

Seaside United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy

In April of 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church 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 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (§162 C).

Tragically, churches haven’t 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 in appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite 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 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 – 2000*, pp. 180-181. ©2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

PURPOSE

Seaside United Methodist Church’s purpose for establishing and implementing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and its protocol is to demonstrate our commitment to not only the spiritual growth but also the physical and emotional safety of all of the children and youth connected to the church.

Policy Application

This Policy applies to all paid and volunteer workers in all age groups which use church facilities. It differentiates between paid workers, regular workers and occasional volunteers. **Paid workers** are defined as any staff member whether full or part time. This includes the Director, teachers, and assistants of SUMC's preschool. **Regular workers** are those individuals who volunteer on a weekly basis with children and youth (anyone under the age of 18). **Occasional Volunteers** are those individuals who work with our children or youth on an intermittent basis.

Policy Outline and Procedures

I. Worker Selection

A. *Screening process for all **Paid** and **Regular Workers**.*

1. Application – all **Paid** and **Regular Workers** shall complete an application as applies to their position (Appendix I and II).
2. Personal Interview – all **Paid Staff Members** shall be interviewed and approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee prior to hiring. Preschool staff shall be interviewed and approved by the Director, Chair of the Preschool Board and one of the Pastors. All **Regular Workers** will meet with the Associate Pastor prior to assuming any position with children and youth. The application and Background Screening Form will be discussed during this interview.
3. Reference Checks – reference checks will be conducted on each **Paid** and **Regular Worker** to determine suitability to work with children and youth. Information from each reference check will be documented and kept confidential (*Appendix III*).
4. Completion of a Criminal Records Check Form – each **Paid** and **Regular Worker** will complete this form. The information contained on this form will be used to conduct a Criminal Records Check. The Administrative Assistant will obtain this information (Appendix IV).

B. *Screening Process for **Occasional Volunteers**.*

Screening Form for **Occasional Volunteers** – all **Occasional Volunteers** will complete a screening form to be reviewed by one of the Pastors (*Appendix V*).

II. Preventative Measures

A. **Visibility** – all classrooms used by children and youth will have a window in the door or a half-door which can be left partially open in order to provide visibility into the classroom space. If it is necessary to use a space which does not meet this requirement; there will be two workers present at all times. This rule does not apply to pastoral counseling sessions which may be conducted behind closed doors. In the event of a Pastor counseling a child or youth behind closed doors, another staff member will be present in the building and the child or youth will be advised of their presence in the building. Concerning the use of the preschool/church school nursery, bathroom, and changing table, the doors will be left open if there is one worker in the bathroom with a child.

B. **Overnight Rules** – youth chaperones must be 21 years of age or older and Members or participants in the active life of our congregation for at least 6 months. Parents of youth who do not meet these criteria cannot chaperone, but are welcome to visit the event prior to leaving their youth with approved personnel.

C. **Church Nursery Procedure** – each child left in the Church Nursery shall be signed into the Nursery or Children’s Church by a parent and/or grandparent. This Sign-In Sheet provides information pertaining to the care the child. The child must also be signed out of the activity by a parent/grandparent on this same form (Appendix VI).

D. A notebook is kept in each Sunday School classroom for **accident forms** (Appendix VII and VIII) and **incident reports**. The preschool teacher’s notebook will also include a sign in/sign out log.

III. Program Implementation

A. All current Paid, Regular and Volunteer Workers will be required to complete the paper work required by their position within a given timeline. If they do not do so, they will be contacted and asked if they wish to continue to serve and given a timeline to complete their paperwork. If they do not wish to complete the process, they will be removed. In order to be non-discriminatory, All must complete the paperwork and process.

B. Once this policy has been adopted, all current workers and volunteers shall be given the required paperwork to be completed and submitted according to the stated deadline. All new employees and volunteers shall be required to complete the paperwork at the time of recruitment or training.

C. All forms will be kept confidential and locked in a locking file cabinet in the Administrative Assistant office. Only the Paid staff members charged with assisting in the process will have access to these forms.

IV. Responding to and Reporting Suspected Abuse.

A. *Responding: In all instances of suspicion of Child Abuse the following Procedures will be followed:*

1. A timely report to a Pastor of SUMC shall be made by a person with first hand knowledge of the incident.
2. Documentation of the alleged abuse shall be made by completing the Suspected Child Abuse Form within 24 hours of the incident, (*Appendix VIII*), and turned into one of the Pastors within 24 hours.
3. No employee or volunteer shall conduct his/her own investigation or interview the child or other individuals pertaining to the incident.
4. No employee or volunteer shall make any statement about the incident to the news media. Any questions from the news media must be referred to the church's attorney.

B. *Reporting: In all instances of suspicion of Child abuse the following Procedures shall be followed:*

A Pastor of SUMC shall report the incident to the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, Child Protection Services during regular office hours at 253-2077 (8am – 5pm). If unable to speak with someone immediately, call 253-2098 (leave message). After office hours call 911 and ask to speak with a social worker on duty. This notification will be made within 24 -28 hours of the report.

V. Safeguards of Training and Education

The Associate Pastor shall provide child abuse prevention training for all church employees and volunteers on an annual basis. This training is required. Individual training shall be provided to those who begin working with children or youth during the course of the year.

VI. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth.