

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Asbury United Methodist Church
Arnold, MD

I. Preamble

God has called us to make disciples of Jesus Christ with concern that our ministries safely protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation.

Jesus taught that “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV), and “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 NRSV).

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (2004 The Book of Discipline paragraph 162 C).

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to his or her safety by our congregational response, pledging, “With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Book of Worship, Baptism Covenant, Congregational Pledge II).

Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all persons. We especially lift children, youth and vulnerable adults, as well as those committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees in this present age. The Washington-Baltimore Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church recognizes the need to respond to these situations by outlining policies and procedures that can:

1. Prevent abuse from happening in our churches;
2. Affirm we are a place where children can feel safe in disclosing abuse;
3. Protect volunteers and employees in ministry to our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

This policy suggests minimum requirements in the areas of:

1. Background Checks
2. Rules
3. Reporting, and
4. Response Plan

II. Background Checks

Background checks will be performed on every paid staff and any volunteer who supervises children, youth, or vulnerable adults. In that regard, Asbury UMC will require (1) all applicants for employment

with the church, regardless of their position, and (2) all applicants for volunteer work who supervise children, youth and vulnerable adults to complete the following:

- Background check
- Baltimore-Washington Conference Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
- Asbury Safe Sanctuary Online Training

Asbury UMC will use a reputable company to perform the following checks, hereinafter referred to as “Background checks”:

1. Personal ID verification
2. National Criminal History Database search, including a check of the sexual offenders registries
3. Social Security verification
4. County Criminal records search
5. Address history verification

All information collected is stored on a secure site under the jurisdiction of the background check company.

Any paid staff member or volunteer who may be driving children for an Asbury UMC activity will be required to submit their driver’s license number to obtain a Motor Vehicle report.

All paid staff shall be required to have fingerprint cards made by a law enforcement agency that shall be submitted to the Criminal Justice Investigative Services.

<http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/publicservs/fingerprint.shtml>

A background check will be conducted at least every 5 years, if the individual serves for consecutive years. If the individual does not serve for consecutive years, the background check will be conducted after each “break” in service. Notices for renewal will go out at the beginning of the calendar year. Staff whose background checks are through the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, CJIS – Central Repository as per Maryland law pertaining to child care providers -- are exempt from the above rule of checks every 5 years, unless otherwise directed by the Department of Public Safety.

All forms must be returned to the Asbury Pastor and individual checks completed prior to becoming involved with our children or youth.

Any person who may pose a threat to children or youth will be prohibited from working with any minors and vulnerable adults.

All old records (background check applications completed in hard copy prior to the online service) shall be kept in a secured, locked location. Access to these records will only be given to the Senior

Pastor. The Pastor will, as needed, confer with a safe sanctuary committee member to clarify any results from a background check. It is recommended that these records be kept by the church in perpetuity. No records will be kept on an Asbury computer or hard drive.

The Baltimore-Washington Conference Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire must be completed annually. Notices will go out at the beginning of each calendar year.

Any outside group that is working with children or youth must provide a copy of their policies for child safety prior to using Asbury UMC facilities. These policies will be reviewed by the safe sanctuary committee and must meet or exceed the requirements set by Asbury UMC. If they do not, the group must provide proof of background checks that comply with Asbury UMC policy. Volunteers with outside groups must complete the Baltimore-Washington Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire.

III. Rules – Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

- a. Supervisory standards will include the “Two adult rule.” There should be at least two adults approved by the church in any room where there are children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- b. If there is only one adult present, the door shall remain open, or if there is a window in the door, or an internal window, the door may remain closed, but the window must be uncovered and the door unlocked.
- c. There must be a minimum 5-year age difference between the oldest child/youth and the person responsible for the class or activity, unless an adult approved according to the church safe sanctuary policy is present.
- d. No child or youth will be left unsupervised while attending a children/youth-specific ministry activity.
- e. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require written and signed permission from parents/guardians.
- f. For overnight activities:
 - i. Follow Section 111 Rules, a-e;
 - ii. There shall be a one to six ratio, gender-specific, of adults to children/youth;
 - iii. Sleeping accommodation will be separate for male and female children/youth, with approved adult males housed with male children/youth, and approved female adults with female children/youth;
 - iv. Sleeping accommodations for LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual) youth will be made on a case-by-case basis;
 - v. All approved adults supervising overnight activities for children/youth must have cell phones on their persons at all times, with cell phone numbers exchanged between

all adults. At least one child/youth must have a cell phone on those occasions when adults are not present;

g. There shall be three or more people in each vehicle when children or youth are present. In special circumstances when youth have no other transportation to and from an event, accommodations may be made, but only with explicit written permission of the parent/guardian.

h. Training is a requirement for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth or vulnerable adults. An initial educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries programs and policies is required prior to any adult having direct supervision of children and youth. Thereafter, the minimum standard would include an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, practices, and procedures for supervision.

IV. Reporting

If abuse or neglect of a child, youth or vulnerable adult is witnessed, suspected or reported to you by a youth, child or vulnerable adult, you have a bound duty to report your suspicion, or report the child's/youth's complaint. To report this abuse or neglect witnessed by you or reported to you, the following steps should be taken:

Step 1: If emergency, call 911. If not an emergency, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Contact the local Department of Social Services and the Asbury UMC Pastor

- For Anne Arundel County the phone number is 410-421-8400
- When traveling to other locations with children or youth, the local Department of Social Services phone number should be obtained prior to departure.

Step 3: When reporting to Pastor, complete the form "Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect," provided by the Pastor.

Step 4: Make 1 copy of the complete Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect

- Send the original to the Anne Arundel County office of the Maryland Department of Social Services at the following address:

Maryland Department of Social Services
Child Protective Services and Child Welfare Screening
7500 Ritchie Hwy.
Glen Burnie, MD 21060

- Give the copy to the Asbury UMC Pastor

Step 5: If you have observed abuse or neglect, do not talk about it except with the Asbury UMC Pastor, your supervisor (Director of Preschool, Director of Clubhouse), Department of Social Services or law enforcement officers.

Step 6: Please note that you cannot keep a child from their parent or guardian.

The Asbury UMC Pastor to whom the incident was reported should complete the form "Follow-up to Suspected Incident of Child Abuse/Neglect." The Pastor has the right to confer with members of the safe sanctuary commit regarding further steps the church may take.

V. Response

A quick compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements should be directed to the Conference Director of Communications.
2. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the Pastor will remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth or vulnerable adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
3. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry/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.
4. Notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child, youth or vulnerable adult until the parent (s)/guardian(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
5. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
6. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

VI. Revisions

The pastor will direct certain persons, with the assistance of legal counsel to regularly review this policy and the procedures established. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified. Any changes made will be communicated to staff members and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

ADDENDUM

VII. A Safe Environment

Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries – Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children or youth. Those working with children or youth have to understand and respect those

boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change, as children grow older. A nursery-aged toddler sitting in the lap of a caregiver is appropriate whereas an older child or youth sitting in a leader's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a nursery-aged toddler to a leader are much different than the same from a youth. Regardless of gender, youth-initiated hugs are acceptable. Adults should not initiate hugs. Adults may initiate high fives or fist bumps in lieu of hugs.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for all persons to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children or youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the adult person in authority to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult leader recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, greater space should be allowed to come between that person and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem then the ministry leader in charge should address the issue.

VIII. Internal Reporting

Behavior by a youth or adult that is not considered abuse or neglect, but is still considered inappropriate or that does not reflect the safe environment Asbury promotes, should be reported to the supervising adult leader.

1. Traffic Violations

In the event that an adult leader or staff member receives a traffic citation in the course of an organized youth event, the person who received the citation will inform the supervising adult leader. The adult leader will contact the Pastor or appropriate Safe Sanctuary coordinator(s) who will then recommend a course of action.

Adult Leaders driving on ministry business are to avoid cell phone use—even hands-free—when transporting children, while driving in heavy traffic, during hazardous weather conditions, or when it violates local law. Adult Leaders are never to send or read text messages while driving.

2. Inappropriate Behavior

Any questionable or inappropriate behavior directed towards children or youth during or outside of Asbury's organized events and activities must be reported immediately to the supervising adult leader. If the inappropriate behavior involves the supervising adult leader, the report should be made to the Pastor. Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to the following examples:

- Sexually oriented humor or language.
- Ridicule, derogatory or demeaning comments regarding a participant's race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Unwelcome or undesired physical contact.
- Inappropriate comments about a participant's clothing or appearance.
- Inappropriate comments about a participant's mental or physical capabilities.

Refer to paragraph '4. Investigations and Response' for guidance on how to respond should inappropriate behavior be reported.

3. Abuses Between Minors

Along with the safety measures stated in the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, every effort will be made to avoid situations where abuse between minors is most likely to occur. Any alleged or suspected incident must be reported immediately to the supervising adult leader. All youth who register for youth activities are required to read and sign the "Youth Commitment" and agree to the Honor Code that reflects the values of Asbury's youth activities.

In the case of children and youth, teachers/volunteers are to immediately report incidents of bullying to the supervising adult leader and adult leaders are expected to immediately intervene when they see a bullying incident occur. As defined by Stop Bullying.gov is "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." If needed, a meeting with the parents, the adult leader or Pastor will be scheduled.

4. Investigations and Response

If an allegation is made and is not a reportable incident of abuse or neglect, the supervising adult leader may contact the Pastor, or appropriate Safe Sanctuary member(s). The Pastor and/or appropriate members will immediately determine how best to further proceed with the concern or allegation in question. If appropriate this may include being in contact with the minor's parent(s) or legal guardian(s), to the extent they are not the subjects of the allegation. These individuals will then confer to reach consensus on the recommended course of action.

IX. Internet Safety and Social Media

While communication via social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most of youth and can be an important tool for ministry, we recognize that those forms of communication can also be dangerous if not used properly. They offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of ministry work, but their improper use can produce serious consequences. Therefore, adult leaders should be aware that any and all direct communications with Asbury's children/youth may be subject to audit.

Administration of Asbury Social Media Groups - Each church related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of two unrelated administrators, who are either church leaders or adult leaders engaged in the ministry. Sites must be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.

- a. Access to the church internet is restricted without the explicit permission of responsible adults. Access to the internet should be password protected.
- b. Youth should not have access to the church wireless passcode.

- c. Youth should not have access to church devices that access the internet, unless being supervised by an adult leader.

FOR ADULT LEADERS

Employee and adult leaders who want to communicate with minors using forms of electronic media must agree to follow the guidelines set forth by Asbury UMC:

1. Adult Leaders 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.
2. Except in an emergency, adult leaders may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group e-mail, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, e-mail address, or photograph.
3. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time you would not normally call a home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.
4. Implement privacy settings and personal boundaries.
 - a. Creating separate private and professional profiles on networking sites.
 - i. Adults should not submit 'friend' requests to children or youth. Minors may feel like they are not able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and adults.
 - ii. Due to the greater potential for misinterpretation, inappropriate discussions, and inadvertent exposure of youth to inappropriate content; personal pages should be maintained appropriately. Church leaders and adult volunteers should avoid relationships with children/youth via social networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.
 - b. Applying privacy settings that are consistent with all students, across all platforms.
 - c. Reviewing accessible content and photos frequently.
 - d. If a student texts you after hours -- and it's not an emergency – wait until morning to reply.
5. Adult Leaders who become aware of possible child abuse through electronic media must report per this Safe Sanctuary Policy.
6. If you choose to utilize any social networking site to communicate with students associated with Asbury UMC, invite other Asbury Adult Leaders to view and respond to the content. Parents of students should be aware of and know:
 - a. All information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels aren't considered confidential.

- b. When possible, communication should be sent to entire groups in public areas -- not in private messages – this includes images.
- 7. Any inappropriate material posted in your online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.
- 8. Video Chatting with student is strongly discouraged – if you must, be aware of what you're wearing and of your surroundings.
- 9. Electronic communication should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of a received email or text raises concerns or questions share it with the ministry leader or the Pastor. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged, or require extensive conversation. **Email may be more appropriate where matters are deemed legally sensitive to preserve records of communication.**
- 10. There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes. Permission is required when youth register as a member of Asbury's Youth activities.
 - a. Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image
 - b. Include a media release statement on a signed consent form
 - c. It is strongly discouraged to attach student names with their image (ie: captions, tagging on social media)

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