

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

**For Ministries with Children, Youth, and
Vulnerable Adults**

Port Orchard United Methodist Church
725 Kitsap Street
Port Orchard, Washington 98366

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Booklet belongs to:

Print Name

Date

Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The congregation of the United Methodist Church of Port Orchard is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers who participate in the ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The attached *Safe Sanctuaries Policies for Ministries to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults* reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

As a participant in this congregation, we want you to know that you are welcome to discuss with a pastor of this congregation, in a confidential setting, your experience, if any, as a survivor of abuse.

Definitions:

Children and youth are considered 18 and younger or participating as a youth (i.e. pre H.S. graduation)

Vulnerable adult: elderly, frail, developmentally disabled, dependent

1. Introduction

Theological Statement

As Christians we are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. From our ancient Hebrew roots, we receive a legacy of justice and mercy. Hospitality and generosity were essential elements of the covenant between the people and their God. Holy places of worship were treasured as places of safety and harmony.

The New Testament continues to affirm our covenant relationship with God and with the whole community of faith. We are called to live just and generous lives, following the great commandments set forth by Jesus Christ. Jesus clearly taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith, in worship, in loving nurture and encouraged to grow in their own faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children and vulnerable adults find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. As a Christian community, we must live up to that responsibility with secure and open hands and hearts.

We must also recognize that we live in a world where there are risks and uncertainties. An open and hospitable Christian community will always, to some degree, be a vulnerable community. Yet it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risks by following a thorough and practical policy of prevention.

Your church leaders are committed to training and supporting our children, youth, parents, vulnerable adults, and all volunteer leaders in understanding and following the safety procedures and policies outlined in this booklet.

May God bless all of our efforts to be the faith community Jesus Christ has called us to be.

Portions of this statement are directly from *Safe Sanctuaries* by Joy Thornburg Melton; Discipleship Resources, 1998.

2. Policies

Background checks

All paid staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are required to complete a background check. All paid staff and volunteer drivers who minister with our protected groups are required to complete a national background check.

If the background check shows an individual has been convicted of a crime against a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, he or she will be denied the position of working with these populations. In the case of the possession, sale or misuse of drugs or alcohol in the past seven years, he or she may be denied the position or may work under closer supervision of the pastor or designated church leadership; this will be decided at the discretion of the pastor in cooperation with church leadership.

Additionally, new hire paid staff (outside of clergy who are appointed by the Conference) will be required to fill out a standard application form which includes documentation of their work history for the past ten years and which requests personal references with complete addresses. The form will also include consent to verify all information provided, a waiver of any right to confidentiality only as it relates to the hiring authority and of any right to pursue damages against the church caused by the reference's response, and certification that the information is true and correct. Confidentiality of information will be maintained by members of the hiring authority staff who have a need to know/need to access any applicant's information.

Prevention

The church's volunteer and paid staff should be encouraged to protect all those in their care from potential abuse by being:

- Cognizant of potentially abusive situations.
- Informed and watchful for signs and symptoms of abuse.
- Supportive of the church's abuse policy.
- Willing to attend orientation and/or training in abuse prevention.
- Aware that we all need appropriate human touch and that trouble is caused when touch is not appropriate.
- Aware of their responsibility to report observed abuse to the pastor. (See Conference policy on reporting abuse at the end of this policy).

Preventative safety procedures For working with children and youth

The following procedures protect both the vulnerable person from abuse and the volunteer from false accusations of abuse:

- Have two unrelated adults (or an adult and older youth as determined by the church leadership) in every classroom or youth group meeting.
- During Sunday morning, at least one “rover” or a Sunday morning greeter will be available in the hallways of the Sunday school area in the event that classrooms have only one teacher present. The “rover” can be available if the teacher should need help in case of emergencies or if students leave their classrooms to pick up supplies or to use the bathrooms.
- If only one adult is present, the room door should be kept open; a childproof gate will be used if needed to keep very young children in the room.
- Use safe touching practices: ask first; use firm and clear touch, not suggestive touch; pat shoulders and heads, not chests and bottoms (bathing suit area); hug from the side; discourage children above the age of nursery care from sitting on laps.
- Single night over-nights with youth will be staffed by a minimum of two adults who will remain awake at least until it is verified that all youth are soundly sleeping, even if this requires the adult to remain awake all night.
- Students and leaders will use changing areas at pools and showers at separate times so that the privacy of neither the student nor leader is violated.
- Youth leaders and teachers will be a minimum of 4 years older than the students they supervise. Young Adults who are less than 4 years the upper age limit of our youth group are not permitted at youth functions. The Port Orchard United Methodist Church will work to establish programs and activities for our young adults that will help them transition into adulthood.
- Drivers during church programs will have been legally licensed drivers for at least 5 years, and will carry their own insurance sufficient to provide coverage for all persons in their vehicle. Should the church acquire a vehicle volunteers must meet all state and church requirements for driving and will be registered with the Church’s insurance as an authorized driver for the church.

Classroom/program dismissal

Children in fourth grade and younger will be collected from their classrooms by their parent(s) or other responsible adult. These adults will have been listed as people who are authorized to pick up each child. Registration forms for Sunday school students include space to specify if there are persons who are legally restrained from having contact with the child. Parents will re-register their children every fall and will specify who, besides them, are authorized to pick up their child.

Children are not to be left alone

- Children will not be left unattended in the classrooms.
- If there is an emergency and the teacher must leave the classroom, the rover/greeter will be asked to step in and supervise until the teacher returns.
- When a child needs to leave the classroom for any reason, the teacher will ask another child of the same sex to accompany him or her. Teachers will provide students who need to leave a clear set of boundaries for their travel to and from the classroom.
- Parents are asked not to leave their children at the classroom if the teacher is not present.
- When only one child or children of the same family remain and a parent is late, the teacher and

the child/children will go together to look for the parent.

Nursery Safety

The nursery is staffed by paid staff members who are experienced in caring for small children. These staff members will maintain certification in infant/child CPR, AED and in First Aid.

The door to the nursery is to remain closed or gated at all times to help keep the children safe inside, but the wall has a window through which parents may observe their children. At least until the child/children and adults are well known by the nursery staff, the children are to be signed in by their parent(s) or other designated adult and will be greeted by the nursery attendant/teacher. There is a system in place that will enable the nursery staff to alert parents in the building if they are needed.

Advance notice to and involvement of parents

It is our practice and policy to give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the events in which their children will be participating. This notification policy will include programs at the church or away from the church and will include overnight programs at the church. This notification will usually take place through email, letters, phone calls and posting in the Sunday bulletin. If parental approval is required, the necessary information will be provided with the advance notice. When the event requires transportation away from the church or includes overnight stay, full information about destination and times will be shared in advance in similar ways. An open-door policy, allowing parents access to programs and events at any time, will help keep lines of communication open. To minimize program disruption parents are asked to limit their visits and /or notify the staff in advance that they intend to visit.

First Aid/CPR training

Paid Youth staff and Nursery staff are required by these policies to hold current certifications in First Aid, CPR (and AED training when the church acquires an AED). The church will encourage, on an annual basis, all church volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as ushers and all paid staff, to receive or renew First Aid, AED/CPR training.

Staff identification

Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and ushers will wear standardized badges identifying them and their respective programs. The badge should include the United Methodist Church logo, the individual's name, position and program area. Any other adult, youth or child encountered in the hallways may be asked by any of these staff about their reasons for being present.

Safe Sanctuaries training for staff, adults and helpers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults

Volunteers working with our protected groups are required to attend a training session in which they are informed of the church's policies for the prevention of child and other abuse, and are taught about the various forms of abuse and how to recognize signs of abuse. The training will include procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults; appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse; and details of the state laws regarding abuse. At the end of the orientation/training,

all will be required to sign a covenant to abide by the church's policies and procedures. Trainings will be offered annually. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to attend annually, required to attend once every three years. Alternate means of acquiring the information will be provided if necessary. All members and participants in the church are encouraged and welcome to attend these training sessions even though they may not be directly involved with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Dealing with reported incidents of sexual or physical abuse by paid or volunteer staff

Reporting is important. Our children are our greatest resource and, as the Church, we have an obligation before God to do all within our power to provide physical safety in our programs, as well as quality content and leadership. This applies to vulnerable adults as well. Reporting is, at present, the best hope that the abuse will stop and that wholeness and shalom might be restored.

Any paid or volunteer staff who either makes the observation of abuse or who receives information from a child, youth, or vulnerable developmentally disabled/adult, dependent person (or his/her guardian), will contact the pastor. If the pastor is not immediately available one of the retired pastors in the congregation may be contacted. If one of the pastors is suspected, contact will be made with the chair of Staff-Parish Relations Committee who will then report to the District Superintendent. The suspected incident should not be discussed with anyone else. **Confidentiality is important** for the well-being of the victim and others involved.

Conference Policy on reporting abuse:

Reporting of Alleged Abuse

Obligation: Any individual supervising or otherwise caring for children, youth and vulnerable adults shall report alleged abuse to the Pastor, Christian Education/Youth Director, or other appropriate church authority (which will include our retired pastors).

Documentation: Alleged Abuse Report Forms will be available at training, in the church office or from program coordinators. Administrative Response to the Alleged Abuse Report Forms will be used to document actions taken.

Response: The authority receiving an abuse report shall respond according to the individual situation using options provided on the Alleged Abuse Report Form.

Support: The authority receiving an abuse report shall support the victim of abuse including referral to appropriate professional resources.

Staff Member or Frequent Volunteer at Port Orchard United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policies Covenant

(Please answer each of the following questions:)

As a staff member or frequent volunteer/driver of the Port Orchard United Methodist Church, do you agree to:

1. Observe and abide by all church policies regarding working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults?
Yes No

2. Report promptly abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?
Yes No

3. Complete, sign, and submit a national background check form?
Yes No

I have participated in a training event or have read and understand the training materials provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment.

I have read and will retain this *Safe Sanctuaries Policies for Ministries to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults*, and I agree to observe and abide by these policies.

Signature

Date: _____

Print full name

Original – maintained in church files
Copy – provided to individual signing the form

Infrequent Volunteer at Port Orchard United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policies Covenant

(Please answer each of the following questions:)

As an infrequent volunteer with children, youth and vulnerable adults of the Port Orchard United Methodist Church, do you agree to:

1. Observe and abide by all church policies regarding working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults?
Yes No

2. Report promptly abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?
Yes No

I have participated in a training event or have read and understand the training materials provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment.

I have read and will retain this *Safe Sanctuaries Policies for Ministries to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults*, and I agree to observe and abide by these policies.

Signature

Date: _____

Print full name

Original – maintained in church files
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