



HOPEUNITED

Connecting people with God and one another.

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY & PROCEDURES

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

The General Conference of the United Methodist church, in April 1996, and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, June 2004, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in the church. This would include sexual, emotional, physical, ritual abuse, and neglect. 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 in the realm of God.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse¹ occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. Abuse is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its membership 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 churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where all people can grow safe and strong.

As disciples of Christ and upholders of the values of justice and hospitality affirmed throughout the Bible and our United Methodist tradition and doctrine, Hope United Methodist Church has developed this "Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedures" to show our unwavering commitment to providing a place where children, youth, vulnerable adults, volunteers and staff can be safe to grow in God, and become the people God intends them to be. The purpose of this policy is to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth and to help protect staff persons and volunteers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

Scriptural and Doctrinal Context

"In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." -Matthew 18:14

"Children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse" - Paragraph 162C – Methodist Social Principles 2004 Book of Discipline

¹ Ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be.

“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.”

-Baptismal Covenant II page 44, United Methodist Hymnal

Safe Sanctuaries Committee

Hope United Methodist Church shall have a Safe Sanctuaries Committee as follows:

Purpose: Hope United Methodist Church’s purpose for establishing this “Safe Sanctuary Policy & Procedure” and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Covenant: As a Christian community of faith and as a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all adult volunteers. 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 and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for operating 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. In all our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that all people will be “...surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”²

Organization: The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will meet at least twice each year for policy review, implementation of policy, establish training dates, and to prepare a report for the Church Council. The Committee will include:

- Representative of Church Council who serves as Chair
- Representative of Staff Parish Relations Committee
- Chair of Children’s Ministry Team
- Two members from the congregation (preferably members with children)
- Pastor

² “Baptismal Covenant II.” *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville, Tenn.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. 44.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

I. Scope of Policy

The “Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedure” shall apply to all persons, including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Hope United Methodist Church, or by other organizations or individuals which occur on church property. Examples include, but are not limited to: Hope Mountain, Student Ministry activities, music activities, Confirmation, Bible Studies, Senior Adult trips, mission trips, etc.

The Chairman of the Safe Sanctuaries Committee will be the Safe Sanctuaries Program coordinator, however the day-to-day administration of the “Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedures” shall fall under the ministry team leader.

The Safe Sanctuaries Committee Chair will be responsible for:

- Securely maintaining, along with the Pastor, all files related to the Safe Sanctuaries program.
- Preserving the confidentiality of all aspects of the program.
- Providing necessary training of staff persons and volunteers.
- Maintaining accountability of volunteers for adhering to the Policy and Procedures
- Providing communications concerning the Safe Sanctuaries Program to the congregation and staff persons of Hope United Methodist Church.
- Insuring the implementation of the Policy and Procedures.

II. Definitions

“**Adult**” means any person 18 years of age or older.

“**Child abuse**” means any non-accidental (or substantial risk of) injury or pattern of injuries to a child inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by a parent, guardian, caretaker, or custodian. Child abuse includes:

- Physical Abuse – Any non-accidental physical injury or injuries by any person to a child. Examples of physical abuse include, but are not limited to: beating, harmful restraint, use of a weapon or instrument, or actions that result in or could result in serious physical injury.
- Sexual Abuse - Any sexual behavior imposed on a child by any person. This involves a range of activities, including fondling or other inappropriate physical contact. It also includes exhibitionism, child pornography, and suggestive behaviors or comments.
- Emotional Abuse – The expressing of attitudes or behaviors by any person toward a child that create serious emotional or psychological damage. Examples include rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, ignoring or corrupting a child on a sustained and repetitive basis.
- Neglect - Any serious disregard by any person for a child's supervision, care, or discipline.

“Child or youth” means any person under the age of 18.

“Children’s and youth activities” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of persons (staff or volunteers) in charge of these activities. “Children’s Ministries” at Hope United Methodist Church include infant through fifth grade. “Youth Ministries” include children in grades six through twelve. “Music ministries” include children and youth from age 4 to 18.

“Church” or **“We”** means the congregation of Hope United Methodist Church.

“Conference” means the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“Staff person” means any person employed and paid by Hope United Methodist Church. These persons also fall under the personnel policies adopted and implemented by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

“Volunteer” means any person who assists in a leadership or support role, including chaperones, in children, youth, and adult ministries of Hope United Methodist Church.

“Vulnerable adult” means any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities.

III. Procedures

In order to provide as safe and secure environment as possible for ministry participants, and to minimize staff persons and volunteers vulnerability to unwarranted accusation, the following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

Screening:

1. All paid employees of the church will be required to have a criminal background check and participate in a Safe Sanctuaries Training event. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee must check out all references for paid staff.
2. All Volunteers will be required to have a criminal background check and participate in a Safe Sanctuaries Training event before they are aloud to begin their service with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.³
3. All staff and volunteers should be retrained yearly. This training may be provided by Hope United Methodist Church, district or conference training programs.
4. All paid employees will be required to obtain and maintain CPR/first aid training certification. This should be available on site, paid for by the church, and provided during regular business hours.
5. All volunteers and staff must sign a pledge to follow this policy and these procedures prior to being permitted to participate in activities with the children, youth and vulnerable adults.
6. The result of all screenings will be kept confidential.

³ These requirements are in keeping with the guidelines of the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church as adopted in June of 2004.

Supervision:

1. All volunteers who supervise directly or indirectly children, youth, or vulnerable adults are to be at least 18 years old and attending Hope for at least six months.
2. “Rule of Two”: A minimum of two adults, unrelated if possible, should be present for any church sponsored event involving children/youth. If the “rule of two” is not possible, the door to the classroom must remain open or have a glass panel. The monitor rule should also be followed.
3. The “Buddy System”: We encourage the parents, teachers, and leaders of anyone under the age of 18 to make sure the children/youth always have a ‘buddy’ who is close to their age, so that no child is ever alone while in the church buildings, or while on any activity trip, or overnight.
4. All classrooms or areas being used by children, youth or vulnerable adults should have a glass panel, preferably meeting safety regulations, in the door to allow for outside monitoring. The glass panel must not be covered and should allow vision of all spaces within the classroom area. In addition, one person should be designated a ‘monitor’ and should make unscheduled visits to check on all classrooms or areas. If a children, youth or vulnerable adult activity is held in any room not having a window in the door, then the door must remain fully open at all times.
5. Parents shall always be given advance notice and information regarding any activity in which their child/youth will be participating which deviates from, the traditional classroom instruction offered at church.
6. It is encouraged that a parent or guardian accompanies any child to the restrooms during any/all services, Welcome Table nights, and other events/activities on church premises. For all offsite activities or events children/youth should be accompanied by a parent, advisor, or approved chaperone.
7. Children and youth must be supervised at all times by a responsible adult person (at least 18 years of age and five years older than the oldest child or youth being supervised). This does not prohibit adults who are less than five years older than youth or children in an activity from participating as a ‘helper’ for the activity. This procedure DOES require the ‘Rule of Two’ be met by persons at least five years older than the children/youth in any activity.
8. On an overnight retreat where there are both male and female youth, there must be both male and female advisors. Youth will not share a bed with an adult. A minimum of three persons shall be assigned to a room, if possible. Males and females should be housed in separate rooms, with the exceptions of married couples. There will be no visiting between bedrooms unless directly supervised in a group setting with the counselors for a devotional or group discussion time.
9. The Pastor’s study and other offices should have a glass window in it, as well as any other room where pastoral counseling or consultation is common. An open door policy may also be used when necessary. Pastoral counseling is expected to be confidential in nature, but it is preferred that such sessions take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance.
10. Fire extinguishers and smoke alarms will be maintained on a regular basis by the Trustees.

Miscellaneous

- Insurance: The church will provide adequate liability insurance for their facilities in case of accident or injury to anyone participating in a church sponsored activity, as well as coverage for sexual and other forms of abuse.
- Safety and First Aid: The church shall provide and maintain first aid kits. These first aid kits will be inspected and maintained at regular intervals (monthly) by the custodial staff. Positions of first aid kits will be posted so they will be easy to find in case of an emergency.
- Travel:
Any teaching or educational experience that requires travel from the church or overnight must have the written permission, up-to-date insurance information and a permission to seek and obtain medical care form from the parent or guardian of each child/youth involved.

IV. Reporting and Response:

Under current North Carolina law, any person or institution that has cause to suspect that a child or youth is being abused or neglected is required to report it. Reporting suspected abuse is the first important step in stopping the abuse and protecting the child youth or vulnerable adult from future harm. Any suspected abuse is to be documented, reported immediately and kept strictly confidential.

Reporting Procedure:

1. Reports of discovered or suspected abuse should be made as soon as possible to the ministry team person responsible for the involved area of ministry, as well as the Pastor or the Chair of the Leadership Team.
2. Any emergency needs of the victim of the suspected abuse must be addressed immediately.
3. The person suspected of the abuse must be removed from contact from the victim and from leadership during the impending investigation.
4. The parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim will be notified and steps will be taken to insure the victim's safety until the parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive.
5. The proper law enforcement or social service agency, as required by North Carolina law, shall be notified of any substantial abuse or neglect. Contact should be made with the Henderson County Sheriff's office and the Henderson County Department of Social Services.
6. Full cooperation will be provided to any investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
7. Supportive care will be given to all persons involved to include the victim of the suspected abuse (and his/her family) and the person suspected of the abuse (and his/her family) to restore all persons to wholeness.
8. The Pastor or Chair of the Leadership Team to whom the incident has been reported must immediately fill out an incident report with all available details. Report forms will be kept in the church office. The District Superintendent (DS) must be notified within 24 hours. It will then be the decision of the DS, Pastor, and other persons listed

above as to the appropriate action to be taken. The DS will have final local authority in the matter.

Required Documentation of an Allegation of Abuse:

1. Name of the person observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including date, time and place, and any action taken by this person.
2. Name, age and date of birth of the victim of the suspected abuse.
3. Any statement made by the victim of the suspected abuse.
4. Name of the person suspected of the abuse, the date, time and place of any conversation and any statement made.
5. Any action taken (ex: suspension of the person suspected of the abuse).
6. Date and time of call to victim of the suspected abuse parent(s)/guardian(s) and content of the conversation.
7. Date and time of call to local law enforcement/Department of Human Services, name of person spoken to, content of conversation and any case number assigned.
8. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding the incident.

V. Public Response Plan

The Pastor or a designated spokesperson will handle dissemination of information to staff persons, media, and congregation after consulting with appropriate authorities including the Director of Communications for the WNCC. No one else will be authorized to speak or give out any information concerning a case of alleged abuse. A clear position statement of the church's policy and procedures to safeguard children, youth and vulnerable adults will be ready for release. At all times the privacy and confidentiality of all persons involved will be strictly maintained.

VI. Conclusion

In all our ministries with children and youth, Hope United Methodist Church, is committed to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed in the way that leads to life eternal.”⁴

⁴ “Baptismal Covenant II.” *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville, Tenn.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. 44.