

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church  
FETTERHOFF CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### ***PREAMBLE***

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Luke 18:16 (NIV). Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. <sup>(1)</sup> As Christians, we must take this responsibility to all children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country. Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected. <sup>(2)</sup> Often abuse occurs in settings where children and youth should have been able to feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and most sadly, the church. In more than three-quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. <sup>(3)</sup> The purpose of this policy aims to protect all the children that come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of our local church.

Presented herein is a plan that includes: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan. This delineated policy is the MINIMUM necessary precautions for protecting children.

### ***DEFINITIONS***

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child” means any person under the age of 18.

“Child abuse” as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law means any of the following:

(i) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age.

(ii) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator, which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.

(iii) Any recent act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator, which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.

(iv) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child’s life or development or impairs the child’s functioning.

No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child’s welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.”<sup>(4)</sup>

“Children’s activities” means any activity, program, or ministry in which children are under the supervision of responsible adult staff persons or volunteers at or sponsored by the Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church.

“Church” means the Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church, 4025 Fetterhoff Chapel Road, Chambersburg, PA.

“Conference” means the Susquehanna Conference, The United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 2053 Mechanicsburg, PA 17055, (717) 766-7441.

“Helper or assistant” means anyone who is under the supervision of a responsible adult staff person or volunteer during a children’s program, activity, or ministry.

“Mandated reporter” (Appendix B) means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation,

or practice of their profession, come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers and nurses, social services workers, day-care center workers, mental health professionals, peace and law enforcement officers.

“Staff person” means any person employed by Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church

“Monitor” means an adult staff person or volunteer who randomly circulates throughout the Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church facility and/or children’s activities, programs, or ministries.

“Perpetrator” means someone who has committed child abuse and meets the definition of one of the following four relationships to a child: a parent of a child; a person responsible for the welfare of a child; an individual residing in the same home as the child, or a paramour of the child’s parent.

“Staff person in charge of a children’s activity” means the adult church staff person responsible for the conduct of this activity, program, or ministry.

“Volunteer” means a responsible adult who assists in conducting church activities, programs, or ministries under the supervision of a staff member or any adult person responsible for any children’s activities, programs, or ministries that use the Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church facilities.

“We” means the Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church, 4025 Fetterhoff Chapel Road, Chambersburg, PA 17202.

### **SCREENING PROCEDURES**

Careful screening is one way of trying to prevent the abuse of children. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every activity, program, and/or ministry that involves children. The Conference is also encouraging the networking of Conference agencies and local churches because staff persons and volunteers may serve in a variety of places and roles.

We propose these MINIMUM standards:

1. All staff and volunteers who have direct contact with children shall be required to fill out a Volunteer Application <sup>(6)</sup> that shall include:
  - a. Standard contact information
  - b. Experience and qualifications for the position
  - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
  - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church or non-church organization to secure the background checks necessary for the position being applied for.
  - e. Listing of two non-related references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.
  - f. A completed PA Child Abuse History Clearance form (CY113 3/95, Appendix F)
  - g. A completed PA Request for Criminal Record Check (SP 4-641/97, Appendix G)
  - h. Given our church’s proximity to Maryland, all staff and volunteers who reside in and/or work in Maryland will also have to complete Maryland’s equivalent forms for child abuse history clearance and criminal record check.
  - i. Demonstrate an active relationship with this church of at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in children’s activities, programs, and/or ministries.
2. During the staff persons’ and volunteers’ first year of employment and/or service they will submit to the screening procedures prescribed by this policy, clearances will be provided prior to working with children. Following the first year, all new applicants, persons who have a break in service of 18 months or more and those with 5 or more years since their last background check shall submit to the screening procedures.
3. All clearances shall be kept in confidence and on file with the staff member assigned and overseeing the Safe Sanctuary Committee. <sup>(7)</sup>
4. The church leader in charge of the children’s activity(ies), program(s) and/or ministry(ies) and/or their designee is responsible for reviewing and verifying each applicant’s information prior to service.

All applications and related forms must be completed. <sup>(8)</sup> When a reference follow up is accomplished by phone, detailed notes of the conversation should be kept on the Form for Reference Check.

5. No person who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, and/or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children in any church-sponsored activity, program and/or ministry.

6. Convicted sex offenders who are, or wish to become, part of the ministry of Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church must covenant with the church according to the *covenant for convicted sex offenders wishing to join in church activities*. (Appendix A)

7. When the church is hosting an activity, program, and/or ministry for which staff members and/or volunteers are required, we recommend that all brochures and other written material contain language specifying these procedures as MINIMUM BASIC GUIDELINES for all adults serving at the activity, program and/or ministry. (For example, we are a Safe Sanctuaries Congregation.)

### **SAFETY PROCEDURES**

The second step for providing a safe place for children is conscientious and intentional safety procedures. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

These are MINIMUM standards and each children's activity, program and/or ministry may adopt more stringent requirements:

1. Training is a requirement for all staff persons and volunteers working with children in church children's activities, programs, and/or ministries. New staff members and volunteers will attend an initial training orientation that includes information regarding this policy, safety procedures, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse. After the initial orientation session, all current staff members and volunteers will attend an annual policy update session.
2. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the children with whom he/she is working. <sup>(9)</sup>
3. All participants who can understand a covenant shall sign a participation covenant. <sup>(10)</sup> In a situation that an activity, program, and/or ministry is continuous, this covenant can be in the form of clear, posted, or printed rules that are explained to the participants at the outset of the program.
4. Transportation
  - a. In addition to other clearances, volunteer application, and participation covenant, drivers of children need to fill out a driver clearance form and provide proof of coverage by adequate insurance.
  - b. No drivers under the age of 25 shall be used to transport youth.
  - c. An adult who transports youth or children should be a safe driver and have proper credentials in the state of residence. Including a driving record without DUI's or excessive number of speeding tickets.
  - d. Each passenger should have a seat belt and the use should always be enforced.
  - e. Car seats or booster seats are required for children up to the age of 8 years (or as otherwise required by current law).
  - f. If possible two unrelated adults should be in each car. If only one adult is taking a carload of children, the group shall all meet at the church, travel together and return to the church so a parent or guardian can pick up the children.
  - g. Where possible, use caravans of cars as you travel.
5. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule". The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group or the setting, there will always be at least two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "monitor" who moves in and out of rooms, through the church's halls, checks the playground, etc. <sup>(11)(12)</sup>

6. Ratio of adult caregivers to children and youth.
  - a. Birth – 12 months: 2 adults for every 1 to 3
  - b. 12 – 24 months: 2 adults for every 1 to 4
  - c. Ages 3-5: 2 adults for every 1 to 8
  - d. Grade school: 2 adults for every 1 to 15
  - e. Youth: 2 adults for every 1 to 15
  - f. Activities for outside the church should provide 2 or more adults for every 5 children or youth.
7. Each room or space designated for children's activities, programs, and/or ministries shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open such as a restroom, if an adult's presence is required. All activities, programs, and/or ministries should occur in open view. Should the children's activity, program and/or ministry be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the staff person in charge of the activity, program and/or ministry shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, program, and/or ministry and the children are properly supervised.
8. Sleeping Arrangements.
  - a. Adults will not sleep in the same bed with a child or children. In a hotel-type or dormitory setting it is recommended that, if possible, an adult room is between two children's rooms. (In order to minimize the possibility of danger from within the group as well as from strangers, choose a hotel where the rooms open to the interior of the building rather than the outside, if possible.)
  - b. In camping situations, adults will not sleep in the same tents as children. In a setting where adults and youth are in a large open area, adults will sleep in a separate area of the room from the children.
  - c. No permission for boys to enter the room where girls are sleeping and no permission for girls to enter the room where boys are sleeping will be given. <sup>(13)</sup>
  - d. Adults should arrange among themselves to check on the children or youth on a random schedule during the night.
9. Medications:
  - a. When possible all medication shall be administered by the child or youth's parent or legal guardian. If a child or youth needs medication while attending a church activity, the medication must be given to the designated Adult supervising that child or youth by the parent with written instructions regarding the use of the medication. The medication must be in the original container with the label intact. If it is a prescription drug, the label with instructions must be on the label. The Adult will return the medication to the parent or legal guardian at the end of the church activity.
  - b. All youth must have a signed parental consent-medical information form on file.
10. Registration materials for activities, programs, and/or ministries in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require a signed written permission forms renewed annually. These forms should include pertinent health information and be completed in order for the child to participate in the activity, program, and/or ministry.
11. Parents will have advance notice and full information regarding the activity, program, and/or ministry in which their child will be participating. Parents will also be notified of any activity, program, and/or ministry in which a staff person and/or volunteer will be alone with their child.
12. Staff persons and/or volunteers should be conscious of safety concerns when leading activities and games. Proper equipment and adequate supervision of the activity, program, and/or ministry should always be in place.
13. No drugs, alcoholic beverages, weapons or fireworks will be allowed.
14. No permission or opportunity for children to separate themselves from the group, with or without an adult, will be granted or provided.
15. No inappropriate touching creating the perception that the personal space and privacy of the individual is being violated will be allowed.

## **REPORTING**

Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the staff person in charge of the children's activity. The staff person in charge of the children's activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately remove the alleged victim and perpetrator from the situation and obtain information necessary, using the incident report form (appendices C and D), such as the alleged victim's name, his/her age and address, the alleged perpetrator's name, age, address, and relationship, if any, to the alleged victim, type of abuse, place of injury, and location of incident. <sup>(20)</sup>

Upon receiving such information, the staff person in charge of the children's activity will call the Pennsylvania Childline and Abuse Registry <sup>(14)</sup> to make a report and submit a written CY47 form <sup>(15)</sup> to the Franklin County Children and Youth within 48 hours. <sup>(20)</sup>

Persons who are the objects of the report will be required to refrain from all children's activities at the church until the incident is resolved. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, documenting all conversations and recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

## **RESPONSE PLAN**

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the staff and volunteers of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

If the allegation is against a local church staff person or volunteer or helper or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity the Local Church's Crisis Management Team <sup>(17)</sup> and Conference's Crisis Management Team<sup>(18)</sup> shall be contacted immediately only if they are non-offenders of the incident. The Conference Crisis Management Teams will advise the Conference's insurance carrier. The staff person in charge of the children's activity will contact the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) immediately and take any necessary steps to assure the child's safety until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrives. The safety of the child must be the church's primary concern. An in-person meeting with the parent(s) or guardian(s) will be arranged as soon as practical. The accused perpetrator should be treated with dignity and not confronted with anger and/or hostility. A written record of the steps and actions taken will be kept.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the staff person in charge of the church activity to make the initial contact with the Childline and Abuse Registry<sup>(14)</sup>. An example would be a youth telling a Youth Pastor about abuse by a relative. The Youth Pastor will call immediately Childline and an incident report (CY47) (Appendix E) will be filed within 48 hours of the report and should be sent to Franklin County Children and Youth. <sup>(20)</sup>

The Media Director of the Conference <sup>(16)</sup> and his/her designee is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Lead Pastor. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of church staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.

Pastoral support <sup>(19)</sup> will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated. An incident report will be filled out in case of an accident and be kept in the appropriate staff member's files. A copy will be available to the parent(s) or guardian(s) upon request.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998) Rev. Melton is an ordained deacon the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church who is both a Christian educator and a lawyer.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law 23 Pa.C.S.A.6303. Note that this section of state law also provides that, "If, upon investigation, the county agency determines that a child has not been provided needed medical or surgical care because of seriously held religious beliefs of the child's parents, guardian or person responsible for the child's welfare, which beliefs are consistent with those of a bona fide religion, the child shall not be deemed to be physically or mentally abused. The county agency shall closely monitor the child and shall seek court-ordered medical intervention when the lack of medical or surgical care threatens the child's life or long-term health."
- (6) Sample forms are found in Chapter Nine of Safe Sanctuaries
- (7) Files kept regarding volunteers will be accorded the same status as personnel files of staff persons with any applicable exceptions required by the *Discipline* regarding clergy volunteers.
- (8) Sample forms may be found in Chapter Nine of Safe Sanctuaries.
- (9) Melton 31-32.
- (10) Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have the chance to be alone with potential victims, they will quickly lose interest. The two adult rule also protects local church staff persons and volunteers from false allegations.
- (12) While in some situations, younger counselors and aides may provide excellent help, people under the age of 18 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Putting children in charge of children invites disaster.
- (13) The covenant is a statement in which the participants and leaders/chaperones agree to: take part in the ministry; give their best efforts to the ministry; respect the other participants and leaders; treat others as well as they would wish to be treated.
- (14) 1-800-932-0313
- (15) CY47- Children and Youth Form (Appendix E)
- (16) The Conference Media Director may be reached at 717/766-3607.
- (17) The Fetterhoff Chapel United Methodist Church Crisis Management Team would include the Senior Pastor (or the Associate Pastor if the Senior Pastor is not available), the Congregational Health Minister, the Youth Minister, and the staff person who is responsible for the program where the alleged incident occurred.
- (18) The Conference's Crisis Management Team can be contacted through the Conference Council on Ministries Director at 717/766-3601.
- (19) Either through the local church or the Conference as appropriate.
- (20) "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Mandated Reporter Training Workbook". Parents Anonymous of Pennsylvania.

## **APPENDIX A THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE PLAN TO CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS**

The Church is the only institution to offer reconciliation between God and neighbor, thus making our world less hostile, and the Church represents the Body of Christ, who says, "Come unto me" to all people. The Church must find a way to create space for grace for all people. At the same time, the Church is given the mandate to bring the children to Jesus, noting that Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them. For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14, NLT). The following actions should be taken so that sanctuary, protection, and grace may be offered to all.

1. When a person within your church congregation becomes a convicted sex offender, grace and care must be extended to the convicted individual as well as any family members associated with the church. Under the Pastor's direction, a covenant group will be formed to support and nurture both the convicted individual and the family. A covenant group coordinator will be named and responsible for coordinating contact and support of the individual while he/she is incarcerated and on probation, including accompaniment of the person while at church activities, and communication with the Pastor and the Safe Sanctuaries committee. The covenant group coordinator cannot be related to the convicted individual by blood or marriage. This covenant group will be actively involved in this ministry during incarceration, probation, and while the individual is listed as a convicted sex offender. While family members may be part of this covenant group, spouses cannot be the only person to accompany the convicted individual during church activities or on church property.

2. When a convicted sex offender, not previously connected with the congregation, wishes to connect with the church, the pastor should make an appointment and visit with the individual as quickly as possible. This conversation must be welcoming but honest. Included in the conversation should be the need to protect the individual as well as children and youth. Information should be gathered into the nature of the offense and an understanding of the probation restrictions.

3. In either case, the Pastor should be in contact with the probation/parole officer to verify the parole restrictions. Information should be sought specifically regarding the church attendance and guidance in how to best incorporate the individual into the congregation setting.

4. In every case, the church and the attending individual should enter into a written covenant:

The church will covenant to:

- Provide a support group, where one or more members will support the individual with attendance when they are on church property. This should be a quiet support, but should include someone being present with him/her at all times, including the restroom.
- Volunteer work, if allowed by parole restrictions, would be limited to adult activities. Opportunities that provide direct contact with children would not qualify.
- Areas where children's programs are occurring should not be entered, even with a covenant group member.

The individual will covenant to:

- Uphold the mission of the church and their design to provide safe sanctuary for all children by respecting, and abiding by, the safe sanctuary policy.
- Cooperate by giving needed information as requested and accept full benefit of the covenant group as provided.

If the covenant is not kept, the individual will not be permitted within the church facility or at church activities. Spiritual guidance can still be extended to the individual by both the pastor and the covenant group in another location.

**Covenant for Convicted Sex Offenders Wishing to Join in Church Activities**

A covenant should only be taken after a detailed conversation occurs with the pastor including facts of the offense, the sentence, the conditions of probation, the name of the probation/parole officer and contact information for the officer. Secondly, the pastor is to contact the probation/parole officer to verify the information received from the individual. Probation restrictions may include presence on church property, and should be clarified. The probation officer is to be interviewed as a reference as to the qualities of the individual.

Assuming no specific probation restrictions exist, specific conditions must exist in order for participation, including:

- Being accompanied by one or more members of the covenant group at all times, even in the restroom, while on church property and while participating in church activities.
- No entry into areas designated to be used by children.
- No participation in activities that would provide direct contact with children.

Describe your commitment to uphold the mission of the church:

Do you covenant to agree with all conditions as outlined above?

The conditions must be upheld, and, if not upheld, you will be asked to no longer be in attendance within the church facility and at church activities. Spiritual guidance and support can still be extended by your pastor and covenant group in another location. Your signature below indicates your understanding of this covenant.

Signature:

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Pastor's Signature:

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Signature of your covenant group coordinator:

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Covenant Group Members:

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APPENDIX BCLERGY AND MANDATED REPORTING

Clergy are specifically named as required reporters in the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Act, in Section 3490.4 Definitions. However, because a specific exemption is mentioned for confidential communication (42 Pa.C.S. 5943), some clergy erroneously believe they are not mandated to report. This confusion is increased because clergy are not defined as mandated reporters in every state. The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence states that “only about half of the states require clergy to report suspicion of child sexual abuse to law enforcement” ([www.cpsdv.org](http://www.cpsdv.org)).

In Pennsylvania, clergy are mandated to report if they have “reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused (3490.11).” If the congregation operates school or other type of facility, “the person in charge, or the designee, shall be responsible and have the obligation to make a report of the suspected child abuse (3490.13).” This could range from a child directly telling the clergy about the abuse or a member of the staff reporting suspicion of abuse to the clergy based on comments, drawings, bruises, etc.

The exception to mandated reporting granted to clergy in Pennsylvania only applies if the information is received as part of a “confession.” This generally means that it is the offender confessing to the clergy. A particular gray area for clergy is hearing a confession in which the offender indicates urges, yearnings, or the intent to abuse again. While the law grants many helping professions privileged communication status, there are exceptions under which one must report knowledge of imminent harm to self or others. The privilege granted to clergy is based on ecclesiastical law and is total. There are no exceptions. Some clergy will choose to break the bonds of the confessional and others will not.