

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

“Safe Sanctuaries” for St. Luke’s United Methodist Church

Hickory, North Carolina

Introduction:

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, in June 2004, adopted resolutions aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in the church. This would include sexual, emotional, physical, and ritual abuse, and neglect. The adopted resolutions include 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 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 abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both 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. Virtually every congregation has among its member’s 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.

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

Purpose:

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Children and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

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 of our children and youth, as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child and youth will be "...surrounded by steadfast love, .. established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (From "Congregational Pledge 2," "Baptismal Covenant II," in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

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CHILDREN, YOUTH and VULNERABLE ADULTS PROTECTION POLICY

ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA

The members and staff of St. Luke's United Methodist Church (SLUMC) are committed to maintaining a safe environment for every child and young person involved in its ministry. Our goals are to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to protect children and youth from sexual or physical abuse or neglect, to educate workers and care givers concerning abuse issues and to protect staff and volunteers, as well as the Church as a whole, from potential allegations of abuse and neglect.

A. Definitions:

- a. "Children" and/or "Youth" shall mean any person under the age of eighteen years.
- b. "Adult" shall mean any person of eighteen years of age or older.
- c. "Vulnerable Adult" shall mean any person over 18 who may be unable to take care of or unable to protect him or herself against harm or exploitation.
- d. "Church sponsored program," "event," or "ministry involving children" means any and all activities on site at the church or offsite, including overnight trips.

B. Selection of Paid Workers and Volunteers.

1. A Nationwide criminal background check will be performed at the time of employment for all paid persons caring for children or youth.
2. All volunteer workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults, full or part time, including without limitation interns, Sunday School teachers, youth group workers, Pre-School staff; nursery workers, Vacation Bible School, and choir leaders will complete an Authorization to Obtain a Consumer Report prior to their active service.
3. Volunteers under the age of eighteen or who have an undocumented status will be able to serve as a junior leader to assist in ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable adult in the presence of a staff member or volunteer who has been screened and trained. These individuals must complete Safe Sanctuary training and follow any written guidelines for the ministry area that they are serving.
4. All paid workers and volunteers will be subject to repeat background checks at least every three (3) years.
5. Personal interviews will be conducted by the Staff Parish Relations Team with all applicants for employment and conducted by ministry leaders with volunteers who have contact with children or youth. For employees and volunteers with the Child Development Center, interviews will be conducted by the Director and a member of their Board of Directors.

6. Reference checks will be made on all compensated workers and may be required of volunteer workers.
7. All information provided in the application forms, as well as any information collected through reference checks or other investigation or inquiries, is to be considered confidential Church property and is not to be released to any other party without the approval of the Senior Pastor.
8. Persons who have been convicted of, or pled guilty to, physical and/or sexual abuse of children, or other serious crimes against persons (rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.), or against whom such charges are pending, will not be allowed to work with children or youth. Conviction of any crime shall be subject to review prior to serving.
9. Church membership and/or regular attendance for at least 6 months at SLUMC is a prerequisite for volunteering with children or youth. Exceptions to this provision of the policy may be granted by the Senior Pastor or his designee in the case of combined programs with other churches, intern programs, and other similar circumstances.

C. Guidelines for Workers with Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adults

1. At least two adults should be present at all times during any activity involving children/youth, especially if only one child/youth is present. This rule reduces the risk of abuse and also reduces the risk of false accusations.
 - a. However, the Senior Pastor or a member of the Education Staff (Minister of Education and Director of Youth Ministries) may authorize one adult to supervise children/youth on the church premises in classroom settings.
 - b. If it is necessary for an adult to be alone with a child/youth and out of the sight of others, authorization from the Senior Pastor or a member of the Ministry Staff should be obtained. Such one-on-one situations should be avoided whenever possible.
 - c. In the event where there are not two adults in the classroom, there must be a roving superintendent or monitor during the meeting or teaching time, and the door must be left open.
 - d. Every adult worker must be at least five years older than the child/youth supervised. An adult worker must be five years older than the oldest youth, i.e. if a youth is 17 years old, workers must be at least 22 years of age.
 - e. No person under the age of eighteen may supervise a child/youth unless he/she is under the direct supervision of an adult who is physically present, has had a background check, and is compliant with Safe Sanctuary using the following minimum adult and maximum child/youth ratios:

<u>Children/Youth Ages</u>	<u>Adult: Child/Youth Ratio</u>
0 – 12 months	2:8
12- 24 months	2:8
24 – 36 months	2:12
3 – 6 years	2:16
6 – 17 years	2:32

- Questionable or inappropriate behavior should be reported immediately to the appropriate ministry leader as such conduct can precede abuse, even though the observed act itself does not constitute abuse.
- Prohibited conduct** includes any form of physical, emotional, or mental abuse of a child, including but not limited to, the exploitation of a child, youth or vulnerable adult which breaches Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship. Sexual exploitation of a child, youth or vulnerable adult includes, but is not limited to, any interaction between a child, youth or vulnerable adult and an adult in which the child, youth or vulnerable adult is being used for the sexual stimulations of an adult. This may or may not include touching.

Prohibited conduct may include, but not be limited to:

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of sexual conduct towards a protected minor;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a protected minor or vulnerable adult;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an older child and a younger child;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor or vulnerable person;
- Physical neglect of a minor or vulnerable adult, including failure to provide adequate supervision;
- Causing mental or emotional injury to a minor or vulnerable person.
- Possessing obscene or pornographic (sexually explicit) materials at any function of the Church;
- Possession or being under the influence of any illegal substances;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a minor's or vulnerable person's function of the Church;
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a minor or vulnerable adult.
- Carrying any type of weapon on Church property.

Prohibited conduct also includes inappropriate usage of digital platforms and devices. Inappropriate usage of digital platforms includes any behavior that breaches Christian ethical principles, including but not limited to the above prohibited behaviors, using social media, email, websites, videos, pictures, text messages, phone calls, and the like.

4. If a person desires to plan an activity off campus, he/she must:
 - a. Request permission from the appropriate ministry leader;
 - b. Always have at least two adults present;
 - c. Have permission from parent(s)/guardian.
5. Doors to classrooms used by children/youth should include windows, which should be uncovered at all times. Alternatively, doors without windows should be kept open.
6. Other organizations which use church premises for children/youth oriented activities (for example, Suzuki, Boy Scouts, or Girl Scouts) will be provided a copy of this policy and required to adopt this policy unless the organization has a similar policy in place and has furnished a copy to SLUMC.
7. Counseling is expected to be confidential in nature, but it is for the protection of both parties that such a meeting take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance. This should be in a room that has a window in the door. If the door does not have a window then the door should be left open.
8. At least one adult present at every church activity should be certified in basic first aid and CPR. The church should offer training annually.
9. Parents should always be kept abreast of the programs their children/youth are involved in, and be given advance notice and information regarding any activity which deviates from the traditional classroom instruction offered at the church during Sunday School, UMYF, Vacation Bible School, or other regular activities at the church. Permission forms with medical information should accompany children/youth for any activity involving travel or extreme sports activity (skiing, etc).
10. No youth may transport other youth from the church to an offsite church-sponsored event. In situations where no authorized church vehicle is being provided for transportation to a church event, students are permitted to ride as a group with an approved adult with the written permission from a parent(s) or guardian (s). Outside of church published youth events and activities, students are not allowed to be in the personal vehicle of an adult without written permission from the parent and two approved adults being present.

D. Procedures for Reporting Incidents of Abuse of a Child or Youth

1. North Carolina law, G.S. 7b-301 states: “Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, as defined by G.S. 7B 101, or has died as the result of maltreatment, shall report the case of that juvenile to the director of the department of social services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found. The report may be made orally, by telephone, or in writing. The

report shall include information as is known to the person making it including the name and address of the juvenile; the name and address of the juvenile's parent, guardian, or caretaker; the age of the juvenile; the names and ages of other juveniles in the home; the present whereabouts of the juvenile if not at the home address; the nature and extent of any injury or condition resulting from abuse, neglect, or dependency; and any other information which the person making the report believes might be helpful in establishing the need for protective services or court intervention. If the report is made orally or by telephone, the person making the report shall give the person's name, address, and telephone number. Refusal of the person making the report to give a name shall not preclude the department's assessment of the alleged abuse, neglect, dependency, or death as a result of maltreatment.” Abuse includes neglect, physical injury, and emotional maltreatment including verbal abuse of a child or sexual abuse. Any and all incidents of suspected abuse or neglect, whether occurring in association with church sponsored activities or in other settings of a child’s life must be reported.

2. North Carolina law, G.S. 7b-301(b) states that “Any person or institution who knowingly or wantonly fails to report the case of a juvenile...or who knowingly or wantonly prevents another person from making a report...is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.” This law went in to effect December 2013, and carries up to a 45-day community punishment for a person with no prior convictions.
3. Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children/youth must be reported as soon as possible (and at least within 24 hours) to the church staff member in charge, to our pastoral staff, and to the Director of the Department of Social Services (DSS) of Catawba County, as mandated by NC State Law. (The number for the Catawba County DSS is 828-324-9111.)
4. The person reporting the incident will document in writing, all known facts and circumstances.
5. All adult members of SLUMC staff and other adults participating in programs on the property of SLUMC are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse of children/youth. They will be encouraged not to hesitate to caution others that activities they observe are, or may appear to be, inappropriate. The church will be supportive of individuals who in good faith make reports of actual or reasonably suspected cases of abuse.
6. Any organization that uses SLUMC facilities will also notify the Senior Pastor or his designee as soon as possible about any incident or suspected incident of abuse involving any person affiliated with such organization while using SLUMC facilities.
7. The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

E. Responding to Allegations of Abuse of a Child /Youth

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
2. All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.
3. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
4. All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
5. The parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately by the Senior Pastor.
6. The liability insurer for the church will be notified about the incident by the Senior Pastor or his designee, as appropriate.
7. The safety and security of the child must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
8. An in-depth investigation will be carried out by church personnel under the supervision of the Senior Pastor or his designee as well as by civil authorities if appropriate, following an allegation of abuse.
9. The Senior Pastor or his designee will be the sole spokesperson for the Church insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
10. Any person accused of abuse or neglect must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

F. Training and Education

1. All compensated workers and volunteers will be trained regarding protection of children/youth from sexual abuse and protection of adults from false accusations of abuse. This initial training will include the following:
 - a. The need for the Children/Youth Protection Policy.
 - b. Church policies governing working with children/youth.
 - c. Procedures for reporting observed or suspected misconduct.