

Approved Church Council 2/25/18

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Windsor United Methodist Church
Columbia, South Carolina

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, Windsor 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.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions will be used as follows:

- Children are ages birth to age 12.
- Youth are ages 13 to 18.
- Vulnerable adults are age 18 and over who are not physically or mentally healthy or who may speak a language other than English.
- Abuse is the act of a person using his or her power to take advantage of another person.
- Supervisory adult is one who has supervisory responsibilities over a child/youth or vulnerable adult.

COVENANT Statement

Windsor United 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. (1)We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; (2) we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; (3) we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; (4) and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of South Carolina law.

STAFF SELECTION Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and/or youth or vulnerable adults at Windsor UMC will be:

- 21 years old, and
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising. This requirement does not apply to vulnerable adults.

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at Windsor UMC will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information,
- Be active in the life of the church by attending church worship services or a church small group for at least six months,

- Provide the names and contact information of 3 personal references, and
- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect or the production of and/or the possession of child pornography may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- In addition, individuals who will be responsible for driving children, youth or vulnerable adults may not drive if convicted of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) within the last 5 years.

STAFF SUPERVISION requirements

Whenever supervising activities involving children and/or youth or vulnerable adults at Windsor UMC take place,

- Two non-related adults will be present at all times.
- When this is not possible, two related adults may supervise with an open door policy in play.
- Children and youth will be checked in and out of an activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- The Supervising adults will have access to a land telephone or cell phone.
- One-on-one interactions between adults and children and/or youth or vulnerable adults will take place with an open door and line of sight visibility to a minimum of one other adult.
- All adults will refrain from initiating any physical touching with children or youth or vulnerable adults.

Whenever Windsor UMC sponsors an activity involving children and/or youth

- Only the Legal Guardian, Pastor and Education Supervisor will have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth or vulnerable adults' 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. Door windows will be kept free from adornment.

BEST PRACTICE Guidelines

In addition to the requirements listed above, the following best practice guidelines will maximize Windsor's effort in keeping children and/or youth safe, staff and volunteer supervisory adults will:

- Sign a covenant form.
- Pass a CPR/First Aid training every two years.

- Will attend training about Safe Sanctuary policies, procedures and child abuse issues on a regular basis.

TRANSPORTING Requirements

Whenever Windsor UMC transports children or youth or vulnerable adults away from the church campus,

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- Adults should never transport child/youth alone.
- Adult drivers must have a current South Carolina driver's license.
- Drivers must be approved and covered by the church's insurance company with the understanding that the church's insurance is secondary to the driver's.
- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.
- All drivers and passengers will wear safety seat belts at all times.
- Windsor UMC will not rent or use a 15 passenger van as described by SC Code of Laws 56-5-195, otherwise known as Jacob's Law to transport children or youth to or from activities.

OVERNIGHTS

- Adults and youth, males and females, will sleep in four separate quarters, if possible.
- Youth must have signed parental consent and release form.

PHOTOGRAPHY, PHONES, TEXTS, NEWSLETTERS, E-MAILS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to protect the identity of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, Windsor adults will not:

- Tag photos or use photos without the consent of parents.
- Call or text a child/youth under the age of 18. A group text is allowed.

CONTRACTUAL GROUP Requirements

Contractual groups involving children, youth or vulnerable adults using Windsor's church facility will follow Windsor UMC's Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures.

RESPONDING TO AN ALLEGATION OF A SUSPECTED INCIDENTS

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

- Insure the protection of the child or youth or vulnerable adults and attend to any needs of the alleged victim,
- Remove the accused person from position and proximity while investigation proceeds,
- Contact the Senior Pastor,
- Notify parents,
- Notify authorities including County Office of DSS, Police or Sheriff's Department, and
- Document everything.

In addition,

- Notify District Superintendent,
- Notify Church attorney, and
- Identify spokesperson for church. Call Conference office, because it is better if no church member speaks to media.
- Identify counselor for victim and affected individuals.

If Pastor is accused,

- Contact SPRC Chair.
- SPRC Chair notifies District Superintendent who will contact Bishop and take charge.

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).