

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
St. James United Methodist Church
Coburn, PA

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, The St. James 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

The St. James 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 and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. 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 and youth 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 Pennsylvania law.

St. James UMC will provide an ongoing education plan for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention.

Staff SELECTION Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at St. James UMC will be:

- 23 years old.
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A member of St. James UMC for at least 6 months.

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at St. James UMC 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 3 personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense if they will have contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults. 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. Background check must be done using Pennsylvania Police Check and Child Abuse Check **or** the Trak-1 system
- Once completed, a copy of the background check should be provided to the pastor or Safe Sanctuaries coordinator.

- If a background check as outlined above is required by volunteer's employer, a copy must be provided to the pastor or Safe Sanctuaries coordinator.
- Background checks need to be renewed every three (3) years.

Staff SUPERVISION Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults at St. James UMC,

- Two unrelated adults will be present at all times.
- Children and youth will be checked in to and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent/legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visibility to all.

Whenever St. James UMC sponsors an activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults,

- Anyone, with the **exception** of any individual who has been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect, has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.
- During Sunday School, the Sunday School Superintendent (or some other adult appointed by the Superintendent) will make unannounced and random visual checks on all classes containing children.

Whenever St. James UMC transports children, youth, or vulnerable adults away from the church campus,

- No one under the age of 23 should drive to/from events.
- Adults should never transport child/youth by self.
- Drivers should possess a current driver's license, registration, insurance, when transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- Drivers should have a current background check on file with the church.

Whenever St. James UMC hosts an activity involving children or youth from another church or community organization,

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

St. James UMC 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.

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

- Insure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- Call the church pastor; If the pastor is the involved in the incident or not available;
- Call the District Superintendent
- Call the Conference Director of Communications
- If the victim is under age 18, a report will be made as soon as possible to ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313.
- If the victim is older than 18, a report should be made to the Pennsylvania State Police directly.

Internet Safety Guidelines

The Internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than ever before. St. James UMC will protect the privacy and identity of all persons under 18 years of age and all vulnerable adults in online writings, postings and discussions. By:

- Obtain written permission from the parent/legal guardian to use photos or videos of children or youth.
- Obtain written permission from the parent/legal guardian to E-mail, Instant Message (IM'ing), call, text, or send data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, PDA, or cell phone.
- Never post easily identifiable information online.
- Safety measures for sharing photographs electronically.
- Safety measure for social networking sites.
- Conduct any communications with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a professional manner and **only** if you have received advance written parent/legal guardian permission.

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).

MEDIA PROCEDURES FOR CHURCH, DISTRICT, AND CONFERENCE STAFF

Handling Telephone Calls from Reporters

- Take a written message (don't transfer to voicemail without taking message)
- Get reporter's name, media outlet, direct phone #, and deadline
- Ask for topic of story
- Explain that a church spokesperson will return call
- Don't answer questions yourself
- Be polite, but firm
- Keep a log or written record of media calls

“Hold Response”

“I want to make sure we give you the most accurate and up-to-date information. Our (conference communicator) or (pastor) or (appropriate person) can best help you. If you give me your contact information, deadline and topic that you're calling about, I'll have that person return your call as soon as possible.”

Handling Reports On-site

- Refer questions to pastor, conference communicator or district superintendent.
- Again, be polite but firm. - Do not communicate in any way your personal opinion.
- Don't make any attempt to speak “off the record.”
- Don't ever respond with “no comment.”

Handling Casual Conversations or Question about a Crisis

- Don't speculate, repeat unconfirmed information or express personal opinions - Don't feel that you are obligated to answer questions
- Do respond with a brief, positive, general statement

Contact information for Conference Director of Communications:

Shawn Gilgore

- Office phone: [717-766-7441](tel:717-766-7441) x3607

11/5/2014: Policy approved at St. James Administrative Board Meeting.

9/25/17: Addition of Media Procedures for Church, District, and Conference Staff (Page 5). Approved following the October 22, 2017 church service at St. James UMC, Coburn, PA.