

Safe Sanctuary Policy

United Methodist Church, Branford

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, “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 the 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 Resolution of the United Methodist Church –2000, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by the United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary 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 whether church buildings, grounds, ministries and/or activities.

Our Covenant With Children And Youth:

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that provide an environment for spiritual growth and for safety of all children, youth in our care, as well as those who work with children and youth in this ministry. We will follow the measures of this policy in the recruitment and selection of paid staff as well as volunteer workers with children and youth. We will implement the operational procedures of this policy. We will train and educate our staff and volunteer workers in the use of these policies. We will define and follow procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law. We will define and follow procedures for handling an allegation of abuse among staff or workers. We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Safe Sanctuary-- Policy Definition:

Definitions

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child abuse” as defined under Connecticut Law (section 17a-101-17a-103a) means any of the following:

Any child or youth who has a non-accidental physical injury, or injuries which are at variance with the history given of such injuries, or is in a condition which is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

For the purposes of this Policy, this definition includes vulnerable adults.

“Child” means any person under the age of 18.

“Children’s activities” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of persons (staff or volunteers) in charge of these activities.

“Church” means United Methodist Church, Branford.

“Conference” means the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“Sanctuary” means church properties, ministries and activities.

“Staff person” means any person (*clergy and laity*) employed by the United Methodist Church, Branford.

“Volunteer” means a person who assists in conducting children’s activities under the supervision of a person in charge of children’s activities.

“Persons required to report child abuse” in accordance with CGS sc. 17A-101(b) are listed on the back of the “report of suspected child abuse/neglect” – Form DCF-136.

“Person in charge of a children’s activity” means the church volunteer or employed staff person responsible for the conduct of this activity, such as the Sunday school or V.B.S. teacher, nursery worker, choir director, and youth leader.

“Vulnerable adult” means any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities.

“We” means the United Methodist Church, Branford.

Safe Sanctuary Step 1 – Screening Procedures:
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Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children and vulnerable adults.

We will cooperate with the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in efforts to network with Conference agencies and local churches because staff persons and volunteers may serve in a variety of places and roles.

We propose these MINIMUM standards:

All volunteer or staff persons (*over the age of 18*), who have regular and direct contact with children and vulnerable adults shall be required to complete:

1. A Volunteer Application
2. The United Methodist Church, Branford Policy Statement on Misconduct of a Sexual Nature
3. The United Methodist Church, Branford Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire

The United Methodist Church, Branford will conduct a *National* Background check on all persons (paid staff as well as volunteers) who have regular and direct contact with children and vulnerable adults. *The applicant has the right to review the background check.*

The Pastor will review all documents for approval *and may review with another pastor within the New Haven cluster.*

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with minors:

Any conviction for:

- Criminal homicide
- Aggravated assault

- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault (rape)
- Aggravated sexual assault
- Injury to a child
- Incest
- Indecency with a child
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child
- Possession or promotion of child pornography
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
- Employment harmful to children
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure
- Enticing a child

All charges for these crimes or charges or convictions for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Pastor or his/her designee.

<p>Safe Sanctuary Step 2 -- Supervision:</p>

The second step for providing a holy place of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults is conscientious and intentional supervision. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children or vulnerable adults and to protect persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations. (Again, these are MINIMUM standards and each child's activity may adopt more stringent requirements as necessary.)

1. *Education in Safe Sanctuary policy* is a requirement for all staff persons and volunteers in charge of children's activities and will be conducted by the Sunday School Supervisor or their designee. *A form will be signed and kept in a file showing completion of the education.*
2. First Aid/CPR Training (at least one person who has been trained will be on site during scheduled activity)

3. Minimum supervisory standards will include the “two-adult rule”. The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms. To further reduce risk, it is preferable that the two adults are not related.
4. No person in charge of children’s activities shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST 18 years old and AT LEAST 5 years older than the oldest child with whom he/she is working.
5. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open. All activities should occur in open view.
6. Registration materials for activities in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate. Parents will always be given advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will be participating.
7. Bathroom Policy – Because we are a safe sanctuary – children are not allowed to leave the sanctuary unless accompanied by a parent, guardian, or parent designated adult.
8. Worship Service Child Care – A child who is left with our child care staff during worship services must be dropped off by a parent, guardian, or parent designated adult and picked up by the same adult. A child will not be released to any other person unless prior arrangements have been made.

Safe Sanctuary Step 3 -- Reporting:

Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The person who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the children’s activity and file an incident report entitled “Report of suspected incident of child abuse” which is found in the church office.

Upon receiving such information, the Pastor or the person designated by and accountable to the Staff Parish Relations Committee will call the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Hotline (1-800-842-2288) to make an **oral report within 12 hours** and file a **written report within 48 hours** of making the oral report using form DCF-136 (which is found in the church office or on the DCF website), and notify District Superintendent by calling (203) 288-0286.

Persons who are the objects of the report will be required to refrain from all children’s activities until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any

children's activities, care will be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted. The Pastor will determine as the situation warrants what actions must be taken to treat, provide shelter or otherwise assist the child.

Safe Sanctuary Step 4 -- Response Plan:

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, all volunteers or staff involved in that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

The Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the person in charge of that event or activity to make the initial contact with the Pastor.

If allegations are made against the Pastor, the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately and *will assume* the responsibilities assigned to the Pastor in this policy. *(Call church office for the phone number of current chairperson.)*

Information will be disseminated to the Parish at a congregational meeting planned for a specific date and time. The Pastor, lay leaders, and representatives from N.Y. Annual Conference will lead it. If the pastor is the suspected abuser he/she may not be the leader. The meeting will include honest and forthright information, what actions have been taken, what has been done to ensure the safety of the victim and to ensure the safe continuation of the Church's ministry.

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 strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44). Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.