

Carroll First 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 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, 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 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.

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

Mission Statement

The mission of the Carroll First United Methodist Church (FUMC) is "*Connecting people with God through worship, witness, service and sharing.*" The People of the church believe it is in the best interest of the church, children and youth, church staff and volunteers, to adopt policies, procedures and screening tools to assist the church in protecting the physical, mental and emotional well being of the children and youth who participate in the church sponsored activities and to protect volunteers and church staff against baseless allegations, and to ensure prompt and compassionate response in case of allegations.

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 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 of reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirement of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to the media inquires if an incident occurs.

Staffing Guidelines For All Ministry Areas Of Carroll FUMC

Screening procedures for all volunteer and Staff

All volunteers/applicants are required to fill out an application with references, training, signed acceptance of Policy form, and a check of the Department of Criminal Investigation (DCI), sex offender registry and child abuse registry. After the initial background check, these checks may be run at any time in the future with no more than 3 years passing between checks. The acceptance of policy form will be reviewed yearly.

Adult leadership

To the extent reasonably possible, one of the adults should be at least five years older than the maximum age of the participants. To the extent reasonably possible, adult leadership should be gender balanced in approximately the same proportion as the participants. This is especially important on overnight trips.

Youth Volunteers

Youth volunteers (under the age of 18) must present a signed Parental Permission as part of their Volunteer form before they can be authorized to work with children. This will include a question about any previous incidents of abuse. The youth will also sign this form and conduct covenant. Youth volunteers may be included in the two supervisors supervising children; not included in the two adults supervising youth.

Recommended Policies

First Aid and CPR

First aid and CPR will be available to all volunteers as often as possible and will be paid for by the church. The director of ministry should be trained in First Aid and CPR.

Orientation

It is recommended by the Conference that there should be a special Sunday set aside for talk on abuse in conjunction with Sunday school, and also an evening program offered to parents annually.

Safe Sanctuary Guidelines For All Members

Two adult rule

Two or more adults will be present during any church sponsored activity that involved children and youth including Sunday school, after school programs and youth events. In the event that two adults cannot be present in each class, an "adult" roamer will be assigned to move in and out of rooms during class time for Sunday school. For all other events, parents will be made aware that only one adult will be present.

Windows in all classroom doors

All classrooms will have a window or half door in them. In the event that neither is available the door must remain open while children or youth are present.

Open-door counseling

All counseling sessions with children or youth require an open door for the entire session or the door should be equipped with a window. Counseling should take place when others are nearby.

Church Activity Guidelines**Adequate Personnel**

Program and activities that involve children and youth should include adequate supervisory personnel. To the extent reasonably possible, the adult to child/youth ratio should be approximately one adult to every 3-5 younger children (infant through preschool), one adult to every 8-10 elementary children (kindergarten through fifth grade) and one adult to every 10-12 youth (six through twelfth grade). This suggests a minimum of two adults for each program. The Senior high class should be conducted by 2 adults at least five years older than the oldest student.

Dismissal of Youth/Children

Youth/Children may not leave any activity prior to the designated end of an event without written permission from a parent or guardian. After said time of dismissal the youth are no longer the responsibility of the church or its adults

Church Nursery

Nursery will be staffed with at least one adult in the room or within hearing range and two 8th grade+ supervisors, except during the summer. Parents should sign-in their children and this registry should include any allergies/medical problems, where the parent can be reached, the parents cell phone (Parents are encouraged to turn their cell phones to vibrate, during the time their child is in the nursery, as a paging system.) and a place to note if there is anyone who the child should not be released to such as a non-custodial parent.

Advance Warning to Parents

Parents must always be given advance notice and full information about all events that take place during Sunday School, Mini Methodist, UM Kids, or Youth group. Written permission must be obtained by the parents for all trips and annual consent may be given for the Sunday school dismissal and weekday activities that take place during the year.

Additional Guidelines And Procedures**Parent and Family Education**

Parents will receive a copy of the safe sanctuary policies upon asking and they will be directed on how to find it on the church's website. Any and all questions or concerns should be address and if the answer is unknown it should be researched and then shared with the parent.

Staff and volunteer behavior policy

All staff and volunteers are specifically prohibited from committing any act of child/youth mistreatment, neglect, or abuse. Prohibited behaviors for all employees and volunteers include, but are not limited to

1. Using verbally or emotionally abusive or derogatory language.
2. Using sexually implicit or explicit language or behavior.
3. Physically striking, hitting or spanking.
4. Cuddling, kissing or unwelcomed/inappropriate physical contact.
5. Pinching or tickling in an inappropriate or sexual manner.
6. Inappropriate or intimidating actions of body language.

Adults are asked to use appropriate language at all times but is required especially when in the presence of youth. There is to be no swearing, foul language, or sexual connotations made. All adults are to be dressed appropriately. Clothing should be free of inappropriate language or crude sayings.

Use of illegal substances

Volunteers are not to be in contact with children/youth while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or use tobacco products while supervising children/youth. No youth or adult are allowed to smoke during church activities or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If a youth is under the influence of alcohol or drugs parents will be notified.

Cyber Safety and Texting policy

Texting and electronic communication can be a vital part of youth ministry work, but their improper use can produce serious consequences. Youth and volunteers may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities. Youth and volunteers are discouraged from using cell phones during ministry programs except, when okayed by the leader, in an emergency, to contact a parent or guardian, or to place calls specifically approved by a leader. There should be occasional training about the communication policy and the dangers of such conduct such as sexting or bullying. Any information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels (such as texting, Facebook, Twitter, etc) are not considered confidential. Employee and volunteers who want to communicate with minors using text messaging, e-mail, social networking websites or other forms of electronic media must first sign a consent form. Except in an emergency, volunteers and leaders may not connect with youth in this manner unless a consent form by the parent is signed. Another adult should be tied into all communication channels, whether it is a parent or another youth leader. Volunteers and staff are encouraged not to use their cell phones while driving and are never to send or read text messages while driving. Pictures posted to Facebook will not be posted without parent consent on the activity registration form. On the church Facebook page pictures should not be tagged and will be removed by staff members as soon as we are made aware that they are tagged. Pictures on other Facebook pages of church nature are not the church's responsibility.

Overnight and Youth mission trips

Parent/guardian(s) will need to fill out the release of liability form that includes multiple contact numbers, health and dental insurance information, and health information before a child/youth would be allowed to attend an overnight trip. Two adult leaders will keep this information with them on the trip. Another copy will be left in the church office.

In hotels and dormitories, youth will stay in rooms with youth, adults will stay with adults. It is recommended that adult rooms be between youth rooms. It is also recommended that adults arrange among themselves to check on the youth rooms using a random schedule during the night. No boys will be allowed in girls' rooms and vice versa. It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleep with all the children or youth participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge. The church recommends a parent/guardian meeting to explain safety policies and behavior expectations prior to any overnight/off-site trips. Emergency contact information should be shared. Parent/guardian(s) should be informed that if their youth misbehaves the parent/guardian(s) will be responsible for picking the youth up immediately.

Medicine Policy

Medicine is dispensed by church personnel only when absolutely necessary. When such need arises, parents should fill out an authorization for dispensing medication. All medication will be dispensed by an adult as per parent instructions. The medicines will be kept in the possession of the adult responsible for dispensing the medication. Parents may give prior approval for children/youth to receive over-the-counter medication if the need arises.

Driver Policies

Drivers must have a valid Iowa driver's license and proof of a good driving record, and must adhere to applicable laws. Volunteers who wish to drive will make copies of their driver's license and insurance card to be kept on file in the office. Driving records will be checked as needed. Drivers should be aware that their insurance would cover any claims that occur as a result of driving for the church. Without exception, all drivers must be at least 21 years old to drive with passengers. Passengers are required to wear seatbelts and to use child safety seats as required by Iowa law. It is recommended that a driver will never be alone without another passenger while transporting for Church activities.

Respectful code of conduct

A respectful code of conduct must be established with the children/youth and adults during any overnight event. The respectful code of conduct needs to be signed by all children/youth and adults and needs to include but is not limited to the following policies: no profane language, no practical jokes that could cause physical or emotional harm, boys and girls may not enter the opposite sex sleeping or restroom areas, participant may not leave the activity without permission, a youth or child should never be alone with an adult. There is also a behavior covenant that needs to be signed at the beginning of every year.

Outside Groups meeting in FUMC Facilities

Outside groups and organizations using the church facilities will be made aware of this Policy and Procedures and must adhere to it or must provide evidence of their own policy and procedures. An adult representative of outside groups must sign a waiver of liability for the sponsoring organization before use of the facilities will be granted.

Administration Of Policies And Procedures

Paid staff member or lead volunteer in charge of group is responsible for following the safe sanctuary policy and is over seen by the Pastor. Administration of policies and procedures will be handled through the protection policy taskforce. Membership of the protection policy taskforce includes: the Director of Ministries, pastor, chairperson of the Education Commission, Youth Director, and the chairperson of the

Staff Parrish Relations committee (as long as there is not a conflict of interest with any of these positions).

Child and Youth Safety Response

All observed abuse, suspicious activity or allegations of abuse that are brought to the attention of a volunteer staff, must be immediately brought to the person supervising the ministry activity. That person should fill out suspected Child Abuse Reporting Form to the best of their ability and provide that information immediately per the directions below. Upon receiving an allegation, the person's receiving report should first consider the following: Make all reasonable efforts to maintain confidentiality, secure the safety and wellbeing of the victim, do not minimize the incident or lay blame, treat the accused with dignity and support.

For Allegations against volunteers

The accused adult should never be confronted before the safety of the victim is secured. The report will be made to the appropriate program director. Then the volunteer should be relieved of duties by the appropriate program director until accusations are investigated. The Director will report to the Pastor who will assemble the appropriate response team. The Pastor and Director will determine if the District Superintendent will be notified.

For Allegations against employees

For any employee, other than the Senior Pastor, the report will be made to the Chairperson of the Staff Parrish Relations Committee and the Senior Pastor who will assemble the response team. The Senior Pastor and the Chairperson of the SPRC will determine if the District Superintendent will be notified.

For Allegations against any appointed Pastor

The report will be made to the Chairperson of the Staff Parrish Relations Committee who will immediately inform the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will lead the investigation per the Book of Discipline.

Step by Step Response Plan

1. Take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well-being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. NOTE: If one or both of the parents/guardians are the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning the notification of others.
2. Convene a Response Team to handle the incident. The Response Team should designate one person to serve as the spokesperson, and all requests for communication should be directed to that individual. **No other employees, volunteers or church members shall speak to the media on behalf of FUMC.**
3. Immediately, and with dignity and respect of the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from future involvement with children, youth or vulnerable adults. Advise the accused that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff or volunteer, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner.
4. Any staff or volunteer who is alleged to have committed abuse against a child, youth or vulnerable adult will be required to refrain from all direct ministry or direct activities with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with The Book of Discipline. Any staff or volunteer who is alleged to have committed abuse against a child, youth or vulnerable adult MAY still participate in ministry or activities where there is no direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
5. The Response Team is responsible to see that proper notification is made to the following: guardians, DHS or law enforcement, attorney, insurance or other authorities.
6. If the victim is a minor, immediately notify the custodial parent or guardian that a complaint has been made and the nature of the complaint by the Pastor and a face to face meet will be scheduled.
7. If the perpetrator of the abuse is a minor, the parent/guardian(s) of the minor should be notified that a complaint has been made and the nature of the complaint. The minor should be questioned about the incident only after written consent from the minor's parent.
8. Together with the agency official, meet with the child's parent/guardian(s) and in their presence and with their permission, with the child.
9. Pastoral counseling will be offered to all involved.

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 will be “surrounded by steadfast love,.....established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthen in the way that leads to live eternal” (“Baptismal Covenant II”, United Methodist Hymnal, p44).