

Ocean View United Methodist Church

8400 East Oak Island Drive
Oak Island, NC 28465

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Revised February 2019

Approved by Church Council March 12, 2019

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Safe Sanctuaries Policy

In April of 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" (P162C). Tragically, churches haven't 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] occurs 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. 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 *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2000*, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission.)

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

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.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and 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 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 our workers with 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.

Conclusion

In all our ministries this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each individual will be "surrounded by steadfast love,...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal (From Congregational Pledge 2, Baptismal Covenant TI, in the United Methodist Hymnal)

Policy Application

This Policy applies to all paid and volunteer workers. Paid workers are defined as any staff member – whether full or part time. Volunteer workers are those individuals who work with our youth on an unpaid basis. Youth is anyone younger than age 18.

This policy further applies to any adult, youth or child who is in need of community services because he/she is unable to take care of himself/herself against significant harm or exploitation; May have a learning disability, mental illness, physical disability, visual or hearing impairment, or limitations associated with advanced age.

Policy Outline and Procedures

I. Worker Selection (Screening Process for all paid and volunteer workers)

- A. Application – all paid and volunteer workers shall complete an Employment Application and a Criminal Records Check Form. (*Appendix I and III*).
- B. No volunteer will be accepted for work with children, youth, or adult until the volunteer has been active in the life of the church for at least six months.

- C. Personal Interview – All Paid Workers shall be interviewed and approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee. Unpaid volunteers may be interviewed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee or their designee prior to hiring, or beginning work with youth.
- D. All paid and volunteer workers will meet with the leader of the area to be assigned, for example – VBS or lead teachers of youth prior to assuming any position. The Application and Background Screening Forms will be discussed during this interview.
- E. Reference Checks will be conducted on all paid and volunteer workers to determine their suitability to work with Youth. Information from each reference Check will be documented and kept confidential (*Appendix II*).
- F. All volunteers and paid staff shall be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth under their care

II. Preventative Measures

- A. Visibility – All classrooms used by Youth will have a window in the door or a half-door, which can be left partially open in order to, provide visibility into the classroom space. If it is necessary to use a space which does not meet this requirement, there will be two workers, one of which must have a Safe Sanctuary Certification, present at all times.
- B. This rule does not apply to Pastoral counseling sessions, which may be conducted behind closed doors.
- C. Overnight and Day Trip Rules – Youth chaperones must be at least 23 years old and members or participants in the active life of our congregation for at least 6 months. There will be a minimum of two approved personnel present at all times, more as conditions warrant. Parents of youth who do not meet these criteria cannot chaperone, but are welcome to visit the event prior to leaving their youth with approved personnel.
- D. Church Nursery Procedure – Each child to be left in the Church Nursery shall be signed into the Nursery by a parent, grandparent or guardian. This Sign-In Sheet provides information pertaining to the care of the child. The child must also be signed out of the Activity by a parent, grandparent or guardian on this same form. A similar procedure will be followed for children who participate in Children's Church. (*Appendix IV*).
- E. Two-Adult Policy- Whenever possible, two adults will be present during any activity or interaction with children or youth. During Sunday School, room doors without windows shall remain open and an adult leader shall travel between classrooms, checking on classes with only one teacher.

III Program Implementation

- A. All current paid and volunteer workers will be required to complete the 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 shall not be allowed to continue to work with youth. In order to be non-discriminatory, ALL paid and volunteer workers must complete the paperwork and process.
- B. Once this Policy has been implemented, all workers will be given the required paperwork at the time of recruitment or training. Forms will be completed and submitted according to the stated deadline.
- C. All Forms will be kept confidential and locked in a locking file in the Administrative Assistant's Office. Only those charged with responsibility for the process will have access to these forms.

IV. Responding to and Reporting Suspected Abuse

- A. Responding: In all instances of suspicion of Child Abuse the following procedures will be followed:
 - 1. A timely report to a Pastor of OVUMC or the chairman of the Trustees will be made by someone with firsthand knowledge of the nature of the report.
 - 2. Documentation of the alleged abuse will be made in the form of a completed Suspected Child Abuse Form within 24 hours of the incident or suspicion (*Appendix 1¹*).
 - 3. **No member of the staff – paid or volunteer shall conduct their own investigation** or interview the child or other individuals pertaining to the suspicion.
 - 4. No individual shall speak on behalf of the church in any statement to the media. This statement will be issued by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, or his/her representative, only.
- A. Reporting: In all instances of suspicion of Child Abuse the following procedures shall be followed:
 - 1. A Pastor of OVUMC or his representative will report the incident to Brunswick County Department of Social Services, Abuse and Neglect Division at (910) 253-2077. This notification will be made within 48 hours of report.
 - 2. If an allegation is made against a member of our congregation or a staff member, the Pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee will notify the District Superintendent and the congregation's attorney.

V. Safeguards of Training and Education

A. The designee of the Security Team will provide Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Training for all paid and volunteer workers on an annual basis. This training is mandatory. First Aid Training may be offered as well.

If a worker begins working with Youth during the course of the year, individual training will be required of these individuals and provided by the designee of the Security Team.