative. We must do all that we can to nurture and protect our children and students. This policy is intended to provide a guide for that protection, as well as the protection of our adult workers and the church. This policy is enacted to insure that the parents, members, volunteers and staff of The Vine Church have a clear understanding of what the policies and procedures are regarding the safety of our children and students. The leadership of The Vine Church requests the cooperation of all in our church, as they must abide by the guidelines of this policy

Policy Standards and General Christian Moral Standard

Staff and volunteers that work in any area of children and student ministries at The Vine Church including but not limited to Kidzu Children's Ministry, Vine Youth Ministry, and Small Group Childcare are required to adhere to these policies and standards as moral Christians.

Supervision of Children and Student Workers

The church staff and volunteers who supervise children and student workers are charged with enforcing this policy. Any violation of these policies or persistent failure to follow this policy can result in immediate dismissal, disciplinary action or reassignment to another area of work at the discretion of the Leadership Accountability Team. Anyone who suspects this policy is not being enforced should bring it to the attention of the person who is deemed "person in charge" of the specific program or event. This person must take immediate action on this violation. All reports must be brought before the Lead Pastor and/or his/her designee within twenty-four (24) hours.

Supervision of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy

The Lead Pastor will appoint the person or committee (staff or volunteer) with the responsibility of the oversight of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. These policies govern all activities held by the church that involve children and students under the age of 18, any adult with a mental age under 18, or any vulnerable adult. These policies must be reviewed annually and re-approved by the Leadership Accountability Team and be presented at charge conference. These policies may be altered at any time with the approval of the Leadership Accountability Team

Classification of Workers (two tiers)

The Vine Church uses the following classifications of its workers:

1. Primary Workers: All paid staff, interns, and volunteers in roles with a greater responsibility or risk shall be classified as primary workers and will be required to meet "primary worker" responsibilities. Primary workers have the primary responsibility for interaction with and greater access to children and students. A primary worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age. Examples are Kidzu leaders and Vine Youth leaders.
2. Secondary Workers: Secondary workers are volunteers who have occasional contact with children and students or volunteers who serve under the supervision of a primary worker. These persons must work with supervision of a primary worker. Examples are volunteers assisting with Camp Kidzu or serving in the Vine Youth band.

Any exceptions to this policy are subject to the Lead Pastor or his/her designee's approval.

Application

1. All who wish to serve in either a paid or unpaid capacity in any program in the Church must complete a written application which includes references and permission for a background check. The applicant's notarized signature authorizes a background check with the company of the Church's choice which may include but is not limited to a check of the state and/or national sex offenders' registry, criminal records, motor vehicle records, credit check and any other review deemed necessary to determine the applicant's suitability for service.
2. The application and appropriate background check must be completed before an applicant is placed in service.

Training of Workers

1. There shall be an annual training/review session for all Workers.
 - a. Newly employed staff shall attend a training session prior to time of service.
 - b. Continuing staff shall attend a session for review and update annually.
 - c. Volunteers shall attend training and review sessions annually.

2. Training sessions shall include information on:
 - a. Types of abuse.
 - b. Behaviors indicating possible abuse.
 - c. Appropriate touch.
 - d. Guidelines for Prevention.
 - e. Procedures for documenting accidents and incidents.
 - f. Mandatory Reporting Laws.
 - g. Procedures for Reporting Alleged Abuse.
 - h. Procedures for Response.

3. A copy of this document shall be provided for each Worker.

Guidelines for Volunteers

All volunteer workers must be at least 18 years of age. Students under the age of 18 may assist with **Kidzu Children's Ministries or Vine Youth Ministries**, under the leadership of two **primary** workers or one primary worker and one secondary worker, but adherence to the Two Worker Rule is **mandatory**.

All volunteer workers must be at least five years older than the children or students with whom they will be serving as the primary worker. Volunteer workers or staff may not under any circumstance pursue romantic relationships with anyone who is a participant in the ministry they are serving in.

Any person wishing to work with students or children must have been a member of the church or have been a steady guest for a minimum of six months before being allowed to serve as a primary volunteer. A person may begin the application, training, and background check process after consistent involvement for 2 months. This policy can be waived only by the Lead Pastor or his/her designee, on a case by case basis.

Background Checks

Any primary worker working with children or students of The Vine Church must undergo a national criminal background check. The report must show no serious* offenses or they will not be allowed to become a worker. Workers will not be allowed to chaperone an event on or off of church grounds until the background check has been completed or the worker has been cleared by the Lead Pastor or his/her designee. A primary worker awaiting results may participate with on-site activities as long as they are supervised by another primary worker. A new background check should be done at least every four years.

Policy Preventing Persons from Eligibility to Serve

1. Circumstances or conditions that may prevent a person from eligibility to serve with children or students include the following items:
 - a. Individuals with certain addictions
 - b. Persons with chemical and/or substance abuse within the past three years
 - c. Individuals convicted of a felony
 - d. Applicants whose felony conviction is not a zero-tolerance* crime will be considered on an individual basis, pending a background check and subject to final approval by the Senior Pastor.

2. **Zero Tolerance* items include but not limited to:**
 - a. Individuals with mental illness that could endanger children
 - b. Individuals convicted of neglecting, abusing, molesting or battering a child or an adult
 - c. Individuals convicted of a violent crime

***Zero Tolerance offenses will prevent a person from serving with children and/or students with no exceptions.**

First Aid and CPR Training

Since the safety of our children and students is a top priority, next generation staff shall be trained in both First Aid and CPR.

Annual Orientation

All new primary workers must attend a Safe Sanctuary orientation. The church will provide an orientation and refresher course that will provide information on children and student abuse and explain any changes made to the Safe Sanctuary Policy. This may or may not be held in conjunction with First Aid and CPR training. All primary workers must take a refresher course every two years.

Two Worker Rule

There must be both one primary worker and one secondary worker or two primary workers in the room when there is a child or student present. This rule is for the protection of the students as well as the adults.

Floater

This rule allows for only one primary worker to be in a classroom when you have another primary worker floating the hall regularly. When using this rule, their must be visibility into the classroom through a window or door must remain open at all times. This should only be done if two workers are not available.

Classroom Windows

All classrooms will have at least one window in the door. The window must not be covered at any time with decorations, etc.

Open Door Counseling

Any one-on-one counseling session with a child or student will be done with the door open. If at all possible, it should be done when another adult is nearby but not necessarily within hearing distance.

Transportation

Transportation to and from activities held at the church is not the church's responsibility.

Church approved volunteers* may provide transportation to and from activities held away from the church. There must be two adults in each vehicle. When there is an off-site overnight trip, there must be at least one adult worker of each gender represented. Students will not be allowed to drive other students or children or themselves. Church approved volunteers must have a valid driver's license and an insurance card on file with ministry leaders.

***No one with two or more driving convictions or guilty pleas within the last five years will be authorized to transport anyone on behalf of the Church in connection with any Church activity. No one with DUI or reckless driving conviction, guilty plea or no lo contender plea in the last ten years will be allowed to transport anyone on behalf of the Church in connection with any Church activity. Exceptions to this policy are subject to the Lead Pastor or designee's approval.**

Outreach Events

All volunteers engaged in outreach events that are designed to serve minors must have a background check on file. This ensures that all volunteers serving with minors in our church and at community events have been approved.

Sleeping Arrangements

On church sponsored overnight trips, where motel type rooms are used, all students and children should be assigned their own same sex rooms and adults will be assigned their own same sex rooms. The adult rooms should be in between the students/children rooms if at all possible. The adults should check on the children/students at random times throughout the night.

In cabin or dormitory style accommodations, two adults must be assigned to each cabin or dormitory.

Parent and Family Education and Communication

The approval of this policy will be communicated to the church at large with special emphasis on communicating to all parents of our children and students. Copies of the policy will be available for all parents and other interested parties. A copy of the policy will be given to all new members. Any revisions to the policy must be communicated to the congregation as soon as possible.

The policy will be posted on the Church's website.

From time to time educational events will be made available to parents and other interested parties. These events will provide information on the Safe Sanctuary Policy, child abuse and any other information that will enhance parenting skills and parental supervision.

Parents will be provided with advance notice of all regularly scheduled and special student and children's activities. Written permission will be required for participation in activities that are not on church grounds.

Websites, Photos, Videography, and Electronic Communication

The use of electronics to communicate and connect is becoming more prevalent in our society. Because it provides a contemporary and fast way to engage our students, it can be both effective and harmful depending on the wisdom of the adult user. Electronic communication from adults sent to students and children should be limited to information related to students and children ministries. It should not be used to pass along jokes, or other information of a personal nature that one would not share with the parent or guardian of the recipient. E-mail and other electronic addresses/numbers of students and children should be protected and not given out. Any photos or videos on web sites or Face Book pages, posted in classrooms or posted on bulletin boards should not identify

individuals. Program leaders should advise parents and guardians in writing that they use electronic means of communicating with students and provide this information on pertinent areas of the Church web site.

If allergy signs are posted, they should not show the names of the person with allergies.

Parents will be notified that photos or videos of children or students could be posted on a church sponsored web site, on social media, in classrooms or on bulletin boards unless they give specific written notice that they do not want their child's picture displayed. This notice could be included on the Church web site and/or on enrollment forms or the like when children enroll in programs.

Reporting Abuse

The Vine Church regards any form of abuse and evidence thereof as unacceptable and has a strict policy regarding the reporting of such abuse. This is a serious criminal allegation and will be taken seriously. If a volunteer becomes aware of an abuse allegation, he/she must report it to a The Vine Church Leadership Team staff member IMMEDIATELY. If there is not a staff member on the grounds, then the Lead Pastor should be contacted at home or his designee must be contacted. Please do not hesitate to contact a staff member if you feel there is abuse occurring. We want nothing but the best for our children and students. For ALL allegations, a report MUST be filled out and turned into the Lead Pastor within twenty-four hours (see attached). Should the press become involved, only an approved church spokesperson should respond. It is better not to make any response. Do not try to interview the victim. Leave that process to the proper professional from the child welfare agency or law enforcement official, who is better qualified.

The following is a definition of child abuse supplied by The Georgia Department of Family and Child Services.

"What is considered child abuse and neglect?"

Physical abuse is injury to a child under age 18, by a parent or caretaker, which results in bruises; welts, fractures, burns, cuts or internal injuries.

Neglect is the failure of the parent or caretaker to see that the child is adequately supervised, fed, clothed, housed or provided medical care.

Sexual abuse occurs when a parent or other adult uses a child under age 18 for sexual stimulation. "

Mandatory Reporting Laws

Child Abuse

Effective July 1, 2012, Georgia law expanded the pool of mandated reporters to include volunteers whose duties include attending to children. This includes volunteers of organizations that provide care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs or shelter to children. A "mandated reporter" is required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect.

Rights of Mandated Reporters

1. Anonymity or confidentiality (when at all possible)
2. Immunity for "good faith" report
3. Penalty for NOT reporting: Any person or official required by Georgia law to report suspected cases of child maltreatment and who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Child Abuse and Alleged abuse of the Elderly or Disabled Adults

Should an adult in charge have reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, the following procedures apply:

1. The adult in charge shall document the incident in writing *immediately* after the incident is witnessed and/or reported.
2. If a child shares what possibly could be abuse, *don't* try to get all the details.
 - a. Listen attentively and ask him/her if he/she wants to say anything else.
 - b. Believe in the child and be supportive.
3. Documentation shall be signed and dated and should include as much of the following information as possible:
 - a. Name, age, address and current location of the child
 - b. Name and address of child's parents or caretakers, if known
 - c. Name and address of suspected perpetrator
 - d. Location where maltreatment took place, if known
 - e. The nature and extent of the child's injuries

- f. Any other information the reporter believes might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries and the identity of the perpetrator
 - g. Write down any actual words used in the disclosure and your interaction with the child.
4. The report may be made by oral or written communication. It shall include the name and address of the suspected victim, the name and address of the suspected victim's caretaker, the age of the suspected victim, the nature and extent of the suspected victim's injury or condition resulting from abuse, exploitation or neglect, and other pertinent information.
 5. The above documentation shall be given to the staff member in charge, **and** the Department of Family and Children's Services must be contacted immediately (within 24 hours). For suspected child abuse, the phone numbers are 1-855-GACHILD/1-855-422-4453. Reports are taken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For reports of suspected abuse of disabled adults or elder persons, the numbers are 1-866-55AGING (1-866-552-4464)- Press "3."
 - a. If the staff member in charge is the accused party, the documentation shall be given to the Senior Pastor.
 - b. In the Senior Pastor's absence, it shall be given to the Associate Pastor or to the head of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
 - c. If any of the above persons are the accused party, the documentation shall be given to the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee **and** to the District Superintendent.
 6. The parent/guardian of the child shall be notified, unless the parent/guardian is the accused.
 7. If the alleged abuse occurred on church property or at a church-sponsored event the following shall also take place:
 - a. The Pastor/Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall have *24 hours to notify each of the following*:
 - i. District Superintendent
 - ii. Insurance Carrier
 - b. The Pastor/Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee may notify:
 - i. Attorney
 - ii. Pastoral Care Consultant

If allegations of abuse are made, our response shall be guided by the following principles:

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. Questions asked of the victim(s) should be open-ended. Investigation is the responsibility of the Department of Family and Children's Services.
3. Respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained as much as reasonably possible.
4. Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
5. The needs of the victims will be given high priority.
6. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities.
7. The Lead Pastor, or other individual *as designated by the Leadership Accountability Team*, shall be the church's spokesperson with the media.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and students, 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).

Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse

Name of worker observing/receiving disclosure of abuse: _____

Address:

Phone #:

Victim's Name:

Victim's Age/Date of Birth:

Date/Place of witnessed activity or initial conversation with victim:

Victim's Statement:

Name of person accused of abuse:

Relationship of accused to victim:

Name of Pastor/Ministry Supervisor to whom you reported:

Date/time:

Summary:

The following should be completed by the Pastor/ Ministry Supervisor in charge:

Name of parent/guardian to whom reported:

Date/Time:

Summary:

Call to Department of Family and Children's Services:

Spoke with:

Date/Time:

Summary:

Call to Local Law Enforcement:

Spoke with:

Date/Time:

Summary:

Other Contacts/Action Taken: