

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Wesley United Methodist Church

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Why Do We Need a Safe Sanctuary Policy?

Child abuse can take many forms. It can be physical, emotional or sexual in nature. It occurs far more often than any of us expect. Although we would all like to believe "it can't happen here", we see from the experience of the Roman Catholic Church that it can happen just about anywhere. When abuse occurs, the consequences are devastating to all involved, including the church. We know we must take steps to educate our congregation about abuse and to prevent abuse. The Safe Sanctuary Policy is our effort to make our church a safer place for our children, and to protect our church as a whole.

In 2004, the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church passed a resolution requiring all churches to develop safe sanctuary policies. Although such a policy cannot completely prevent child abuse or exploitation, it can greatly reduce the risk for children, youth, staff, volunteers and the church as a whole.

What is a Safe Sanctuary Policy?

A Safe Sanctuary Policy is a plan to develop policies for recruiting, screening and hiring staff and volunteers who work with children and youth. It is also a set of procedures or guidelines that staff and volunteers working with our children must implement in their activities with children and youth. Lastly, it is a plan for responding to a reported or suspected case of child abuse or sexual misconduct, and a plan for reporting sexual misconduct between adults.

Statement of Policy

A. Children and Youth Protection

Wesley United Methodist Church is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to ensure this, it is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision for all children's and youth activities. We also expect all employees or volunteers who work with children and youth to complete and submit an appropriate disclosure and to be familiar with the policy and educated on its procedures.

B. Ministerial Conduct

All persons engaged in the ministry of Wesley United Methodist Church, including appointed leaders, employees, and volunteers are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

Because these ministers, including appointed leaders, employees and volunteers often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry of this church maintain their own psychological, emotional and spiritual health, and that they have

adequate preparation and education for helping those individuals they seek to serve in the ministry. It is the policy of Wesley United Methodist Church to encourage its leaders, employees and volunteers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources. It is also expected that those engaged in providing ministry will complete and submit an appropriate disclosure and/or acknowledgment form for the role in our children's and youth ministry each individual will fulfill.

C. Prohibition of Sexual Misconduct, Abuse and Other Discrimination

Wesley United Methodist Church is committed to creating and maintaining a worship and work community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, abuse, exploitation or intimidation. This church affirms its responsibility for creating an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, adult or child, which is free of sexual misconduct, free of physical and emotional abuse, and that encourages respect, equality, equity and kinship to Christ. We support equity among all persons regardless of ethnicity, situation, age, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Specifically, all persons associated with Wesley United Methodist Church should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation and harassment, and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take the action needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this Safe Sanctuary policy and, if necessary, to discipline any person who violates this policy. Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioners or other individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of Wesley United Methodist Church is unethical and unprofessional behavior, and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

D. Review and Education

This policy was drafted, reviewed and approved by the Church Administrative Council. The update was approved by the Charge Conference on 1/15/2017.

The Governing Board will appoint a committee that will conduct periodic reviews of this policy and make any changes it deems appropriate as a result of its review. The Governing Board approval will be obtained before implementing any changes the committee makes to this policy in the future.

Wesley United Methodist Church commits itself to educating all church leaders, employees and volunteers who work in our children's and youth programs on the provisions of our Safe Sanctuary Policy so they are aware of their responsibilities within the framework of this policy, the rationale behind the development of this policy and the applicable guidelines and procedures to be followed in ministry. Annual training sessions will be conducted by the Discipleship Coordinator or a conference resource person. A copy of this policy will be available for reference in the Church office. It will also be posted on the Church's website.

Definitions

Minister: A person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. “Minister” includes, but is not limited to, appointed leaders of the church, employees and volunteers.

Ministerial Relationship: The relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

Emotional Abuse: Involves verbal or non-verbal violence toward a child that gives the child the message that the child is “no good” and never will be. It includes, but is not limited to, using harsh, abusive language meant to revile, malign or hurt the one it is directed at.

Physical Abuse: Involves physical violence toward a child, including, but not limited to, any type of physical aggression directed at a child in anger, including corporal punishment.

Sexual Misconduct: Includes, but is not limited to, “sexual exploitation” and “sexual harassment” as defined in this policy. It occurs when a person within a “ministerial relationship” engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member or volunteer.

Sexual Exploitation: Sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a minister engaged in the work of the church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister.

Sexual Harassment: A repeated or coercive sexual advance toward another person contrary to his/her wishes. It includes, but is not limited to, behavior directed at and about a person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or harassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute "sexual harassment" when:

- submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment or participation in any church activity;
- submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited "sexual harassment" includes, but is not limited to, unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations;
- verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, or sexual propositions;
- physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault or coercing sexual intercourse, and
- visual contact, such as glaring or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters or magazines.

"Sexual harassment" also includes, but is not limited to, continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome – and using sexual behavior to control, influence or affect the career, salary, work, learning or worship environment of another.

It is impermissible to suggest, threaten or imply that a failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership or comfortable participation in the life of the church.

Basic Guideline Procedures

Employee and Volunteer Screening Guideline: All Staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children and/or youth shall be required to fill out a Disclosure and Authorization form.

For Wesley United Methodist children's and youth ministries, persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with Wesley United Methodist Church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in children's and youth activities. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the pastor will replace the six-month waiting period.

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) will knowingly or willingly be accepted as a volunteer or employed as a staff person to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.

Persons who have a break in service of one or more years shall submit to screening procedures. Wesley United Methodist Church reserves the option to repeat background checks of persons who have had three or more years of service.

All background reports shall be kept, as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file which the senior pastor will maintain in a locked file cabinet. Detailed notes for all reference checks shall also be included in the personnel file. All applications and related forms must be completed and retained on file for seven years.

The Coordinator of Discipleship who is in charge of the children's activity(ies) or youth activity(ies) is responsible for reviewing this policy with each applicant prior to service and annually thereafter.

The "Two Adult" Guideline: This policy suggests that no fewer than two unrelated adults be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children and youth. However, it is expressly understood that Sunday school classrooms will not always be staffed with two unrelated adults. When classrooms are not staffed with two unrelated adults, a "roamer" will be used who will move in and out of the classrooms during the program, event or ministry while the doors always remain open. The "Two Adult" guideline will also apply when transporting children and youth in any personal or church authorized vehicle.

"Windows and Doors" Guideline: There will be windows in all doors where children or youth ministry occurs, or doors will be left open to accommodate open access to the rooms where child or youth ministry occurs.

Communication Guidelines with children and youth: All forms of electronic communications will be done so that messages, texts, social media or other forms of contact will include (CC or Share) another staff member, volunteer or parent.

The "Five Years Older" Guideline: It is desired that all workers or volunteers with children and youth be at least five years older than the children and youth they are

leading. If there is a young adult or another youth who wishes to be a volunteer with children's or youth ministry who is less than five years older than the age of the youth or children in ministry, such volunteers will be paired with a compliant adult leader who is at least five years older than the age of the ministered children or youth whenever possible.

The "Six Month" Guideline: No volunteer may be accepted to work with children and youth until that volunteer has been an active participant in our congregation for at least six months unless that volunteer is paired with an adult who has been an active participant in our congregation and who has worked or volunteered with our children or youth ministry for at least six months.

First Aid/CPR Training: All workers and volunteers who work with children and youth will be encouraged to obtain training in basic CPR and first aid. The church will provide all workers and volunteers with information on where such training may be obtained. However, the church will not pay the costs of such training unless advance approval is obtained from the senior pastor or the Discipleship Coordinator that will provide the funds for such training.

Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco: Alcohol, recreational drug and tobacco use are prohibited on any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving youth or children.

Seatbelts: Seatbelts will be worn by all participants, but especially by youth and children, during any church-sponsored event that requires transportation in a car.

Driver's License and Insurance: Workers and volunteers that agree to transport youth or children on any church-sponsored event must have a valid driver's license in order to drive any youth or child on the church-sponsored event. They must also have a completed driver's background check on file. In addition, workers and volunteers should not transport youth or children in a vehicle unless they have adequate liability insurance on the vehicle they are using to transport the youth or children. Drivers should be adults over the age of 21. For each activity when transportation is provided a copy of the adult's driver's license and valid insurance card will be submitted to the church and retained in the adult's personnel file.

Emergency Contact Card: Children and youth participating in church-sponsored events or activities outside the church premises are expected to provide emergency contact cards from parents or guardians that contain information on who to contact for the child or youth participants in the event of an emergency. These contact cards will also contain a general grant of permission for the child or youth to participate in any event or activity, and authorize supervising adults to seek emergency medical care if necessary. The absence of a completed emergency contact card will not prohibit a child or youth from participating in a church-sponsored children's or youth activity or event, but every effort will be made to ensure that emergency contact information is provided. The primary goal is to inform parents, guardians and hosts that emergency contact information should be made available to those supervising children's or youth events.

Orientation and Acknowledgment: Each year the church will offer an orientation for all full-time or part-time workers and volunteers who work with youth and children. The orientation will include a review of the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and the guidelines

Wesley United Methodist Church strives to use in all its youth and children's ministries. Procedures for reporting and investigating incidents or complaints regarding inappropriate behavior, misconduct or alleged violations of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will also be reviewed. Annual training sessions will be conducted by the Discipleship Coordinator, Pastor, or a Church conference resource person.

All leaders, workers and volunteers in youth and children's ministries shall provide a signed acknowledgment form indicating they are familiar with the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy, are trained on its guidelines and procedures, and agree to give their best effort to the ministry and to adhering to the guidelines and procedures established by the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

The previous guidelines are important to our commitment to the prevention of abuse of our youth. They are to be followed when reasonably possible. Strict adherence to these guidelines is not always possible or practical so it is important to note these are guidelines only. These guidelines are not listed in order of importance.

Church expenditures: All purchases made with Church funds will be reviewed to prevent unauthorized or inappropriate expenditures. (Those that do not adhere to the philosophy of Wesley United Methodist Church).

Computer Use: Church owned computers are subject to random searches to prevent the downloading or viewing of material that is illegal, unauthorized, and inappropriate. (Does not adhere to the philosophy of Wesley United Methodist Church).

Reporting & Complaint Response Procedures

I. REPORTING

Complaints alleging emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual misconduct or any other inappropriate behavior that violates the Safe Sanctuary Policy should be reported to the senior pastor.

All complaints, except those involving the activity of the senior pastor, will be referred to the senior pastor for initial handling.

If the complaint involves the activity of the senior pastor, the complaint should be referred to the chairperson of the Governing Board for initial handling. Wesley United Methodist Church will cooperate fully in any process conducted by the Northern Illinois Conference related to the senior pastor.

In certain cases, as required by state or federal law, the senior pastor must comply with mandatory reporting requirements and report certain types of abuse allegations to the appropriate county department of human services and/or local law enforcement agencies.

II. RESPONSE PROCEDURES

A. Senior Pastor's Initial Contacts

Upon receipt of a complaint, the senior pastor will promptly contact the complainant to discuss the options available to address the complaint. A copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will be provided to the complainant at this time. The parents or guardians of any minors involved will be notified so they can assist in choosing the appropriate response option and participate in the response process.

B. Response Options

1. Direct Resolution

The complainant may choose to attempt resolution by making direct contact with the person whose conduct the complaint involves.

2. Informal Process – Meeting With Senior Pastor

The complainant may choose to have the senior pastor attempt resolution of the matter. The senior pastor will offer to meet with the accused party, either individually or jointly with the complainant, to bring the issue raised to the accused party's attention, and to resolve the issue to the mutual satisfaction of all involved.

3. Formal Process – Written Complaint with Investigation

This option involves the following steps.

(a) Written Complaint

This option is initiated by the complainant filing a written complaint describing the incident(s) giving rise to the complaint and identifying the person whose conduct the complaint involves.

The senior pastor will explain to complainants electing this option that the privacy of all individuals involved will be maintained to the greatest extent possible, but that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Information will be shared only as needed to properly investigate the complaint and decide upon an appropriate course of action.

The written complaint will be referred to the three-member moderator team for review and further action. The moderator team is appointed by the Governing Board

A moderator may choose to abstain from further participation if a conflict, real or perceived, exists that renders the moderator incapable of impartiality. The Pastor and the Governing Board will choose a 3rd person to replace the abstaining moderator.

(b) Investigation

(1) Investigative Team Appointed: The moderator team will promptly appoint a two person investigative team, comprised of one man and one woman, to conduct an investigation of the complaint. It will be within the moderator team's discretion to decide whether the accused party's volunteer service continues, be restricted or completely suspended during the investigation. If the accused party is a church employee, the pastor will decide whether the employee's service will continue, be restricted or suspended during the investigation, or terminated.

(2) Investigation Conducted: The two person investigative team will meet separately with the complainant and the accused party to gather statements and information about the facts and circumstances surrounding the events or activities that involved the alleged misconduct. A parent or guardian of any minor involved shall be present unless they choose not to be.

It may also be necessary for the team to meet with others who were present at the activity or event involved to gather pertinent information about the facts and circumstances surrounding the allegations in the complaint.

(3) Investigative Team Report: No more than thirty (30) days after appointment, the two member investigative team will prepare a report to submit to the moderator team. This report should include the following information:

- A summary of the steps taken in the investigation.
- A restatement of the nature of the complaint made and a summary of the information obtained from the complainant during the interview process.
- A statement of the response to the complaint and a summary of the information obtained from the accused party during the interview process.
- A summary of information obtained from other parties in the investigation.
- A recommendation for action.

Both the complainant and the accused will be given the opportunity to review the investigative team's summary of their respective interviews. Each will be asked to sign a statement indicating the investigative team's summary of their respective interview is a fair representation of the facts as that person reported them.

(c) Moderator Team Action: The three person moderator team will review the investigative team's report and decide on an appropriate course of action. The moderator team may direct the investigative team to gather additional information if the moderator team believes it is necessary to make a proper determination. A course of action must be determined within 60 days from the complaint.

The moderator team will order one of the following actions. If the complaint involves the alleged misconduct of a church employee, the moderator team will consult with the pastor to decide on the appropriate course of action.

(1) No Action Recommended: This order is appropriate when the investigation reflects no inappropriate conduct took place, or when the complaint has been resolved through some other means.

(2) Private Discussion/Reprimand: This order is appropriate when the investigation reflects the complaint involved miscommunication or misunderstanding between the parties more than anything else, and is appropriate when education on sensitivity may be all that is needed to resolve the issue.

(3) Dismissal/Removal: This order is appropriate when the investigation suggests inappropriate conduct violating church policy was engaged in, whether knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, and where it is determined it is best to remove the person complained of from their position of contact with the church's youth and children.

The adjudication of the moderator team and/or pastor will be put in writing and should include an explanation of its findings.

The moderator team will choose at least two of its members to meet with the complainant to review and explain its findings and its decision.

III. RECORD KEEPING

A. The senior pastor shall keep a log of all complaints made, and should include notes that indicate the response options the complainants elected and the outcome of the response options elected.

B. If a formal written complaint was submitted, a full record of the proceedings conducted to investigate and dispose of the complaint must be maintained. The record should include:

- A copy of the written complaint.
- The materials gathered and produced by the investigative team.

- The moderator team's or Staff-parish committee's written decision regarding the course of action taken to dispose of the complaint.
- A summary of the final meeting held with the complainant.

C. Records of all complaints and proceedings must be kept a minimum of seven (7) years following final disposition, or, if the complainant is a minor at the time of the event, until the complainant reaches the age of forty-five (45).

D. Access to these records will be limited to the Governing Board as needed and the senior pastor. These records may also be disclosed to cooperate in an investigation conducted by the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church, law enforcement officials, the county department of human services, the church's insurer or the church's legal counsel.