

Safe Sanctuaries
Asbury United Methodist Church
Watertown, NY
Updated November 18, 2019

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.” (2008 The Book of Discipline paragraph 162 C)*

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)

As Disciples, we affirm Christ’s commandment to love our neighbors and serve as witnesses of Christ’s power to transform.

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. Asbury United Methodist Church recognizes the need to respond to these situations by

outlining policies and procedures that can:

1. follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers,
2. implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events,
3. educate all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods
4. have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law and
5. provide for crisis response, crisis intervention and media inquiries should an incident occur.

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.

“Cyberbullying” occurs when someone uses the Internet (including email, social networking sites, texts, websites, gaming sites, chat rooms or blogs) or other electronic means to threaten physical harm or cause psychological distress to someone else.

“Cyberstalking” includes harassing behavior that is repeated over an extended period of time for the purposes of control, manipulation, submission, and/or access to the person and his or her life.

“Emotional abuse” includes severe rejection,

humiliation and actions intended to produce fear or extreme guilt in a child. You may see a parent who verbally terrorizes the child, who continually and severely criticizes the child, or who fails to express any affection or nurturing.

“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.

“Vulnerable Adult” means a person 18 years and over; who due to age, illness or a mental or physical condition, is less able to protect himself/herself against harm or exploitation; including but not limited to physical and sexual abuse, neglect by self or other, financial or material exploitation; emotional or psychological mistreatment. Vulnerable adults are also those adults who work with children and youth who can be in a position where accusations of abuse could mistakenly arise; or, adults who have been abused either as a child or an adult.

This Safe Sanctuaries Policy represents our commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety and

growth of all within our care.

RECRUITING, SCREENING and SELECTING WORKERS and VOLUNTEERS

1. Recruiting Workers –

a. A written position description that includes the essential functions of the job shall be provided for positions in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

b. Interested workers shall complete an application that includes identification, address, employment history for the past five years, volunteer work during the past five years, experiences and skills specifically related to the position, prior church membership (if any), personal references (not related to the applicant) with complete address and contact information, waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church/charge caused by the references' responses, certification that the information provided is true and correct, voluntary disclosure of past criminal convictions and authorization to conduct a criminal background check.

2. Screening Workers

a. References provided by the applicant shall be checked by the pastor or a designated Safe Sanctuaries committee/team member. The reference check shall include questions about the applicant's ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults (depending on ministry) and leadership ability.

b. A personal interview shall be conducted.

c. A criminal background check and state central child abuse registry shall be authorized by and completed for all clergy in any active status or relationship with the Conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district

superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions, as well as paid workers, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The criminal background check shall be performed after every two (2) years of service and at the beginning of service and after a break in service of one or more years. Background check results shall be kept in a secure manner.

3. ADULT VOLUNTEERS shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church/charge for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

4. SELECTING WORKERS

a. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

b. In the event that the criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern, the pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.

c. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, shall not be accepted as paid employees or volunteers to have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity or setting.

PROCEDURES for Conducting Ministry Programs and Events for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

1. Adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth or vulnerable adults at a church/charge,

district or conference sponsored event or activity. The two-adult rule requires that regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be left unsupervised while attending a ministry program or event.

2. Adult staff and volunteers are those who are at least 18 years old and who are at least five years older than the oldest minor present, whom they are leading, ministering to or supervising. Youth (those ages 13-17) are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for the “two-adult rule”.

3. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.

4. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of the Asbury Safe Sanctuaries Policy before starting their service and shall agree to covenant with Asbury United Methodist Church, to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies.

5. All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry 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 half door configuration or an open door.

6. Written attendance records shall be kept for all ministry/events/activities involving children and youth. These records shall include at a minimum, the date and names of all participants and shall be kept until Jesus returns (perpetuity).

7. Ministry activities involving transportation and/or overnight shall require a written permission slip/form signed by a parent/guardian or other responsible adult to include

parent/guardian or other responsible adult's name, address, phone number and any child/youth special needs, allergies. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21 years of age. The ministry supervisor shall be required to keep a copy of their current license and proof of insurance card on file with the appropriate ministry program.

8. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the participants.

9. Every clergy in any active status or relationship with the Conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders registries maintained by New York State law enforcement agencies. This is done by accessing:

NY:

http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/somsSUBDirectory/search_index.jsp.

PA:

SearchCounty.aspx

10. "Social media are tools whereby effective and fruitful ministry may grow and be nurtured. Although these tools can aid us and increase the scope of contact and connection as well as the breadth of people who may be touched by our ministry offerings, social media cannot be the source or foundation of ministry. Our foundation is Jesus Christ. Social media are creations of human ingenuity that provide for us one more way to express and proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to use social media with care, consideration, intentionality, and a Christ-like spirit." Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World, Joy Thornburg Melton and Michelle L. Foster, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN; 2014. Social media guidelines should be reviewed at www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources. Look for Safe Sanctuary category.

a. Written parental/legal guardian permission is required for electronic or online communication between children, youth, vulnerable adults and church staff, church leaders.

b. Communication sent electronically (i.e. email, text messages, etc.) to children, youth, vulnerable adults by adult staff, volunteers or clergy working with them, must also be sent to their parents/legal guardians. Use group emails and group texts. A copy of the communication should also be sent to another unrelated adult leader within the Christian Education department.

c. Leaders responsible for communication regarding the youth ministries and who use the church's technology are adults following the church's procedures. Youth who do assist can be given training in the acceptable uses of the church's communication tools and online resources, however youth are not the ones in charge of it.

d. Written parental/legal guardian permission is required for photography of children, youth and vulnerable adults; and, for the images use in the church's online/social media presence. No names shall be used to identify those pictured in the images.

EDUCATION

All adults who have regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be Safe Sanctuaries trained. Topics should include but not limited to the need for Safe Sanctuaries, types and signs of abuse, recognizing signs of abuse and neglect, basic procedures in hiring/selecting workers, basic procedures in supervising workers and program participants, responding when abuse or neglect is disclosed or suspected, and reporting abuse. All adults who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have an annual orientation that includes but is not limited to the church's/ministry's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures as it applies to the ministry/event. The Upper New York Annual Conference shall make available a standardized training program to assist each charge, district, agency, and ministry to fulfill the covenant to "educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods." (2011 Safe Sanctuaries Resolution)

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Reporting shall be 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, youth 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. 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 person in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving the information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall **immediately** call;

- New York State Child Protective Services Hotline at (800) 342-3720.
- New York State Justice Center Vulnerable Adults Hotline: (855)373-2122
- New York State Office of Children and Family Services Adult Abuse Hotline: (844)697-3505

Identification information for the alleged victim and the adult responsible for their care is required for the report. The Pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report. One of Asbury's Sexual Abuse Advocates will be contacted as appropriate to the situation. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.

2. 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.

3. Every clergy in any active status or relationship with the Conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline. The Book of Discipline (paragraph 341.5) *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.*

4. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity 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

5. The person in charge of the ministry/event 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 to prevent it from being changed.

6. **NEVER** discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the church/conference and community.

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

Annual Conference Director of Communications.

2. 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.

3. 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 that 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 shall 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.

4. 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.

5. 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. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents(s)/guardians is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

6. The church/charge shall 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 may take place.

This policy was created using materials from The Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, 2008, by Joy Thornburg Melton, and "*Reducing the Risk Program*," 2008 The Book of Discipline.

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The Safe Sanctuary Policy of any United Methodist Church in the Upper New York Conference shall at least be the MIMIMUM as set by the Annual Conference.