

Duke Memorial United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

BACKGROUND

In April, 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. 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.

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” (§ 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 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 Resolution 65, *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church*, 2004, pp. 201-202. Copyright 2004, The United Methodist Publishing House, used by permission.)

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

APPLICATION

This Policy applies to all paid and volunteer workers with children and youth (anyone under the age of 18 years). This policy applies to all children's and/or youth activities sponsored by the church, regardless of whether the activity occurs on church property. This includes activities where the church organizes a group of children and/or youth to go to an activity sponsored by someone else.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

All applicants for paid positions in the church (including the Weekday School and Parents' Morning Out program) will be required to consent in writing to a criminal background check and reference check (Appendix A).

All volunteers who work with children and/or youth in an ongoing capacity will be required to consent in writing to a criminal background check (Appendix A).

No individual with a documented history of violent or sexual abuse will be permitted to work with children and/or youth, whether in a paid or volunteer position.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Visibility: It is our goal that at least two workers (paid or volunteer) shall be present at all church activities attended by children and/or youth. In a regularly scheduled church school class, the class may be led by one teacher, provided the room where the class is held has an unobstructed window or other opening, permitting those outside the room to see inside, or the door to the room remains open during the class or session. For other children's and/or youth activities occurring in the church building that are led by only one worker, the door to the room where the activity occurs must be left open, and there must be others in the building at the same time.

For all children's and/or youth activities that do not occur on church property, two workers (paid or volunteer) shall be present.

Church Nursery/School Procedure: Each child to be left in the Church Nursery/school from infants through first grade shall be signed in by a parent, grandparent, or authorized adult. The sign-in sheet provides information pertaining to the care of the child. The child must also be signed out of the Nursery/School by a parent, grandparent, or authorized adult on the same form.

Requirement for Volunteers New to the Church: A volunteer must be active in the life of the church for several continuous months before working with children and/or youth in an unsupervised capacity.

Counseling: A pastor providing counseling may meet in private with a child or youth while another staff member or adult is present in the building. The child or youth will be advised of the additional adult's presence in the building.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

All current paid and volunteer workers with children and/or youth will be required to complete paperwork required by their position within a given timeline. If they do not do so, they will be contacted and asked if they wish to continue to serve and given a timeline to complete their paperwork. If they do not wish to complete the process, they will be removed from the position. In order to be non-discriminatory, all workers must complete the paperwork and process, regardless of how long they have been working with children and/or youth at the time this Policy is adopted.

Individuals who become paid or volunteer workers with children and/or youth in the future must complete that paperwork prior to working with children and/or youth.

All forms will be kept confidential in a secure filing cabinet in the Senior Pastor's office. Only the paid staff members charged with assisting in the process will have access to these forms.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Training to include information on the prevention and reporting of child abuse will be provided for all current paid and volunteer workers. This training will be required of all paid and volunteer workers, including those already working with children and/or youth when this Policy is enacted. Workers will be given a timeline to complete this training. If they do not do so within that timeline, they will be removed from the position. In the future, all who work with children and/or youth will be required to complete training.

RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED ABUSE

Anyone who suspects there has been an incident of child and/or youth abuse or neglect of a child or youth shall comply with all State law reporting requirements through the following procedure:

1. A timely report to a paid member of the ministry staff of Duke Memorial UMC or the Duke Memorial Weekday School Director will be made by someone with firsthand knowledge of the nature of the report. This initial report will be kept confidential.
2. Documentation of the alleged abuse will be made by completing the Suspected Child Abuse Form within 24 hours of the incident or suspicion (*Appendix B*).

3. No individual shall conduct their own investigation or interview the child and/or youth, or other individuals pertaining to the suspicion.
4. No individual shall make any statement to any member of the press or any media outlet. Any statement will be issued by the congregation's attorney or their representative, only.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

A pastor of DMUMC or his/her representative will report the incident to the Durham County Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services at 919-560-8424. After normal business hours and on weekends, the social worker on call may be paged by calling 911. This notification will be made within 24-48 hours of the initial report.

If an allegation is made against a member of our congregation or staff, the senior pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee chair will promptly notify the District Superintendent and the congregation's attorney.

--Adopted by the Administrative Board of Duke Memorial UMC on December 19, 2006

Appendix A
Criminal Background Check Form



Background check release form.pdf

Appendix B
Duke Memorial United Methodist Church Suspected Child Abuse Form

Date of Incident _____ Time of Incident _____

Location of Incident: _____

Description of scene, marks, etc. that raised concern:

Names of individuals involved

Adult(s): _____

Minor(s): _____

Others (witnesses, etc.): _____

Reported by (name): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Report submitted to (name, position): _____

Date and description of action taken: _____
