

**POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH
AND VULNERABLE ADULTS
BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

I. Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child 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 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse" (para.162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child 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, both 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 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 any form of abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2000, pp.180-181, copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. *Used by permission*)

As part of our congregation's baptismal vows, we covenant with each other to take responsibility for the nurture of faith. As such, the members of this church have pledged to uphold one another. In the spirit of Christ, we teach, strengthen, and support the individual's relationship with the church family. As our baptismal vows imply, we also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our church family.

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This Policy for the Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults (hereafter referred to as “The Policy”) covers any person employed by or volunteering at Bethel United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as “BUMC”) in any capacity involving children, youth under the age of 18, and vulnerable adults (hereafter collectively referred to as “those at risk,” or referred to as youth, “child” and/or “children”) and all outside organizations using BUMC’s facilities for programs for those at risk.

Therefore, we embrace this policy that puts in place the practices and procedures necessary to keep those at risk free from harm. We also see these practices and procedures as a protection for the adults who have graciously stepped forward to care for those at risk within our congregation and community. Finally, we endorse all aspects of this policy, realizing that by protecting those at risk, and reducing the possibility of abuse, we are also taking critical steps necessary to protect the entire ministry of our church.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church. For purposes of this Policy, the term “abuse” includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse.

II. Purpose

Our conference's purpose for establishing this 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, youth and vulnerable adults.

III. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith, Bethel United Methodist Church pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, vulnerable adults as well as all workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); 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.

IV. Procedures

Although it is our fervent hope and prayer that abuse does not occur in BUMC, we must put into place sufficient mechanisms to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who work with them. For that purpose, our ministries shall implement the following procedures in BUMC's ministry programs and events.

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V. Recruiting/Screening Workers

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of those at risk. 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, youth and/or vulnerable adults.

We accordingly implement these MINIMUM standards:

All persons employed to serve in a supervisory capacity for those at risk shall:

- Be at least 21 years of age and five years older than the oldest child in the program.
- Complete an Application / Covenant Form.
- Provide three non-related character references.
- Consent to a criminal background check.

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for those at risk shall:

- Be at least 21 years of age and five years older than the oldest child. In conference programs involving youth and adults working together, 18-20 year olds will not function in a supervisory capacity.
- Complete an Application / Covenant Form.
- Be interviewed by the Program Coordinator.
- Consent to a criminal background check.
- Provide three non-related character references.
- Demonstration of an active relationship with BUMC of at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in children or youth activities.
- Persons who have a break in service of one or more years and those with 5 or more years since their last background check shall submit to the screening procedures.
 - a. All background checks conducted as a result of the implementation of this policy for a volunteer shall be requested / initiated by the Program Coordinator; and all results/reports generated as a result of such background check(s) shall be stored in a locked, secured receptacle accessible only by the Senior Minister.
 - b. No similar provisions for background checks conducted for paid staff positions are addressed herein, in that it is the policy of BUMC that such policy is currently in effect pursuant to the policy of the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) of BUMC.

All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's personnel file.

- All applications and related forms must be completed prior to service.
- In the event that a reference follow up is accomplished by phone, detailed notes of the conversation should also be included in the personnel file.

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VI. Training

All employees and volunteers are expected to attend at least one periodic educational/informative discussion seminar designed toward prevention and appropriate response to childhood abuse; sexual assault awareness; appropriate requirements of South Carolina State Law for reporting incidents of abuse, and related issues. In addition, first aid and CPR training will be made available on an annual basis for all employees and volunteers.

VII. Regular Operations for Programs and Events

1. 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 unrelated adults present. This requirement may be fulfilled with one adult in the room and a second adult with unobstructed line of sight to all children.

2. The number of workers required for each event (above the minimum of two) will be determined by the number and age of the participants and the nature of the activities. BUMC has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of workers to children whenever feasible. These ratios are goals. In some circumstances, achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of children showing up for an event.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Workers</u>	<u>Children</u>
Nursery	2	10
Sunday School	2	14
Youth Programs	2	16
Mid-Week Classes	2	14
VBS	2	14

3. Only authorized staff members/volunteers who have been properly registered, screened, and checked by BUMC will be allowed with the group.

4. Those at risk will not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision.

5. All ministry events will be carried out in locations where this policy can be implemented and with safe and age-appropriate equipment.

6. Each room or space where those at risk 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. Should the children's activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the staff person in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, and the children are properly supervised.

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VIII. Reporting and Response Plan

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall immediately do the following:

1. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child(ren), as the situation requires.
2. **IMMEDIATELY** notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative, or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
 - a. Provide written documentation concerning the incident on the designated form.
 - b. Notify the County Office of DSS. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This will be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
 - c. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
 - d. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
3. The pastor or designee will notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the victim until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) or guardian(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. [Note: If one or both of the parent(s) or guardian(s) is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parent(s) or guardian(s)]
4. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the Chair of Administrative Council, BUMC's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder), member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 362 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2004 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.
5. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff/volunteers at all times.
6. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with those at risk in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with those at risk.

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7. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the victim is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are clear or substantiated.

8. All contact with the media should be handled by the senior pastor or his or her designee. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

9. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.

IX. Special Requirements

1. Outings Away From Church Property: In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent or guardian) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be a minimum of a 1:7 staff-youth supervision ratio observed. Female staff / volunteers will supervise female youth. Male staff / volunteers will supervise male youth. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff / volunteer and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping chamber.

2. Severe Weather / Disaster Response Plan: In the event of severe weather or disaster, BUMC staff persons and volunteers will follow the direction of local law enforcement authorities. Inclement weather updates and advisories are available on television, radio and on the following websites:

National Weather - NOAA - <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/chs/skywarn.shtml>

Local TV Weather - www.wciv.com/weather

3. Regular Monitoring of Equipment to Ensure Adequacy, Safety, and Good Repair: It shall be the responsibility of the Trustees of BUMC to regularly maintain, monitor and ensure the safe operation of all equipment applicable to this policy.

4. Insurance Coverage: BUMC will maintain insurance coverage applicable to this policy.

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5. Procedures for ensuring that Non-Church Programs Involving Children and Youth that Occur on Church Property Comply with Church Policies: All non-church programs on BUMC's property will receive a copy of this policy and will be required to sign a statement in which they agree to abide by the policies herein.

X. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with those at risk, Bethel United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person 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). We take our policies to reduce the risk of abuse seriously and we are committed to their enforcement for the safety and security of all our children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who work with them.

All BUMC events are required to comply with these policies.

Each BUMC event shall be subject to review by the Program Coordinator or his / her designee.

The Safe Sanctuary Committee of BUMC shall review these policies and procedures at least every two years or when procedural changes are made.

These policies and procedures were affirmed by the Administrative Council of BUMC on November 18, 2008. This policy was developed by a Safe Sanctuary Task Force in compliance with The Resolution to Require the Establishment of a Safe Sanctuary Policy in Every United Methodist Church and in Every United Methodist Conference Event in the South Carolina Annual Conference adopted at the 2007 session of The South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Revision #	Revision Date	Revisions Made	Revised by:
Adopted	11-18-2008	Initial Issue	Safe Sanctuary Task Force

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I have read, understand, will comply with, and have received a copy of the Policy for the Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults of Bethel United Methodist Church.

Employee / Volunteer Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____