

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

### **Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church**

(Standards for Local Churches and all ministries within the North Central New York Annual Conference)

(Modified for use at Grace United Methodist Church, Corning, NY)

#### **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 that “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (2004, The Book of Discipline, paragraph 162C)

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their 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.”* (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal 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 North Central NY 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. Screening
2. Supervision
3. Reporting
4. Response Plan

## **DEFINITIONS**

**“Abuse”** means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult by a parent, guardian, or other person. Abuse includes:

- a. The infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means.
- b. The creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of a risk, to a child by other than accidental means.
- c. Committing or allowing to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution upon the child.

**“Child”** or **“children”** or **“youth”** means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

**“Exploitation”** means obtaining or using another person’s resources, including but not limited to funds, assets, or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

**“Sexual abuse”** includes, but is not limited to, any contacts or interactions in which the parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child for the purposes of sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

**“Sexual exploitation”** includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under New York law; or a parent, guardian, or other person having custodial control or supervision of a child or responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under New York law.

**“Supervision”** means to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

**“Volunteer”** means a non-staff (not paid) individual that is approved to lead a ministry activity.

**“Vulnerable Adult”** means a person whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.

## **SCREENING PROCEDURES**

Careful screening is one way to prevent abuse and exploitation of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

1. **All staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out background screening information that shall include, but is not limited to:**
  - a. Standard contact information.
  - b. Experience and qualifications for the position.
  - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions.
  - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure background checks and references as necessary.
  - e. Listing of two non-relative references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not received.
2. Background screening will be conducted through Church Mutual's "Screen Now" program and will be conducted by the church administrative staff.
  - a. Minimum – NY state background check.
  - b. Recommended – National Background check.
  - c. A national background check is highly recommended if the person has lived outside the state and/or lives near the border of another state or country.

*Note:* Clergy serving in the North Central NY Annual Conference will undergo a background screening upon entrance into the conference and/or candidacy process. This information may be updated as requested by the Office of the Bishop and the documentation shall be kept in the personnel files of the annual conference.

3. Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of greater than twelve consecutive months shall resubmit the background screening information. It is recommended that background checks be repeated at least every three (3) years for all staff and volunteers.
4. All records shall be kept in a secured, locked location. It is recommended that these records be kept by the church in perpetuity.
5. Updated lists of approved adults will be available to ministry program leaders as it is modified. The list shall include only names and the date the individual was screened.
6. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a lone supervisory role in activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor may replace the six month waiting rule.

## SUPERVISION

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.

1. **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, youth and vulnerable adults with documentation to include signatures reflecting receipt of policies by participants to be kept in the records of the supervising staff person. Thereafter, the minimum standard would include documentation of an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child, youth or vulnerable adult abuse.
2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the **“two adult rule”**. This rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present.
  - a. In the event that only one supervisory adult or two related adults are available to be responsible for a group, an adult “roamer” who periodically moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities will be utilized.
3. **No child, youth or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised** while attending a ministry event/activity.
  - a. Two adults must remain with the group until the final youth is picked up by a parent/guardian.
  - b. If a youth is not picked up after 30 minutes passed the scheduled end time of the activity, the adult leaders shall begin calling parents/guardians.
  - c. If after one hour a parent cannot be located, local authorities (police) will be contacted to take responsibility for the youth until a parent/guardian can be reached.
4. **All ministry activities should occur in open view.** Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. This may require enclosed spaces such as classrooms having a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration or an open door.
5. Registration materials should be collected for every ministry program activity.
6. Ministry activities involving transportation shall adhere to the following guidelines.
  - a. A written and signed permission slip from parents/guardians will be required for each youth.
  - b. A notarized Limited Power of Attorney Parental Authorization should be collected for each youth prior to the trip.
    - i. The assigned/volunteer ministry leader should have these records easily accessible in the event of an emergency.
  - c. Whenever possible, two adults should ride in each vehicle used for the trip.
    - i. If two adults per car is not possible, one adult driver is sufficient as long as the vehicles travel together and remain in sight of each other.
  - d. No youth will be permitted to drive another youth to or from any ministry activities.
7. No person shall solely supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age and is at least five years older than the children/youth being supervised.

## REPORTING

Reporting is required by any staff or volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

1. All staff and volunteer adult ministry leaders shall receive training on recognizing and reporting suspected abuse as part of the screening process.
2. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse is required to report the incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the pastor of the church. Upon receiving the information, the pastor shall **immediately** call the New York State Child Protective Services Hotline at (800) 342-3720. The Pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be the only individuals with knowledge to protect the confidentiality of all individuals involved.
3. The pastor shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.
4. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to the established rules in The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against the pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office in Rochester, New York.
5. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline.
  - a. Book of Discipline paragraph 341.5
  - b. *All clergy of the United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.*
6. After the pastor has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors are to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
7. The pastor must keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be kept brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. This report should be kept in a secure place; it should be written or typed.

## RESPONSE PLAN

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, 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 the 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.
  - a. **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.

This policy was created using materials from The Safe Sanctuaries Program, Reducing the Risk Program, 2004 Book of Discipline, and Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Modified for use by Grace United Methodist Church, Corning NY : February 2009

Adopted by the NCNY Conference Council 12/1/07

Approved by Grace United Methodist Church Council : March 09, 2009