

**SEVERNA PARK  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

**November 11, 2013**



## Table of Contents

I.	Purpose.....	3
II.	Background .....	3
III.	Congregational Commitment.....	4
IV.	Procedures for Reporting Abuse.....	4
V.	Clearance Requirements for Individuals Who Work with Children and Youth.....	5
VI.	Safe Practices .....	7
VII.	Implementation of Policy and Procedures .....	8
VIII.	Dissemination of the Policy .....	10
IX.	Acknowledgement .....	10
	Policy Approved by SPUMC Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair .....	10

### Attachments and Forms

1. *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse*
2. *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire Response and Participation Covenant Statement*
3. *Authorization to Access Specific Consumer Reports*
4. *Volunteer Application*
5. *Form for Reference Checks*
6. *Pre-Adverse Action Letter*
7. *Post-Adverse Action Letter*



## **I. Purpose**

To establish policies and procedures to help ensure the safety, well being and spiritual growth of the children and youth entrusted to the Severna Park United Methodist Church (SPUMC) by providing an environment that is free from sexual and other forms of child and youth abuse; and to protect those who work with children and youth from unfounded accusations of abuse.

## **II. Background**

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 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” (P 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 within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such instances 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, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse at SPUMC.

### **III. Congregational Commitment**

We, the congregation of the SPUMC, establish this child abuse prevention policy and its accompanying procedures to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

We are committed to protecting those who work with our children and youth from unfounded accusations of abuse. We will support any worker falsely accused and provide them understanding, guidance and strength through prayer.

In all our ministries with children and youth, we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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 Hymnal, p. 44).

### **IV. Procedures for Reporting Abuse**

A. The safety of the victim must be the congregation’s primary concern until the parents are notified and arrive to assume care of the child.

#### **B. Reporting Procedures**

1. If you are made aware of any allegation of abuse of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the law requires that you report it. You must report anything that could possibly be true.
2. Listen carefully to and document the story.
3. Notify the Senior Pastor immediately. The Pastor will notify the District Superintendent and any civil authority that is warranted as well as the insurance company. If it is not appropriate to notify the Senior Pastor, you should notify the Associate/Executive Pastor, or Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) who will contact the District Superintendent. If these individuals are not available, notify the District Superintendent directly.
4. A written report should be prepared and submitted immediately to the District Superintendent. (See Attachment No. 1)
5. Do not discuss the issue with anyone but the people involved. If the accused is a member, volunteer, employee, or visitor, the Senior Pastor should request that he/she not return to the church facilities pending an investigation. We do not investigate. We only report. The Bishop’s office, Baltimore-Washington Conference, and/or insurance company will conduct the investigation.
6. The Senior Pastor will decide who talks with the parent.

7. All media inquiries should be referred to the Bishop – any one else should refer the media to the Bishop and otherwise respond to the media inquiries with “no comment.”
  8. The warmth and concern shown at the first level will have a lot to do with the outcome. The child should be assured that he/she is not at fault. Parents should be apprised of the investigation as it moves forward commensurate with existing statutes.
- C. The Church will make every effort to provide ongoing ministry and pastoral support for all persons involved. The bonds of Christian love call us to affect healing for all persons.

**V. Clearance Requirements for Individuals Who Work with Children and Youth**

- A. The following clearance requirements are applicable to SPUMC staff, volunteers, and personnel of the nursery school, and similar programs and organizations that work with children and youth under the auspices of the SPUMC.
- B. All volunteers who participate in SPUMC sponsored activities with children and youth of the Church must have been members or attendees of the SPUMC for at least three months before beginning volunteer service unsupervised, or if not attending SPUMC, they must be from an organization approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
- C. Each separate organization or individual, such as a nursery school, etc., operating within the building of the SPUMC shall submit to the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) a statement that the organization will comply with the SPUMC *Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures* and the name, address, and phone number of the individual responsible for the organization.

Staff members of the nursery school and similar activities may submit criminal background, sex offender, Social Security Number traces, or Motor Vehicle Records checks in lieu of those obtained by the SPUMC, provided the reports are accepted “as equal” by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

In the case of off-site Severna Park UMC sponsored programs that are non-youth group led, all children and youth will be required to be under the direct supervision of a parent or chaperone. In the case of off-site youth group sponsored events like youth retreats and youth mission trips, the current Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be followed.

**D. Required Forms and Clearances**

1. Staff members of the SPUMC are required to fill out and submit the following forms:
  - a. *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire Response and Participation Covenant Statement*- required annually September 1 to August 31 (Attachment No. 2)

- b. *Authorization to Access Specific Consumer Reports*- a background check is required every five years unless there is a break in employment with the SPUMC or associated activity.

This form is a pre-requisite for a criminal background check, 50 State Sex Offender Search, a Social Security Number trace, and a Motor Vehicle Records check. The latter is required if the staff member will drive children and youth as part of a SPUMC activity. These background checks must be completed prior to beginning employment. (Attachment No. 3)

2. Volunteers are required to fill out and submit the following forms:

- a. *Volunteer Application*- Volunteers must list three references on page 2 of the form. If the volunteer is under the age of 18, a parent or guardian must complete the portion of the form on page 2, providing printed name, address and phone number, and sign the form. (Attachment No. 4)
- b. *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire Response and Participation Covenant Statement*- required annually, September 1 to August 31. If the volunteer is under the age of 18, a parent or guardian must complete the portion of the form on the back, providing printed name, address and phone number, and sign the form. Returning volunteers have 30 days to complete this form from the date it is requested (Attachment No. 2), or they cannot volunteer until it is completed.
- c. *Authorization to Access Specific Consumer Reports*- a background check is required every five years. The Authorization is not required for anyone under the age of 18. (Attachment No. 3)

Note: This form is a pre-requisite for a criminal background check, 50 State Sex Offender Search, a Social Security Number trace and a Motor Vehicle Records Check. The latter is required if the volunteer will drive children and youth as part of a SPUMC activity. These background checks must be completed prior to beginning work with children or youth. For those organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), compliance with the Motor Vehicle Records check may be met by compliance with the BSA requirement that the local troop ensures each driver for troop activities has a valid driver's license that has not been suspended nor revoked for any reason.

3. Conduct of Reference Checks

- a. Reference checks for volunteers involve three individuals whose names are provided by the volunteer using the *Volunteer Application*. (Attachment No. 4)



- b. Reference checks are conducted by mailing the cover letter and *Form for Reference Checks* (Attachment No. 5) from the Church directly to each reference.
- c. References should not be completed by blood, marriage or other family members related to the volunteer. The references should not be employed or supervised by the volunteer. The references should be able, to the best of their ability, to provide statements in support of a volunteer's good character and clean record in regard to sexual misconduct with children, youth and adults. It is preferable that SPUMC staff not be used as references particularly if there has been a supervisor/subordinate relationship between the staff person and the volunteer.
- d. In the event a reference check reveals adverse information about an individual, the steps outlined in Section VII, Implementation of Policy and Procedures, Section F. 1, will be followed.

E. The Satisfactory Completion of a Volunteer Application

A Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire, Criminal Background Check, and Motor Vehicle Records check when applicable must be completed before a volunteer is cleared to work with children or youth. The reference checks must be completed within 30 days of being sent out or the volunteer may no longer work with children and youth.

## VI. Safe Practices

The following practices and procedures are intended to reduce the opportunities for sexual and other forms of abuse during activities of the SPUMC that involve children and youth.

- A. "Two-Adult Rule:" During any Church activities, whether on Church property or elsewhere, at least two adults will be present. This rule applies as well to vehicles which are utilized to transport children as part of a Church activity. The two adults should not be related.
- B. "Five-Year Older Rule:" Any individual, staff or volunteer working with children and youth should be at least five years older than the individuals for whom the worker is responsible. Thus, a volunteer who is 18 years of age should not be overseeing someone who is but 15 years of age. An exception may be made to this rule for organizations, such as those involved in scouting, wherein activities are intended to develop and nurture youth leadership; however, such activities still must be closely monitored by adult leaders.
- C. Volunteers Under the Age of 18: Volunteers under the age of 18 should not be used to oversee nor supervise children unless under the direction of an adult. An exception may be made to this rule for organizations, such as those involved in scouting, wherein

activities are intended to develop and nurture youth leadership; however, such activities still must be closely monitored by adult leaders.

- D. **Windows in Classroom Doors:** All classrooms where children and youth are participating in a Church activity must have either a window in the entrance door, or the door must be a half door with the upper half open.
- E. **Open Door Counseling:** Counseling of children and youth by Church staff should only be held in rooms with the entrance door open, or with two or more adults present. It would be preferable to have the child's or youth's parents present.
- F. **Provide Information about Church Activities:** Directors or coordinators of SPUMC children and youth activities will, to the extent possible, advise parents of the nature of planned activities, the adult supervision that will be present and the location or environment in which the activity will be conducted.
- G. **Orientation and Training:** The staff and volunteers working with children and youth will undergo an overview of this policy and the causes and prevention of child or youth abuse. Organizations operating under the auspices of the SPUMC, such as the nursery school, will ensure their staff and volunteers receive the orientation and training.

## **VII. Implementation of Policy and Procedures**

- A. The Senior Pastor and the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) are responsible for implementing this policy and procedures and to ensure that all allegations are investigated and resolved promptly. All other staff members are responsible to inform the Senior Pastor, or the Chair, SPRC, of any incidents of harassment or abuse of any kind. Members of the congregation are also encouraged to report to the Senior Pastor such incidents.
- B. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures and their implementation will be supervised and administered by the SPRC through a Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee appointed via the annual Charge Conference. The sub-committee will be headed by the Chair of SPRC, and will consist of at least three other individuals. It will act under the confidentiality covenant of the SPRC.
- C. The Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee will review annually this policy and procedures and recommend revisions, as appropriate, to the SPRC.
- D. The Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee will develop the necessary guidelines to process forms, reference checks and background searches. Major revisions to guidelines and forms will be approved by the SPRC.
- E. **Security of Safe Sanctuaries Information**

1. Completed forms and other documents containing personal information related to the Safe Sanctuaries program will be handled only by personnel appointed to the Sub-committee. The only exception will be a review by the SPRC and Senior Pastor in the event of an adverse report concerning an individual received from a reference and/or background check.
2. All completed Safe Sanctuaries forms, files, records, etc. that contain personalized information will be stored in a double-locked file cabinet located within that portion of the Church Office protected by an intrusion alarm system.
3. Individuals submitting Safe Sanctuaries forms should place the completed forms in a pre-addressed, sealed envelope (provided by the SPUMC) and mail the forms to the SPUMC, or personally deliver the forms to the Church Office or the person responsible for the activity, i.e., Sunday School, scouts, etc.
4. Safe Sanctuaries files, to include reference and background checks, etc., will be retained for a period of seven years after an individual ceases to be a staff member or volunteer under the purview of the SPUMC. Thereafter, the records, both electronic and hard copy will be destroyed.

#### F. Adverse Background Check

1. In the event any adverse information concerning a potential new or current employee/volunteer is received from a reference or background check, the Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee will review the information and make a determination whether to:
  - a. Wave the information as not serious enough to be disqualifying; or
  - b. Seek additional information from the individual about the adverse report;  
or
  - c. Advise the Chair, SPRC that the individual may pose a threat to the children and youth of the SPUMC. (Note: Action "c" may also follow the completion of Action "b").
2. Request for Additional Information (Pre-Adverse Action)

In the event adverse information is received about an individual via background or reference checks and the Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee elects to seek additional information or clarification, a *Pre-Adverse Action Letter* (Attachment No. 6) will be sent to the individual. The letter should be personalized rather than a form.
3. Rejection of Perspective Worker (Post-Adverse Action)

If based on a background or reference check, the Safe Sanctuaries Sub-committee recommends, and the full SPRC in conjunction with the Senior Pastor, determines that an individual should not be hired by the SPUMC or work with children and youth, a *Post-Adverse Action Letter* (Attachment No. 7) should be sent to the individual. The letter should be personalized versus a form.

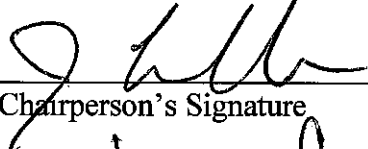
**VIII. Dissemination of the Policy**

This policy is available to anyone who requests one from the church office.


**IX. Acknowledgement**

The SPUMC greatly acknowledges the contribution to the development of this policy and procedures by Joy Thornburg Melton through her book, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*. Information and forms supplied by her book were utilized in developing the foregoing policy and procedures.

**Policy Approved by SPUMC Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair**

  
Chairperson's Signature

07 NOV. 2013  
Date

  
Chairperson's Name (Printed)