

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY
“Safe Sanctuaries” for Ardmore United Methodist Church
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, and the Western North Carolina Conference, in June 2004, adopted resolutions aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in the church. This would include sexual, emotional, physical, and ritual abuse and neglect. The adopted resolutions include the following statements.

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, 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. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of early sexual trauma. Such incidences 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 the 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.

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

Purpose:

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Children and Youth Abuse Prevention 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.

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 retention of workers, both paid and volunteer; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

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 and youth will be “surrounded by steadfast love, ...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (From “Congregational Pledge 2,” ‘Baptismal Covenant II,’ In The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

**SAFE SANCTUARIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
OPERATING PROCEDURES**
Ardmore United Methodist Church
Winston Salem, North Carolina

Recruitment and Hiring of Paid Staff

- The Staff-Parrish Committee of Ardmore UMC will do a background check on all paid workers with youth, which will include a criminal background check and a check of at least three references and/or previous employments.
- Ardmore UMC reserves the right to accept or reject any person for employment in its own discretion.

Recruitment of Volunteers

- The Children's and Youth Council will require the following for any volunteer adult worker with youth:
 1. Completion of an application including references.
 2. Signed Participant Covenant Statement agreeing to abide by Ardmore UMC's policies for working with youth.
 3. A criminal background check if they are new members or have not been members of Ardmore UMC for at least seven years or as otherwise required by Ardmore UMC's sexual misconduct insurance.

- The Business Manager will conduct the criminal background check and reference checks for persons applying to volunteer for working with youth at Ardmore UMC. The Business Manager shall be the only individual with access to the material acquired in the criminal background check, and he is to maintain strict confidentiality. The reports are to be kept in a secured location to which only the Business Administrator has access. If the applicant is deemed unsuitable, in Ardmore UMC's sole discretion, the applicant will be notified by the Christian Education Minister or Senior Pastor that he will not be allowed to supervise activities involving youth. The applicant will be provided with a copy of the criminal background check upon request. The applicant will be given the opportunity and will be encouraged to be involved in the life of Ardmore UMC in areas that do not involve the supervision of youth. The Christian Education Minister will maintain a list of persons whose applications have been approved for working with youth. Ardmore UMC reserves the right to accept or reject any persons as volunteers in its youth ministries.
- Two Adults: Every effort will be made to have two (preferably unrelated) adults in the room or vehicle at all times. If for unforeseen circumstances two adults cannot be present, the classroom door will remain open.
- Roving Monitors: There will be roving monitors every Sunday morning during Sunday school and children's church as an extra safety measure and to provide assistance with bathroom duties when two adults are not present in a classroom. They will also ensure that our hallways remain a safe place for youth should they leave the sanctuary or classroom to use the restroom.

- Hospitality Rule: Volunteers must be members or active worshippers of Ardmore UMC for six months before working with youth.
- Youth Volunteers: Youth may volunteer to work with children when there are at least two adults present in the room. No more than two youth may help in any classroom or nursery.
- Age Limits: Staff and volunteers should be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth being supervised. No one under the age of 18 should be given direct supervisory responsibility.
- Visibility in Rooms: Every room that is used for youth, including those used in counseling situations, should have a window in the door, or a half door, that gives visibility to all areas of that room. The window must be left uncovered. If there is no window, the door must be left open at all times.
- First Aid and CPR: There will be at least one adult present at every church activity that is certified in basic first aid and CPR.
- Communication and Advance Notice to Parents: Ardmore UMC will keep parents informed on the program in which their youth are involved and will be given advance notice and information regarding any activity which deviates from the traditional classroom instruction (i.e. retreats, off campus events) offered at Ardmore UMC during Sunday school, UMY, Vacation Bible School, or other regular activity of the church.
- Age and Activity Appropriate Equipment: All of the nursery, classroom, youth area and playground equipment of Ardmore UMC will be examined at least annually for its appropriateness and safety.
- Maintaining Adequate Liability Insurance Coverage: Ardmore UMC will maintain sexual conduct insurance through an insurance company approved by the Board of Trustees. The policy will be reviewed annually for adequacy of coverage and for verification of compliance with its requirements.
- Training and education: Training and education about Ardmore UMC's Safe Sanctuaries policy will be offered at least annually for volunteers and for the families of our youth, so that they may be kept informed of our efforts to provide a safe environment for their youth.
- Evaluation of Safe Sanctuary Policy: This policy shall be reviewed at least annually by the Trustees, Education Committee and Children's Council.

Procedure for Activities Taking Place Away from Ardmore UMC

- Parents of youth will be given information about all events that take place away from Ardmore UMC. The information will include
 - Where they are going and what they will be doing
 - Housing and sleeping arrangements, if necessary
 - Transportation utilized

- Adult supervision
 - Phone numbers where they may reach their child in an emergency
 - Anticipated arrival time back at Ardmore UMC
- Permission slips will be required for participation in events and activities that are held away from Ardmore UMC. Included in the form will be permission for the adult leadership to seek necessary medical attention in the event of an emergency.
 - Adult volunteers transporting youth in church owned or rented vehicles will agree to a check of their DMV record.
 - It is preferred that two adults will be present in each church owned or rented vehicle in which youth are transported for church sponsored activities. If there are not two adults in the vehicle, there will be more than one youth in the vehicle with the adult driving. The only exception to this rule is in the event of an emergency.
 - Adult volunteers may not transport youth in their personal vehicles without written permission from the youth's parents.

Procedure for Responding to Alleged Incidents

Once an allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. North Carolina Law requires everyone to report suspected child abuse or neglect. "Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, or has died as the result of maltreatment, shall report the case of that juvenile to the director of the Department of Social Services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found." (N.C.G.S. § 7A-543)

- The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported is required to report the incident within 24 hours to the staff person in charge of the activity in which the incident occurred.
- The staff person in charge of the activity in which the abuse was reported will attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and the victim's address and family information, along with the name of the alleged perpetrator, if known, and their address.
- Within 24 hours of receiving such information, the staff person in charge of the activity will report the incident to the Winston Salem Police Department and the Forsyth County Department of Social Services.
- The Senior Pastor is to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the report. The Senior Pastor will notify our District Superintendent.
- If the allegation is against an Ardmore UMC staff person, the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee will notify the Winston Salem Police Department and the District Superintendent. In the event that one of the pastors is the subject of the allegation, the Staff

Parish Relations Committee Chairperson will also notify the Bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference.

- Any person who is the object of the report will be required to refrain from all children's or youth activities until the incident is resolved.
- In any removal of a person from any children's or youth activities, all possible discretion should be used, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted. The investigation of any incident will be left to the authorities.
- Any communication with the family of the victim notifying them of the incident will be documented.
- The alleged perpetrator will be notified after the safety of the victim has been secured. All actions taken in notifying the alleged perpetrator will be documented.
- Within 48 hours of being notified of the incident, the Senior Pastor and Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will meet with the person making the accusation. The person making the accusation has the right to have a witness present. The alleged perpetrator will not be present. Recommendations for counseling and support will be offered. No attempt will be made to judge the validity of the accusation.
- Within 48 hours of being notified of the incident, the Senior Pastor and the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee will meet with the alleged perpetrator. The alleged perpetrator has the right to have a witness present. Neither the alleged victim nor the alleged victim's family will be present. Recommendations for counseling and support will be offered. No attempt will be made to determine the guilt or innocence of the alleged perpetrator.
- Any requests for statements by the media should be directed to the Senior Pastor or his designee.
- If the allegation involves one of the pastors, any request for statements by the media should be directed to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson or his designee.
- Once the appropriate professionals have completed the investigation, there will also be a review of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy by the Trustees, Education Committee and Children's Council.
- If allegations are proved to be true, the church staff will be committed to helping the victim, the victim's family, along with the family of the accused, recover from the incident. If the allegations are proved to be false, the church staff will work with both the alleged victim and accused to find forgiveness and healing.

