

## **Downsville United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

February 2009

Whereas, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 2004 adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for 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 invitation – 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, 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. Many annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their 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 Discipline of the UMC* 1996.)

Therefore, the Louisiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church hereby pledged to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. We will follow

reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident that conforms to the requirements of Louisiana law.

Therefore, in all 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.” (Baptismal Covenant II *United Methodist Book of Worship*, P. 98.

## **Level One Personnel**

### **ALL PAID STAFF**

#### **1. Age**

Applicants should be at least 16 years old.

Applicants should be 4 years older than the oldest youth they will be supervising.

#### **2. Application**

Applicants should complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

#### **3. Reference Checks**

There should be at least 3 references, one of whom should be a relative or someone close to the applicant – pastor, former pastor, teacher. The other 2 references should be from a non-related adult.

All references should be checked in person, by letter or on the telephone by a member of PPR or by the pastor.

#### **4. Background Checks**

A criminal background check will be conducted for all paid staff

#### **5. Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church sponsored activity or program with preschoolers, children, or youth.

#### **6. Interview**

With the supervision of the PPR, all applicants must be interviewed for suitability to the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the PPR chairperson, the full PPR Committee or a designated portion of the committee, or the pastor. Church policy and guidelines will be discussed during the interview. Hires will be required to sign the church's Compliance Form.

## **7. Previous Employees**

Persons who are serving in positions affected by this policy when it is approved by the Administrative Council, who have been serving for a period of 2 years shall be considered fully vetted but will have to participate in annual training at a date to be determined, but to be no more than one year from this date. They also will be required to sign the Compliance Form.

## **Level Two Personnel**

### **THOSE WHO VOLUNTEER REGULARLY**

## **8. Application Forms**

All prospective volunteers should complete and sign an application form provided by the church.

## **9. Age**

Applicants should be at least 16 years old and at least 4 years older than the children or youth they will work with.

## **10. Non Criminal Background Checks**

All volunteer applicants should undergo non-criminal background checks. Background checks will be confidential, and conducted by a designated member of the PPR committee or by the pastor.

## **11. Church Membership and Activity**

Volunteers should be members of the church in good standing for at least 6 months prior to beginning to volunteer.  
Volunteers should be active in the life of the church.

## **12. Existing Volunteers**

Persons affected by this policy who have been serving in their current capacity for a period of at least 2 years shall be considered fully vetted, but will have to participate in annual training at a date to be determined, but to be no later than one year from this date.

## **Level 3 Personnel**

### **OCCASIONAL VOLUNTEERS**

## **13. Safe Sanctuary Policy Awareness**

Persons who volunteer occasionally should be aware of the Safe Sanctuary Policy, its practices, and procedures.

Level 3 Personnel should sign the agreement to abide by the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

#### **14. Recommendation and Supervision**

Occasional volunteers should be known and recommended by the program supervisors and/or the pastor.

Occasional volunteers should not be the volunteer in charge of a group, but should be supervised by Level 1 or Level 2 personnel.

### **PROGRAM SUPERVISION GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

#### **15. Two Adult Rule**

Two adults should be present at all times.

A co-ed group needs both male and female sponsors in order to leave the church grounds.

If the Two Adult Rule is not feasible a “floater” can monitor frequently.

#### **16. Check In and Check Out**

There is to be a check in-check out procedure for all kindergarten age children and younger insuring that a child will only be released to an authorized parent or designee.

All children/ youth should only be released to a recognized family designee.

Parents should notify the one in charge when their youth begin to drive himself/ herself to church activities.

When permission has been given for a youth to transport others to and from church activities parents should notify the one in charge. This permission should be reciprocal. Parents who give permission for their youth to ride with another youth should also contact the one in charge.

#### **17. Open Door Policy**

Parents and other relatives have the right to visit and observe the children's or youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

Other visitors should be accompanied by a church member, or by the pastor.

#### **18. Outside Access**

There should be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from the church facility.

#### **19. Doors and Windows**

All classrooms or office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied.

Classrooms will not be locked when occupied.

Windows will be transparent.

**20. Individual Counseling**

One on one interaction with children and youth should be with the door open and with visibility unimpaired.

**21. Outside Groups**

Outside groups using the church facility will agree in writing to follow the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

**22. Training**

Staff members and volunteers are expected to participate in annual training on the application of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. They also are expected to agree annually in writing to adhere to the policy.

**23. Transportation From Church To A Church Sponsored Activity**

Drivers should be over the age of 21 and should undergo the same screening process that other volunteers undergo. No participants in the youth group can drive to or from a church sponsored event away from the church facilities.

A child and unrelated adult should not travel in an automobile without a second adult present who is unrelated to the driver.

**24. Alcohol and other Mind Altering Substances**

At no time will a care giver, teacher, or other supervisor be under the influence of alcohol or other mind altering substances.

**GUIDELINES FOR ADULT MINISTRIES**

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, or other leader – clergy or lay) engages in a sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual and gender harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual or gender issue. Such exploitation/abuse is strictly prohibited.

Unlawful harassment is a form of discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal authority.

Unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on race, color, religion, sex (whether or not of a sexual nature and including same-gender harassment and gender identity harassment), national origin, age (40 and over), disability (mental or physical), sexual orientation, or retaliation (sometimes collectively referred to as “legally protected characteristics”) constitutes harassment when:

- a. the conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment; or
- b. a supervisor's harassing conduct results in a tangible change in an employee's employment status or benefits (for example demotion, termination, failure to promote, etc.)

Hostile work environment harassment occurs when unwelcome comments or conduct based on sex, race or other legally protected characteristics unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Anyone in the workplace might commit this type of harassment – a management official, co-worker, or non-employee such as a contractor, vendor or guest. The victim can be anyone affected by the conduct, not just the individual at whom the offensive conduct is directed.

A hostile work environment does not include simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not extremely serious. Rather, the conduct must be so objectively offensive as to alter the conditions of the individual's employment. The conditions of employment are altered only if the harassment culminates in a tangible employment action or is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment. A hostile work environment will not be tolerated.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- a. the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender (*Book of Discipline*, par. 1611)
- b. intimidating or coercive behavior that threatens or results in a tangible employment action.

Gender harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman or against a man because he is a man.

Downsville United Methodist Church wishes to be a nurturing Christian environment where employees, volunteers, members, and guests receive the grace of God through the ministries of the church. Because harassment of any nature diminishes the experience of God's grace, no harassment will be tolerated.

## **REPORTING INCIDENTS OF PERCEIVED SEXUAL ABUSE OR HARASSMENT**

Whenever there are allegations of abuse of any nature, legal authorities will be notified. Anyone who is Level 1 or Level 2 personnel who suspects a case of neglect or abuse of a child under the age 17 must report the incident to the Office of Community Services, whether the suspected abuse occurs at church or elsewhere.

1. If a clergy person is perceived to be the abuser the accuser will inform the PPR chair, who will report the incident to the District Superintendent.
2. Any other perceived abuse by adults toward adults is to be reported to the pastor or the PPR chair or the Administrative Council chair.

## **OTHER PROVISIONS**

### **1. Privacy**

Photographs should not be published to the church's web site without written permission. Parental/guardian consent should be given for minors' photographs. Those over the age of majority should provide consent.

### **2. Non church groups utilizing the church facility**

Groups from beyond the church who use the facility on a recurring or non-recurring basis should be informed of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and should sign a form of compliance.