Safe Sanctuary-Child Protection Policy
Northeast United Methodist Church
Columbia, South Carolina
Adopted November 9, 2014

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 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, 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 sexual and ritual 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.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Northeast United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults and to protect workers from false accusations of abuse.

Covenant Statement

Northeast United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate 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 of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

II. Staff/Volunteer Recruitment Guidelines

A. Age

In recruiting and hiring paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. Qualified youth that are age 14 or older will be able to be employed as nursery workers under the supervision of qualified adult staff.

B. Workers with children

1. Northeast United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a staff person or regular volunteer worker for children/youth or vulnerable adults in the church unless they have completed a satisfactory background check. In the case of hiring paid staff workers, the applicant must have been a member of a verifiable Christian denomination or another United Methodist Church at least six (6) months prior to employment. Any exceptions to this must be approved by the pastor or his designee.

C. Application

Paid staff applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

D. Reference Checks

Church leaders will check three references for each paid staff worker. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. The "Children's and Youth Worker's Application Form" will be filled out by the individual requesting the reference check.

E. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and regular volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility or regularly work with children, youth or vulnerable adults, and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophiliac behavior. This shall include the South Carolina state law enforcement division criminal record check as well as the South Carolina department of social services central registry check. The individual applying for safe sanctuary is responsible for completing both required forms (SLED form and SCDSS form 3072). The

church will be responsible for fees to each agency. The results from both agencies will be mailed to the church office for final review and approval. Background checks are good for three years.

F. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or any crime against preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

G. Interview

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

H. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.

J. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The pastor and/or the Director of Family Ministries is responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

K. Required Forms and Signatures

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign “Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check” and “Participation Covenant Statement” forms as part of the application process.

III. Staff Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Northeast United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

A. Two adult rule

Minimum supervisory standards will include the ‘Two-adult rule’. This Rule is in addition to the Open Door Policy set forth at Section C below.

1. *Classroom activities* (ie, Sunday School): Teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more. If the regular assigned teachers are not available and a team of two teachers cannot be assigned to a room, then the Two Adult Rule can be satisfied with one adult in the room and a second adult with unobstructed line of sight to all children who monitors each room as long as children are present.

2. *Group activities*: Approved adults will be assigned in teams of two or more. The number of approved adults 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.

If a community group stays overnight at the church, two or more approved adults must be present. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings away from church property in Section III-H of this document.

3. *Transportation*: At least one adult per vehicle, with no more passengers than functioning seatbelts. They should travel safely together in order to maintain line of sight. The adult must have access to a cell phone. Fifteen passenger vans will not be used for transporting children.
4. During ministry events, one-on-one activities shall not be conducted "behind closed doors" or in isolated areas away from an approved adult.

B. Nursery Checkout Procedure

All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/checkout procedure as outlined in the nursery policy manual.

C. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

D. Outside Access:

There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

E. Doors and Windows:

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment and kept locked at all times. Class room and office doors that do not allow visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with windows when replacement is needed.

F. Individual Counseling:

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section IV of this policy.

G. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.) Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry

workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

H. Outings Away From Church Property:

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually). There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are away from the church property**.** If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, the children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and chaperones will be advised of issues related to water safety. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be a **1:7** staff: youth supervision ratio observed. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

I. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."

2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.

3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.

4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the Director of Family Ministries who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.

5. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

J. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

K. Training

Prior to working in the youth or children department, workers must undergo child protection safety training. Initial training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities, Church Council members and all other church employees.

L. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement

Upon receipt of the this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read the Northeast United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary-Child Protection Policy.

IV. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:

A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.

B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.

B. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:

1. Provide written documentation concerning incident on the designated Incident Report Form.

2. Contact proper Law Enforcement authorities and the county office of DSS. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)

3. 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.

4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Committee.

D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents or guardian is the alleged abuser contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)

E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church'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 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2012 Book of Disciple of The United Methodist Church must be followed.

F. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.

G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.

H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth 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 cleared or substantiated.

I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. 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.

J. 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.

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