

SUNRISE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY PROGRAM POLICY

PREAMBLE:

When the crowd tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.” Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for the Sunrise UMC ministries that deal with children, youth and vulnerable adults. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected. Often abuse occurs in settings where children, youth or vulnerable adults should have been able to feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and most sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.

It is the purpose of this policy to first of all protect the children that come to us, the second is to protect our staff both paid and volunteer from potential allegations of abuse, and third to limit the extent of legal liability of our church.

Following is a plan that will include various areas of the issue: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response plan.

OUR COVENANT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

As a Christian community of faith we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that provide an environment for spiritual growth and for safety of all children, youth in our care, as well as those who work with children and youth in this ministry. We will follow the measures of this policy in the recruitment and selection of paid staff as well as volunteer workers with children and youth. We will implement the operational procedures of this policy. We will train and educate our staff and volunteer workers in the use of these policies. We will define and follow procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to state law. We will define and follow procedures for handling an allegation of abuse among staff or workers. We will be prepared to respond to media interest if an incident occurs.

SAFE SANCTUARY – POLICY DEFINITIONS:

“Abuse” is defined as a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child/youth/vulnerable adult. Abuse includes non-accidental:

- Physical Abuse – Any act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. 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 – The sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives between an young person and someone older and more powerful, against whom the child, youth or vulnerable adult is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts. This involves a range of activities, including fondling or other inappropriate physical contact; it also includes exhibitionism, child pornography, and suggestive behaviors or comments.
- Verbal Abuse – Any verbal act towards a child, youth or vulnerable adult that is intended to humiliate, degrade or threaten.
- Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse is exposing a child, youth or vulnerable adult to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty and sending messages that they are worthless, unloved or undeserving of loved. All of which can lead to serious emotional or psychological damage.
- Neglect –Any act of omission that endangers the health, welfare, and/or safety. As well as withholding food, medical care, affection and/or education.

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

“Child” means any person under the age of 18. For the purposes of this Policy, this definition includes vulnerable adults. “Youth” are a subgroup of children and are comprised of those who are in grades 6-12.

“Children/Youth activities” means any activity or program in which children/youth are under supervision of persons (staff or volunteers) in charge of these activities.

“Church” means Sunrise United Methodist Church.

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

“District Superintendent” means the person appointed as District Superintendent of the Raleigh District.

“Person in charge of a children/youth activity” means the church volunteer or employed staff person responsible for the conduct of this activity, such as a Sunday School or V.B.S. teacher, nursery worker, choir director, youth leader.

“Persons required to report child abuse” means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals; school administrators, teachers and nurses; social services workers; day-care center workers; mental health professionals; peace and law enforcement officers.

“Safe Sanctuary Coordinator” shall be of the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. They shall serve no longer than their term on the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

“Staff person” means any person employed by Sunrise United Methodist Church.

“Volunteer” means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children/youth activities under the supervision of a person in charge of such activities/events.

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

“We” means the Sunrise United Methodist Church.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 1 – SCREENING PROCEDURES:

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind assuring the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Hired staff, who have regular direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults, shall be required to fill out an application. The application process includes an appropriate background check that will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. If anything comes back on the background check then the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will be brought in as a consultant.

Volunteers who have regular direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be required to have an appropriate background check performed prior to beginning volunteer duties. The background check results will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. If anything comes back on the background check the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will be brought in as a consultant to review the check and decide if the individual is able to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

North Carolina statewide background checks shall be run on potential volunteers living in North Carolina for greater than seven years. Potential volunteers which have lived in North Carolina for less than seven years will be required to have both state and nationwide background checks.

Vehicle background checks will be required for any person wishing to transport children or youth.

A volunteer must be a regular attendee of Sunrise UMC for three months prior to serving in any volunteer capacity. Non-members that are volunteering must serve with screened members.

No person shall work with children, youth or vulnerable adults if any of the following criteria are found on the background check:

- Any registered sex offender
- Conviction of or plea of no contest to any felony.
- Conviction of or plea of no contest to any misdemeanor that indicates the volunteer may pose a threat to the integrity or safety of the church environment.

- More than one DWI.
- A pattern of criminal charges, even if the charges were dismissed, which cause concern that the volunteer may pose a threat to the integrity or safety of the church environment.

Staff and volunteers must have a signed Safe Sanctuary Covenant on file with the church.

Staff and volunteer background checks, Safe Sanctuary Covenants and training must be updated every two years.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 2 – SUPERVISION:

The second step for providing a holy place of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults is conscientious and intentional supervision. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth or vulnerable adults and to protect staff and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

1. Training is a requirement for all staff persons and volunteers in charge of activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. Such activities include, but are not limited to: Preschool, Sunday School, Children’s Worship, Youth Group, VBS, Youth Bible studies, youth or children’s trips. The Sunrise UMC Children and Youth Minister, in cooperation with the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator, is responsible for ensuring that training is provided to the appropriate persons and all volunteers have received training and had a background check prior to leading in ministry.

Training for new volunteers will be held each fall. Renewal training will be held every other year for returning volunteers.

2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the “two-adult rule”. The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. In recognition of the importance of familial service and the covenant of marriage, Sunrise UMC shall allow related couples to serve with one another. We believe that it is important for children and youth to see healthy families and marriage serving God. In the case that two adult volunteers are not available, an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms. At least one of these adults must have training in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.
3. No person in charge of children or youth activities shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST five (5) years older than the children/youth with whom he/she is working. Youth will not be able to participate in activities with the youth until four (4) years after graduation.

4. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door, a half-door installed and opened, or in the case of a solid door, the door shall be left open. All windows must remain uncovered and all children must be able to be seen through the windows.

5. Registration materials for activities in which children are away from the church (e.g., youth trips) shall require advance signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate. Media release forms will be required for any event taking pictures and must request permission to publish pictures on the internet or in outside news media without using names. Such forms need to be signed for each event.

6. Counseling children, youth or vulnerable adults is to be done in such a way that both counselor and counselee are both clearly visible from outside the room. When possible, the door should be left open to make sure all are visible.

7. While on trips where hotel rooms are secured, youth and adults chaperones are to be housed in separate rooms. On trips where hotel rooms are not practical, separate sleeping areas for male and female should be established. Adult chaperones in said sleeping areas are required to exhibit behavior consistent with modesty and are to enable children/youth to maintain their own modesty.

8. All trips that leave church grounds must be supervised by the minimum number of adults required by our policy, 1 adult for every 6 children or youth. On trips with mixed gender children or youth, mixed gender chaperones are required.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 3 – REPORTING:

Once an incident of abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. It should also be respected that while all allegations will be taken seriously, they are still allegations until proven otherwise. In that spirit, all incident information should be kept strictly confidential until a resolution is achieved. However, records will be made available to all agencies and persons/parties with a right to know.

The person who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the activity. The person in charge will report the incident confidentially to the Senior Pastor or to the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator.

The following procedure is to be used by the Senior Pastor and/or Safe Sanctuary Coordinator in the case of a report of alleged abuse:

1. Complete a “Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse.”
2. Call Wake County Child Protective Services. (919) 212-7000.
3. If the alleged abuse has taken place on church grounds, or the alleged abuser is a church member, church staff or clergy, then the District Superintendent must be contacted.
4. Complete a “Suspected Incident Checklist” and attach it to the Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse.

If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator, the chairperson of the Administrative Council shall be contacted immediately and he/she will execute the responsibilities assigned to that person under this policy.

Persons who are the objects of the report will be removed immediately from all children, youth or vulnerable adult activities until the incident is officially resolved. In any suspension of a person from said activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 4 – RESPONSE PLAN:

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a child, youth, or vulnerable adult activity, all volunteers or staff involved in that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media.

If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor, the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately and he/she will execute the responsibilities assigned to the Senior Pastor in this policy, unless otherwise directed by the District Superintendent.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 5 – ON-GOING PLANNING & REVIEW:

The Board of Trustees shall meet at least once a year for policy review and implementation. Upon review the policy must be re-adopted and then any changes or implementation plans will be reported to the Administrative Council.