

# Safe Sanctuary Policy

## GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **Purpose**

To ensure the protection and well-being of every child, every youth, and every adult who participates in the life of Grace United Methodist Church.







# Safe Sanctuaries Policy

For children from Birth through the Completion of Twelfth Grade

## **I. Introduction**

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, 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 invitation- 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 and sexual exploitation, and abuse."

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 it appears to be increasing. Many annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their 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 *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission, [pp.384-386])

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

### **A. Purpose**

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

### **B. Statement of Covenant**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Grace United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as GRACE) pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. 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 reporting 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.

### **C. Conclusion**

In all of our ministries with children, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "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 United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44)*

## **II. Definitions**

### **1. Child Abuse**

Child Abuse shall be defined as **any** act, intentional or not, committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, Caregiver, Sunday school teacher, Pastor, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a child's welfare, physical, spiritual or mental health. We recognize child abuse may fall into four categories:

#### **a) Physical Abuse**

Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Instances of physical abuse include any physical act of undue force such as assault with a knife, strap or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from

being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped or thrown. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.

b) **Sexual Abuse**

Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.

c) **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.

d) **Neglect**

Not hearing or addressing a minor's basic needs for health, welfare or safety resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment:

- Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
- Abandonment
- Refusal to seek treatment for illness
- Inadequate supervision
- Health hazards in the home, school, or church
- Ignoring a minor's need for contact, affirmation, stimulation and nurture

### **III. Standards**

#### **A. Minimum Age**

The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the Authority Figure's role. GRACE adopts the following standards for Authority Figures and Assistants.

## 1. Authority Figures

Authority Figures are defined as the primary leaders of a youth or children's activity. Examples may include, but are not limited to "youth counselors," "Sunday school teachers," "children's choir directors," and "children's work area coordinators."

### a) Minimum Age to Lead Youth

To work with youth (grades 6th and above), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 20 years of age.

### b) Minimum Age to Lead Children

To work with children (infant-5th grade), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

## 2. Assistants

Assistants are persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and act at the direction of the Authority Figure, including volunteers.

### a) Minimum Age to Assist with Children

A minimum of 12 years of age and in the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

### b) Minimum Age to Assist with Youth

A minimum of 18 years of age and graduated High School

### c) Competence

In the judgment of a GRACE staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

## B. Two Adult Rule

Two authority figures are to be present during all church sponsored programming with children and youth. All age minimums must be observed and all adult/child ratios must be followed. (See III. C.) When it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, an additional adult must serve as a floater **with no other responsibility** with visual and physical access to all areas.

While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas.

This can include, but is not limited to:

- An automobile while taking a child home
- A classroom with windowless/locked doors
- A cabin at camp



## **C. Arrival and Departure**

Children who are preschool through the third grade will be signed in and out by a parent (not an older sibling) and will be picked up by that same parent ***unless other arrangements have been made in writing.***

## **D. Emergency**

### **1. Contacts**

In the event of emergency, the following people are to be called in this order, as needed:

- a) **911 / Emergency Services**
- b) **Pastor (no exceptions)**
- c) **Parent/Guardian/Emergency Contact**

For this reason, a working telephone will be available in the children and youth areas at all times.

### **2. First Aid and CPR**

At least one adult in every age grouping shall be trained in CPR and First Aid. If no volunteers are available with this training, the church shall be responsible for providing this training or the cost of sending a volunteer or group of volunteers to that training or renewal.

## **E. Medical**

### **1. Information**

Each child and youth will have on file a current emergency medical form. Visitors will need to provide *as much emergency medical information* as possible.

### **2. Medication**

No medication will be given to the children except by parent.

### **3. Health**

#### a) **Participation**

Children brought to the program must be free of fever, vomiting, diarrhea and/or other contagious diseases.

b) **Cleanliness**

State mandated procedures will be followed for diaper change, hand washing, toy cleanliness, and food preparation.

c) **Restrooms**

Children from preschool to third grade will be supervised to the bathroom at all times.

**F. Adult to Child Ratios**

**1. Nursery/Child Care**

An adult is defined as an Authority Figure/Assistant who is also at least 18 years of age. Adults must meet the Authority Figure/Assistant guidelines. (See Section III Part A.)

Infants	2:5 (additional adult for each additional 1-3)
Toddlers	2:8 (additional adult for each additional 1-4)
Preschool	2:15 (additional adult for each additional 1-7)
Elementary	2:20 (additional adult for each additional 1-10)
Youth	2:25 (additional adult for each additional 1-10)

**2. Participants with Special Needs**

In the judgment of GRACE staff, and in consultation with the parent, the above ratios may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of a participant's special needs.

**G. Rooming**

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or other similar situation, there must be two adults. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth.

**H. Youth and Children's Volunteer Covenant**

All volunteer and paid staff of Sunday School, youth groups, nursery care or any other program where children and/or youth are being directly supervised shall be required to fill out a Youth and Children's Volunteer Covenant.

**1. Cost**

There will be no cost to filling out the covenant.

## **2. Privacy**

The Youth and Children's Volunteer Covenant will be shared with the Pastor and the Safe Sanctuaries Board. All results shall be held in absolute confidence.

## **3. Failure**

Persons with answers that exclude them from serving as an Authority Figure shall be politely refused and offered pastoral care.

## **4. Exceptions**

Exceptions must be approved by a 100% vote of the pastor, a unanimous Safe Sanctuaries Board, a unanimous SPRC, the District Superintendent, and the resident Bishop.

# **I. Background Checks**

Background checks are mandatory for all volunteer and paid staff of Sunday School, youth groups, nursery care or any other program where children and/or youth are being directly supervised.

## **1. Cost**

The cost of the background check shall be paid by the church.

## **2. Privacy**

The results of the background check will be made known to the Pastor and the Safe Sanctuaries Board. All results shall be held in absolute confidence.

## **3. Failure**

Persons with background results that exclude them from serving as an Authority Figure shall be politely refused and offered pastoral care.

### **a) Felony conviction**

Felony convictions shall preclude participation as an authority figure or assistant.

### **b) DUI conviction**

A single DUI conviction does not prevent a person from serving as an authority figure. However, no person with a DUI conviction **within the last ten years** may drive any vehicle containing GRACE youth or children other than his or her own. This is possible by God's grace and our firm belief in the power of redemption.

c) **Misdemeanor Convictions**

Any person convicted of misdemeanor offenses shall be disqualified from serving as an authority figure or assistant at the discretion of the Safe Sanctuaries Advisory Board.

**4. Exceptions**

Exceptions must be approved by a 100% vote of the pastor, a unanimous Safe Sanctuaries Board, a unanimous SPRC, the District Superintendent, and the resident Bishop.

**J. Six Month Rule**

All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been in regular attendance (at least 3 church activities per month on average) and active participants for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. **Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with another trained adult.** The Safe Sanctuaries Board may consider exceptions to this rule on a case by case basis.

**K. Policy Instruction**

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session and to sign a new participation statement kept on file at the church.

**L. Written Record of Lapses and Violations**

A written record of violation of this policy will be kept on file by the Church Business Manager. Authority figures are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible. When a ratio is not met or a standard is not followed, a written report shall be filed in the office.

**IV. Conflict and Precedence**

**A. United Methodist Church Discipline**

The requirements of any and all United Methodist discipline or Memphis Annual Conference policies affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such discipline or policies and the procedure outlined in this document, said discipline or policies shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. Further, this policy is

subject to all United Methodist Resolutions relating to employment and child abuse.

## **B. Federal and State Law**

The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment and child abuse.

## **V. Reporting Abuse/Alleged Abuse**

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Department of Human Services and the Senior Pastor.

In the event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Senior Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Senior Pastor, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC).

The SPRC may be reached by contacting the church office at 6125 Blandville Road. If the abuse reported has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Senior Pastor and/or SPRC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

## **VI. Safe Sanctuaries Board**

The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consist of four members made up of two classes of two that will each serve two-year terms. At least one member of each class will be elected from within the Staff Parish Relations Committee. Any At-Large Members will be appointed by the Lay Leadership Committee. All Safe Sanctuaries Board Members will be listed by class annually in the Report of Committee on Lay Leadership.

Its responsibilities include:

- Educating Authority Figures, Assistants and all employees about the policy
- Answering questions about the policy
- Ensuring compliance with the policy
- Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances
- Assisting, as needed, with investigations
- Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed
- Evaluating board function
- Other duties as needed

## **VII. Revisions and Amendments**

### **A. Draft Date**

### **B. Approved**

### **C. Revised**

#### **1. [EXAMPLE] Added CPR | 4-28-2009**

Under Section III (Standards) Part D (Emergency Procedures) ADDED Paragraph 2 (First Aid and CPR) to require CPR and basic Red Cross First Aid capability for Authority Figures or Assistants. Also establishes church as party responsible for any subsequent costs for training.

#### **2. Description | Date**

Details and reasoning