

Statement of Policy on Child Protection and Prevention of Child Abuse
Bethlehem United Methodist Church
Advance, North Carolina

Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Advance, NC (the “Church” hereafter) remains committed to providing and maintaining a safe, nurturing environment for all children and youth under the age of eighteen (18) while in its care during events which are sponsored or co-sponsored by the Church. Implicit in the involvement of persons in ministries to children and youth are the Biblically based terms COVENANT and SHEPHERD. There is an implied covenant between the leader and the child and the child’s parents to be a good shepherd of that child, leading him or her towards an understanding of the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

A commitment to this call includes the adoption and enforcement of this Policy on child protection and prevention of child abuse. This policy applies to all clergy, leaders, volunteers, and other persons who work with children in any paid or voluntary capacity. All children’s leaders and childcare providers who regularly interact with children or youth must read, be in agreement with, sign this policy, and affirm that they have not resigned or been terminated from a position or leadership role for reasons related to misconduct.

The Church believes that appropriate personal relationships between adult leaders and children and youth of the Church foster the community of Christ. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayer), or physical caretaking (changing diapers, hygiene, etc.) are appropriate in our community of caring Christians. Care will be taken, however, that adults do not behave in a sexually inappropriate way during Church-sponsored activities, such as by demonstrating excessive physical expressions of affection or imposing such expressions upon another individual.

It is the goal of the Church that two (2) adults be present with children at all Church-sponsored activities. The Church recognizes that there will be times when an unaccompanied adult may be present with a group of children or youth or with a single child or youth. In those circumstances, if an adult must be alone with children or youth for a brief given time (such as Sunday school or children’s activity), he/she can only do so when subject to being visually observed at all times, such as through an open door or door with a window. If children and youth need to be transported it should be in groups. An unaccompanied adult will not transport an individual child in a Church-sponsored activity without the permission of the child’s parent or guardian.

Prohibited conduct includes any form of physical, emotional, or mental abuse of a child. This includes, but is not limited to, the exploitation of a child, which breaches Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship. Sexual exploitation of a child includes, but is not limited to, any interaction between a child and an adult in which the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of an adult. This may or may not include touching. Prohibited conduct may include by not be limited to the following:

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of sexual conduct towards a protected minor;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a protected minor;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an older child and a younger child;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor;
- Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision;
- Causing mental or emotional injury to a minor;
- Possessing or being under the influence of any illegal substances;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a minors' function at the Church;
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a minor;
- Carrying any type of weapon on Church property which might harm or injure a child or youth.

The first person to learn of an incident of misconduct toward a child during a Church sponsored activity (either a person witnessing or told about the incident, or the victim) should immediately report this incident to the pastor, the Director of Children, or the Director of Youth. The Church staff shall seek such professional advice as deemed necessary and shall take appropriate steps to investigate the incident and determine whether there is any validity. Any potentially valid incident shall be reported promptly to civil authorities under obligation of the law. All persons involved with the report or investigation shall keep the information in the strictest confidence. The Pastor and Chair of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be informed of any complaints that are deemed to be potentially valid. Additionally, proper documentation shall be logged by the Church staff and kept on record.

Upon accusation, the accused is entitled to prompt and fair disposition of such serious charges. It is acknowledged that Church members and ministers are subject to inquiry and discipline under the United Methodist Book of Discipline. Physical, mental, or emotional misconduct shall be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal of any Church employee, leader, volunteer, or childcare provider.

I have read and agree to comply with these policies. I also state that I have not been arrested or convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse or misconduct as defined in this Policy Statement, or resigned from or been terminated from any position for reasons relating to sexual physical, or mental abuse or misconduct, as defined in this Policy Statement.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____