

Safe Sanctuary Policy
Bethel United Methodist Church
Winnsboro, South Carolina

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for 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 and sexual exploitation and abuse." (para. 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 in their 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*. P. 384-386)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Bethel United Methodist Church (BUMC) of Winnsboro, SC adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse and abuse of vulnerable adults 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

Bethel United Methodist Church of Winnsboro, SC 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, or vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of South Carolina law.

Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who have supervisory program responsibilities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at BUMC will be:

- 21 years old.
- A member of BUMC for at least six months.

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at BUMC on a regular basis will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of three personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check (at no expense) if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- Undergo an updated criminal background check every five years.

Staff Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults at BUMC,

- Two non-related adults will be present at all times. If only one adult is present due to an unexpected circumstance, a back-up person should be readily available by telephone.
- Children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be checked in to and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- The child/youth/vulnerable adult and adult supervisor will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be with an unlocked door with visibility to all.
- A worker trained in Safe Sanctuary policies will be present for all activities that will use volunteers that have not been screened, e.g., Vacation Bible School helper or fill-in Sunday School teacher when the regular teacher is unexpectedly absent. Helpers/Assistants will be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.

Whenever BUMC sponsors an activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults,

- Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/vulnerable adult's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway through an open door while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.

Whenever BUMC transports children, youth, or vulnerable adults away from the church campus,

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- Adults should not transport child/youth/vulnerable adult alone unless the parent/responsible adult has been notified and approves.
- Drivers will be approved and covered by church's insurance company (Note: Individuals cannot drive children/youth/vulnerable adults if convicted of a DUI within the last five years)
- If additional drivers are needed that have not been trained in Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures, at least one driver that has been trained should assume responsibility that these policies and procedures are followed.

Whenever BUMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults from another church or community organization,

- The groups using the church facility will follow BUMC's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.

BUMC 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. Re-checks of background information will be done every five years or as indicated.

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at BUMC or a BUMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Insure the safety of the child or youth
- Call the church pastor or designee (803-635-4157) and District office or Bishop (803-786-9486)
- Call the County Office of DSS (803-635-5502)

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 and 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).

Date Revised: _____ April 2, 2017 _____

Chair of Admin Council: _____ John P. Glass, Jr. _____

Pastor: _____ Alice L. Deal _____