

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PREPARED BY JORDAN L. MCKENZIE, CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR AT BELMONT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. THE DOCUMENT HAS BEEN WRITTEN TO COMPLY WITH BASIC SAFE SANCTUARY STANDARDS OF THE WEST OHIO CONFERENCE AND MIAMI VALLEY DISTRICT WITH SOME LANGUAGE BORROWED FROM OFFICIAL STANDARDS PROVIDED BY SAID PARTIES. IN ADDITION, STANDARDS AND LANGAUGE DEVELOPED BY OTHER CONFERENCES HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AND USED.

INTRODUCTION

As a congregation of persons committed to following Jesus Christ, we are called to take the good news of God's salvation to all people in our community and beyond (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15).

A central component of this calling is to provide all persons a safe place to worship, study God's Word, and fellowship (Psalm 20, Psalm 27:4-5).

While it is clear that we are to provide this space for all persons, we are called to place a special emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable among us, including but not limited to, our children, youth, and adults who may be especially vulnerable due to mental, physical, or psychological impairments.

In recognition of the values set forth by the preceding statements, we seek to establish an official safe sanctuary policy for Belmont United Methodist Church. This is not only in accordance with our own church values, but also in accordance with the standards mandated by the Miami Valley District and West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Both the district and the conference affirm the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, which state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse." (2012 *Book of Discipline*). United Methodist policy also extends this protection to vulnerable adults.

The following document is meant to state and explain our official policies concerning safe sanctuary. The policy includes a (1) statement of covenant detailing our commitment

to provide safe sanctuary. It then details protocol for (2) screening, (3) supervision, and (4) security. This protocol is designed to create a safe sanctuary. Lastly, this policy contains procedures for (5) reporting allegations of abuse and (6) responding to allegations of abuse.

SCOPE OF POLICY

The following policy, in its entirety and including all particulars, shall be binding to all persons, both unpaid and paid, who are directly working with or supervising children, youth, or vulnerable adults, as well as *anyone who has potential contact with or access to said parties*. This includes all personnel who have keys to the church, are employed at the church, whether full or part-time, or anyone who will be acting in a supervisory role at any event held on the church grounds.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

A copy of this policy, in its entirety and all particulars, shall be posted at various points throughout the church, including and especially at locations in which programs, events, or classes for children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be held. This ensures that all persons working in these areas will be constantly reminded and cognizant of the following policies.

In addition to this, all persons to whom this policy is relevant shall receive a mandatory training at the implementation of this policy. All persons to whom this policy is relevant who join the church after the implementation of the policy, including paid staff personnel

and non-paid personnel, will receive training on this policy at the time that they begin serving with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. As the policy is updated all necessary persons will be informed of any changes and receive further training as necessary.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions will be utilized throughout this paper:

“Abuse” means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult by a parent, guardian, or other person. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a child by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution upon the child.

“Child” or *“children”* or *“youth”* means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

“Exploitation” means obtaining or using another person’s resources, including but not limited to funds, assets or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

“Sexual abuse” includes, but is not necessarily limited to, any contacts or interactions in which the parent, guardian or other person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use

of the child for the purposes of the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

“Sexual exploitation” includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Ohio law; or a parent, guardian, or other person having custodial control or supervision of a child or who is responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under Ohio law.

“Supervision” means to oversee an activity or direct a ministry for any amount of time.

“Vulnerable Adult” means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from neglect, exploitation, or a hazardous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we affirm our calling to protect all children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse, exploitation, harassment and neglect. We also pledge to take any measures we deem necessary to ensure that these parties are protected from said crimes. 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 of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of policies; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirement of state law; and we will be prepared to respond if media inquiries concerning an incident.

SCREENING

The following procedures shall be used to screen all persons who have applied to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults:

BACKGROUND CHECKS

1. All staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Background Screening Form that shall include but is not limited to:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Experience/qualifications for the position
 - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions
 - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure the background checks and references necessary.

2. All persons who have regular and direct contact with said parties shall have a national background check completed covering the entirety of their adult life. This background check shall be completed by an independent third-party organization.
3. All individuals shall be background checked every three years.

Storage of Background Checks

4. All background checks and related records shall be kept in a locked, fireproof cabinet in the church office. These documents are the property of the church. When an individual submits to a background check, the background check and any related documents become the permanent property of the church.
5. Only the senior pastor, children's director, youth director, secretarial staff and other persons specifically deemed necessary shall have access to these files.
6. Individuals who have been background checked shall at any time be able to view the results of the background check, but cannot take the background check itself or any related documents from the church office or share them with any other persons within the church or outside the church.
7. These records, in their entirety, shall be kept by the church in perpetuity. This includes documents from all individuals who have been background checked, even those who have left the church or those who are deceased. This means that no background checks or related documents shall ever be destroyed. This will protect the church and all individuals from unfair legal liability or unfair allegations.

Other Stipulations

1. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to serve in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor shall replace the six-month waiting period.
2. No person shall supervise children or youth unless he/she is AT LEAST 18 years of age or older and is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children/youth being supervised.
3. Any person who has been convicted of abuse of any kind (sexual, physical, emotional, ritual or neglect) shall not be permitted to volunteer or work directly with children, youth or vulnerable adults in any church sponsored activity.*
4. No persons ever convicted of a felony shall ever serve with children or youth unless there are special circumstances in which church leadership specifically deems the person appropriate to serve in said ministries.
5. All other persons with a criminal record shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine the appropriateness of their involvement in said ministries.
6. No individuals shall be allowed to remain a regular member of the youth group past high school unless s/he is assisting with the group. Other individuals shall move to a young adult or adult Sunday School class.
7. Any individual who does remain to assist in leadership with the group shall not be allowed to supervise other group members unless he or she is at least 5 years

older than other members of the group. Said member shall also not be alone with other members at any point in time.

*While any persons convicted of past sexual abuse, exploitation, neglect, or harassment will not be permitted to serve in ministries involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, we also recognize our church to be a place of hope, healing, and restoration for all people, regardless of background. We commit to working toward fulfilling of this calling in all of our ministries.

SUPERVISION

The following supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations. Other reasoning for said measures includes but is not limited to the fact that said measures:

- drastically reduce the risk of an incident of abuse (a potential abuser is unlikely to engage in abuse if they are constantly in sight of another adult).
- Protect the adults against false allegations
- Reduce the possibility of a claim of negligence
- Provide help if there is an accident or emergency
- Make a statement that children/youth are important and valued by the church

TWO-ADULT RULE

1. Two adults shall always be present with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
The two-adult rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present in a room or area in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are being supervised. This may include the presence of an adult 'roamer' who moves in and out of rooms, area, or places in which ministry activities are taking place.
2. The two adult rule also requires that no fewer than two adults be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children and/or youth.
3. When transporting children or youth for a church ministry event or activity, an additional adult must accompany the driver in the vehicle.
4. In circumstances where children are escorted to the bathroom or are showering or undressing, the two-adult rule should be strictly observed. In addition, the child's right to privacy should always be respected and modest behavior from the children should be required. In these circumstances, supervision by someone of the same gender should be preferred, when practical.
5. This rule is understood to apply to everyone including all clergy, staff, and volunteers.
6. All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space in which ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example,

7. Enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a one-half door configuration, or an open door.
8. Nursery and early childcare workers shall follow all state-mandated legal limits on adult-to-child supervision ratios.

OVERNIGHT TRIPS

During church-sponsored events that take place overnight or off of church grounds:

1. Written permission of a parent/guardian shall be obtained prior to the event.
2. Parents/guardians shall provide contact and medical information.
3. Whenever possible, adults shall not share the same hotel or cabin with children, youth, or vulnerable adults (unless related).
4. Whenever possible, at least three persons shall be assigned to each room/cabin.
5. Adults shall make frequent checks on said parties or as deemed prudent under the circumstances
6. Adults shall not occupy the same sleeping bag or bed with said parties (unless related).
7. All persons shall conduct themselves with appropriate modesty including dressing in appropriate locations and wearing suitable sleep attire and swimwear.

TRANSPORTATION

1. Drivers must go through the same selection and training process as other staff/volunteers.
2. Drivers must be at least 21 years of age.
3. Youth will not be permitted as drivers during church-sponsored events.
4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance
5. All vehicles used to transport children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be insured.
6. Children under the age of six (6) or who weigh less than sixty (60) pounds will be restrained in a safety seat which conforms to state requirements.

SECURITY

The following security procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of harm to children, youth or vulnerable adults, especially from outside parties. These procedures will also protect the church from unnecessary legal and financial burdens that could be incurred.

FAMILY RECORDS

1. Records shall be kept for each child in the church. These records shall provide information regarding, but not limited to: age, date of birth, parents, siblings, custody, allergies, and special medical conditions. This will allow all personnel to be aware of potential issues to watch out for, such as custody disputes, allergies, or medical conditions.

2. These records shall be grouped by family. Parents or guardians shall not be *required* to provide such information on their children or dependents, but will be encouraged to do so.
3. All records shall be updated every three years at the same time as new background checks are completed.

PROCTOCOL FOR GUESTS/GUARDIANS

1. During all large children's events (such as Vacation Bible School, summer programs, etc.) in which a significant number of children may be first-time guests and not usual part of the congregation, any adult picking up a child shall be required to present either an ID tag provided by the church or a picture ID before picking up a child. This will prevent any inappropriate or legally-restricted parties from picking up children.
2. At all large children's event (such as those just mentioned), no adult, including but not limited to: parents, grandparents, or older siblings, shall be allowed to follow children around during the event or be present during activities. This will prevent any unauthorized persons from inappropriately having access to or contact with children. This is necessary as these adults have not been background checked or approved to have contact with other non-relative children.

INSURANCE

The church shall maintain adequate property and liability insurance coverage for the scope of its ministry. This is mandated by *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, which expressly requires the trustees of each local church to secure adequate insurance, as is detailed below:

¶2532.2. The Board of Trustees shall review annually the adequacy of the property, liability, and crime insurance coverage on church owned property, buildings, and equipment. The board of trustees shall also review annually the adequacy of personnel insurance. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that the church, its properties and its personnel are property protected against risks.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

The following process shall be used to respond to any suspected abuse or allegations of abuse. This protocol is meant to clarify the process and ensure that all allegations are reported and are treated seriously and appropriately. It is crucial that reporting of suspecting abuse is immediate and that allegations dealt with as soon as possible to the incident or disclosure.

All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by *The Book of Discipline* and Ohio state law.

¶341.5 All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.

If any of the above situations occur, the following steps shall be taken:

1. If the victim is in immediate need of medical attention, the appropriate medical assistance shall be obtained. If the alleged perpetrator is onsite and an imminent danger is perceived, local police authorities shall be notified immediately.
2. Upon securing medical attention for the victim and ensuring the safety of the site, the person who witnessed the alleged abuse must report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the ministry or activity (such as the children's director, youth director, etc.).
3. The person in charge of ministry/activity shall immediately notify the senior pastor.
4. The person in charge of the ministry area will complete an incident report form using the *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* with alleged victim's age, reason for suspected abuse, and any other relevant or helpful information to the investigation.
5. The senior pastor shall then notify the chairperson of the leadership team.*
6. The senior pastor must immediately contact Child Protective Services for Ohio Health and Family Services to report the allegation. When making the report by telephone, it is advisable that it be conducted in the presence of an objective witness who can verify that the report has been made (and by whom) in case this is needed later for possible legalities.

7. Any other staff members deemed necessary shall be informed of the allegation.
8. The parents or guardians of the victim shall then be notified and any steps deemed necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the child or youth shall be taken until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive.**
9. The senior pastor (or church council leader) shall immediately call the superintendent of the district in which the church resides and report the allegations.
10. The district superintendent shall immediately report the situation to the Assistant to the Bishop and Communications Director at the West Ohio Conference office, as set forth in the *Crisis Communications Guidelines* for the West Ohio Conference.
11. Further communication or steps taken with the staff, congregation, community or media shall only be taken after consultation with the district superintendent and the conference office.
12. The person in charge of the ministry/event must submit a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed in addition to be kept in a secure location.
13. A copy of said report will also be given to the senior pastor and district superintendent.
14. No allegations shall, under any circumstances, be discussed via text message, instant messaging, electronic mail (email).

*If the senior pastor is the subject of the allegation, this step shall be skipped and the chair of the leadership team shall be immediately notified. The district superintendent

shall be notified immediately following the report of the allegation to the legal authorities.

**If one or both of the parents/guardians is the alleged perpetrator, the advice of the authorities shall be followed concerning notification of family or guardians.

Response Plan

A quick, compassionate and unified response to a reported incident of abuse is expected. The following procedures are meant to guide the church's response to allegations.

1. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be full and complete cooperation with all official investigating agencies.
2. There shall also be full and complete cooperation with both the Miami Valley District and West Ohio Conference.
3. All media requests for statements shall be directed to the designated church spokesperson per the church's crisis communication plan.
4. In the case that no official church spokesperson has been named, the official spokesperson shall be the West Ohio Conference's Director of Communications or a person named by the Director to serve as a spokesperson.
5. The accused party or parties shall immediately be removed from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
6. At this time the accused party or parties shall also be advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal.

7. In any removal of an individual from any activity/ministry, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
8. When it has been alleged that an individual has committed an act of harm, the individual shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with *Book of Discipline*.
9. At all times the accused shall be treated with dignity, respect, and grace.
10. The senior pastor, person(s) in charge of the respective ministry, or chair of the leadership team (and perhaps all of these parties) should reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Care and support should always be shown to help prevent further harm and emotional or spiritual distress. Any pastoral resources deemed needed shall be utilized. The care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
11. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering empathy and support as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

Epilogue

The preceding policy shall be the official, binding policy of Belmont United Methodist Church, Dayton, Ohio effective May 2015. The policy shall be evaluated on an annual basis to ensure it is up-to-date with current district, conference, state, and federal legislation and will be updated as needed.