

Safe Sanctuary-Child Abuse Policy Grace United Methodist Church Columbia, South Carolina

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

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 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 (paragraph 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 it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation with 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 by permission.)

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

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

Grace United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will

implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

Who This Policy Applies To:

All compensated and non-compensated workers of Grace United Methodist Church working with children/youth in the following areas: Choir, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School teachers, Drama Productions, United Methodist Youth Fellowship, Bible Study, Sports, unpaid youth volunteers, anyone going on an overnight trip with children/youth, and anyone driving or riding in a vehicle in which children/youth will be traveling, plus those volunteers engaged in the supervision and care of children/youth on Grace United Methodist Church property or at church-sponsored events held off-site.

Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

A. Age

In recruiting and hiring volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve.

B. Workers with Children

Grace United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a worker for children/youth or vulnerable adults in the church unless they have completed a satisfactory background check, and at least six months of membership in Grace United Methodist Church. In the case of paid staff workers, the applicant may have been a member of another United Methodist Church as least six (6) months prior to employment. Documentation of a valid background check conducted less than 12 months prior to paid employment or volunteer service will be accepted in lieu of a new background check.

C. Application

A signed application is to be completed by all volunteers and paid staff, inclusive of conference appointees, along with the related waivers giving permission to check references. Permission for a background record check must be signed by all applicants or workers. Applicant identity should be confirmed by a state driver's license or other photo identification.

D. Reference Checks

Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. The "Children's and Youth Workers Reference" will be filled out by the person conducting the reference check.

E. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for children and youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to

determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

F. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect will not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

G. Interview

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to perform. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and procedures should be discussed during the interview.

H. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person(s) who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.

J. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the application process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Safe Sanctuary Committee and the Pastor, along with the Youth Ministries Director, if applicable, are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

K. Required Forms and Signatures

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign the "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" and "Participation Covenant Statement" forms as part of the application process. The "Participation Covenant Statement" is a statement in which the participants and leaders agree to take part in the ministry, give their best efforts to the ministry, respect the other participants, and treat the others as well as they would wish to be treated. All volunteers, regardless of designation, will be required to complete and submit a Children and Youth Ministry Volunteer Questionnaire.

Staff Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Grace United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

A. Two-Adult Rule

If at all possible, two approved adults should be present at all times. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility, and when transporting children and youth. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class or children or youth. A concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female members would be present. If the group stays overnight at the

church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.

B. Nursery Checkout Procedure

All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/checkout procedure as outlined by the Nursery Coordinator.

C. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

D. Outside Access

There must be access to a telephone, cell phone, or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from the church property.

E. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Door windows will be kept free from adornment at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with windows when replacement is needed.

F. Individual Counseling

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told that they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with the provisions of this Policy.

G. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave in this manner.)

Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or pastor.

H. Outings Away from Church Property

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must have written consent and a medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and renewed annually).

There must be access to a telephone, cell phone, or pager when groups are away from the church property. If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, a certified lifeguard will accompany the group, or one will be present at the swimming facility.

In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping area and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples should not stay together, but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

Any member of the church staff (compensated) or adult volunteer transporting children or youth in a motor vehicle as part of a church sponsored event or ministry must be at least 21 years of age.

No youth should drive to or from events unless the youth has left from his home and joins the group at the outing. Youth are not to transport other youth (exceptions can be made for immediate family members).

Drivers will be subject to the same screening process as paid or volunteer staff.

I. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g. "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the Pastor who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
5. **No physical punishments or verbal abuse are to be used at any time.** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

J. Gifts

The giving of gifts from adults to children or youth should only be done in a group setting. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

K. Training

Grace United Methodist Church volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend training about Safe Sanctuary policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. Regular training on recognition, disclosure, reporting, and prevention of abuse is required for all compensated workers and volunteers involved in the supervision of children/youth. All compensated workers and volunteers will be required to attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the church's policies for the prevention of child abuse, procedures to be used in all ministries with children/youth, possible indicators of child abuse and the appropriate response, appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse (to include discussion with appropriate ministerial staff), and the details of the state laws regarding child abuse.

All yearly returning compensated workers and volunteers will be asked to renew their "Participation Covenant," without having to attend the annual training. However, such

returning workers and volunteers are strongly encouraged to periodically attend the annual training.

L. Verification and Reading of Policy Statement and “Participation Covenant”

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read Grace United Methodist Church’s Child Abuse and Protection Policy. All workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will also be required to sign The “Participation Covenant.”

Church-Wide Education

Parent and Church Family Education:

- a. A family education event or series of events, in which families are invited to learn the facts about child abuse and about the components of the church’s plan, will be provided by Grace UMC. An event of this type may include a speaker from a local law enforcement agency, a speaker from a local child protective services agency, a doctor or counselor who is experienced in treating abused children, an attorney experienced in advising churches about risk management or loss prevention, a video about the incidence of child sexual abuse within churches, printed information about South Carolina’s abuse statutes and abuse reporting requirements, and printed copies of Grace UMC’s abuse prevention policy and procedures.
- b. An event or events may also include sessions for children so that they are informed about the behavior that is to be expected from other participants and from church leaders, about how to recognize and report possible abuse, and about how they can help prevent harm being done to anyone at the church.
- c. Educational materials will be made available to parents whose children are not able to attend the aforementioned sessions or if parents do not wish their children to attend such sessions.

RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protecting and advocating for children and youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and young adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent future abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance, and intervention. We see, to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below). Be prepared to do the following:

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
- B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call
- C. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event). This person will:
 - 1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident on the designated form
 - 2. Notify the County Office of the Department of Social Services (DSS). This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
 - 3. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and/or Laity Leader and the District Superintendent..
 - 4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee
- D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of parents.)
- E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop's Office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 362 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2004 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church must be followed.
- F. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
- G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
- H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangement should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The

spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

- J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or printed from a printer to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's Office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.

Safe Sanctuary Committee.

The Grace UMC Safe Sanctuary Committee (the "Committee") shall report to the Administrative Board and have two principal areas of responsibility: regulatory and educational.

- A. The Committee shall be comprised of at least eight persons, including a lay representative from each of the stakeholder ministry areas: staff/parish relations committee, youth (adult volunteer), music, and children's ministries. The church staff personnel who are defacto members include the pastor and, children's choir director as well as a Sunday School, Scouting, and UMYF adult representative. It would also be beneficial to include at least one lay member of the Committee who represents one of the following professional backgrounds: attorney, insurance agent, nurse, physician, or social worker. Each Committee member shall serve a two-year term.
- B. The Committee shall, at least annually, review and when necessary recommend revisions of the Grace UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy to the Administrative Board.
- C. The Committee shall oversee the educational component of this policy for the Grace UMC congregation at large and for the various age-specific groups (children, youth, parents, etc.).
- D. The Grace UMC shall, in its discretion and by authority of its Charge Conference, retain legal counsel to advise the Committee's review.
- E. Reference checks on employees will be handled by Staff/Parish Relations Committee for new employees and by the respective ministry areas for new volunteers. The Participation Covenants and the Children and Youth Ministry Volunteer Questionnaires shall be stored in a secure manner at the church.
- F. Background checks will be obtained through an official provider of background check services and only ordained clergy on the Safe Sanctuary Committee will have the responsibility and clearance to order and receive reports of background checks. The senior pastor being part of the SPRC will receive the reports of background checks on employees.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth, an vulnerable

adult will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 96).

I have read and understand the policies and procedures of Grace United Methodist Church, Policies and Procedures for the prevention of Child/Youth Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Policies and Procedures Regarding Incidents of Child/Youth Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and agree to adhere to these policies and procedures.

Name printed _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Copy 1 –Children and Youth Ministry Volunteer or Compensated Worker

Copy 2 – Grace United Methodist Church File

PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT

The congregation of Grace United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his/her willingness with one of our church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
3. Adult volunteers with children and youth should observe the "Two-Adult Rule" with its clarifying statements.
4. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse. Periodic training is strongly encouraged.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate and respond appropriately.
6. All volunteers must sign the Children and Youth Ministry Volunteer Questionnaire.

I have read and understand this Participation Covenant and Grace United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Prevention of Child/Youth Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, and I agree to observe and abide by the polices set forth above and therein.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Print Full Name