

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Chappell Hill United Methodist Church

Adopted by the Church Council on September 11, 2007

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 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 both offer 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.’

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sex 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 large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real and appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can site 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 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’, pp180-181. 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 in our church.

Definition of Abuse or Neglect

Neglect, as defined in the Texas Family Code, Sect 261.001, includes situations in which the child is left in a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and that results in bodily injury or a substantial risk of immediate harm to the child. Sexual abuse of minors includes touching them in inappropriate ways such as fondling, inappropriate touching of the minor's body, and inappropriate kissing. Non-touch abuse includes making inappropriate remarks of a sexual nature, showing a child explicit pornographic materials or making the minor watch others engaged in sexual activity. Abuse, as defined in the Texas Family Code, Sect. 261.001, includes such things as physical injury resulting in substantial harm or the threat of substantial harm, or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment to the child's growth, development or psychological functioning.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures reflects our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. Our desire and need is to prevent the risk of abuse to children and youth in our church and community.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian Community of faith and as a United Methodist Congregation, we pledge to conduct our ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as 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 children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the State of Texas; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Chappell Hill United Methodist Church is a small congregation. We currently have the following programs that involve children: Sunday School, a church youth program, a Sunday School Nursery, Parent's night out and Vacation Bible School. All our workers, both paid and volunteer, will receive information pertaining to the prevention of the abuse of children and youth, including Joyce Thornburg Melton's "Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the risk of Child Abuse in the Church", and will be trained on local church policies and procedures. Information about United Methodist policy as contained in "The Book of Resolutions" and the decision of the 2000 session of the Southwest Texas Annual Conference will be shared. Volunteers will be notified of any district or conference training events concerning abuse prevention. While recruitment of Sunday School teachers and volunteers is difficult, we will do everything possible to

ensure that there are either two unrelated adults in Sunday School classrooms or with line of sight into the classrooms. The following procedures will apply:

1. Clear sight lines.

As much as possible, there should be unobstructed visibility to all activities where children and youth are present. Classroom doors should have windows in them or remain open. Changing a diaper as needed should take place where the worker and child are in sight with the child's privacy protected.

2. Open-Door Counseling

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session.

3. Workers Eighteen or Older

In accordance with state minimum standards, primary workers with full responsibility for children must be eighteen years or older. While younger workers may be excellent helpers, they can not be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment needed to be fully responsible for younger children.

4. The Five-Year Older Rule

Another important principle to be observed is requiring that there must be at least a five year difference between the ages of the primary on-site supervisor and the supervised. The five year difference in ages shall apply between the on-site adult in charge and the oldest age of the supervised. Persons being closer in age to those supervised may be acceptable in assisting the primary on-site supervisor.

5. Advance Notice to Parents

Activities for children and youth need clear communication with parents prior to the event, with full information about the event and written parental permission for events specified by the local church (lock-ins, off site events, overnight trips, etc.). Parents are to be notified of any event in which a worker will be alone with a child. Parents must give written permission for their child's participation in that specific event, or must sign a waiver covering times when a child may be alone with a worker.

6. Drivers of Vehicles for Church Events

All drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events described herein must be at least 25 years of age and possess a current, valid driver's license, have proof of insurance at the State minimum limits and not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e. under medication and the like).

7. Co-ed overnight activities

Coed overnight activities require male and female leaders without exception.

8. Permission for events requiring transportation

Prior written parental (or guardian) permission is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event.

9. Parental contact information

Parents of children left for Parent's Night Out or Vacation Bible School must leave a cell phone number at which they may be reached or the telephone of the location at which they may be reached.

Strategies To Reduce The Risk Of Abuse Or Neglect

1. Worker screening for paid and volunteer personnel

a. Formal application process

(1) Biographical data

(2) Educational experience

(3) Previous experience with children and youth

b. Background check with law enforcement agencies

c. Interview of applicants by Pastor and Education Superintendent

d. Reference checks

e. Contact with previous churches applicant has attended

2. Requirements for volunteer applicant consideration

a. Local church membership for 6 months (or attendance for 6 months) is necessary for volunteers.

b. All applicants must complete the Church Risk Reduction Policy Orientation Session, sign a statement indicating that the session has been completed and indicating the volunteer's willingness to file accident or incident reports of any risk situation.

c. Volunteer applicants must agree to a criminal record check.

d. Applicants must have had no felony convictions, history of perpetrating abuse or neglect nor have any addictive habits which impair judgment.

3. Safeguards in employed staff consideration

a. A criminal record check will be run on all employees working with or around minors.

b. References will be checked

c. Applicants must have no felony convictions

d. No applicant with addictive habits which impair judgment will be hired.

e. Each employee must attend the Church Risk Reduction Policy Orientation Session, sign a statement of having attended and indicate willingness to file accident or incident reports as required by law and this policy. They will work with the designated church representative in interpreting the personal and employment implications of abuse or neglect experiences.

When applicable, Chappell Hill United Methodist Church will modify this policy with the help of persons trained in creating “Safe Sanctuaries.”

Reporting of Incidents

1. When anyone suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, they shall report the abuse:

a. Immediately to the Pastor, the Education Superintendent and Chairperson of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee. If these persons are not available, report to their next in order or designated alternate. If one of the persons above is one suspected of the abuse (respondent), do not report the abuse to them. If the Pastor is the respondent, report to the District Superintendent and the Pastor-Parish Relations Chairperson.

b. Within 48 hours report to the appropriate law enforcement agency and Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400).

c. Abuse reporting is required even though the abuse may not have occurred at church.

2. Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

3. The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed, with dignity, from further contact with the

children or youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter must remain confidential.

4. Following the report of an incident, the pastor shall document the report. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:

- a. The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time, place and any action by this person.
- b. The alleged victim's name, age and date of birth.
- c. Any statements made by the alleged victim
- d. Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement by the respondent.
- e. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent
- f. Date and times of calls to the appropriate agency, name of the agency, name of the worker spoken to, content of that conversation, case number assigned and any instructions from the agency.
- g. Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of the agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
- h. Date, time, names and the context of any other contacts made regarding the incident.
- i. Incident reports must be stored under lock and accessible only to the Pastor and the Chairperson of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.

5. The Pastor shall notify the Conference/District authorities

6. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current "Book of Discipline," appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.

Media Response

The District Superintendent shall be notified of all investigations of alleged abuse. In the event of an incident of alleged abuse, The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services will guide further actions and no information will be given without their guidance and approval. If investigations or allegations should come to the attention of the media, all queries shall be directed to the Pastor, the Office of the

District Superintendent or the Office of the Bishop. And any response or interviews shall come from them. Notification to the congregation shall be in accordance with Chappell Hill United Methodist Church procedures with due consideration to the privacy rights of all.

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Steve Evans
Chairperson, Church Council

Dated