

LOCAL CHURCH POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND ADULTS FROM VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

_____ United Methodist Church
as adopted by the _____ (group)
on _____ (date).

INTRODUCTION

“Let the children come to me, and do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14, NRSV). Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that God values all of human life - perhaps children most of all.

The *Social Principles* of the United Methodist Church state that “... children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶1162C). *The Book of Resolutions* encourages all conferences and churches to become involved in the prevention of sexual abuse of children (2016 *Book of Resolutions*, #3084). *The Book of Discipline* names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶12702).

OUR COMMITMENT

Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of the _____ United Methodist Church to do everything in our power to prevent physical, emotional or sexual abuse against children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations involved in any ministry sponsored by our local church. Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end, we covenant to be aware of our legal responsibilities and to comply with those responsibilities and go beyond those responsibilities when necessary to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

The _____ United Methodist Church will participate in orientations and training seminars for clergy and others in a role of leadership with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations. The Great Plains Annual Conference, in behalf of this congregation, through the Safe Gatherings program will help to screen clergy and others in a role of leadership with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations. Each church will be responsible to report instances of abuse as stated in Reporting Section.

The guidelines of the Safe Gatherings program and the procedures set forth the status of certification for persons within the _____ United Methodist Church. Persons thus certified are entrusted with the title “Certified Worker with Children, Youth, and Adults from Vulnerable Populations.” Certified workers with children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations shall be given the opportunity to renew certification in a manner determined by the Sexual Ethics Committee of the Great Plains Annual Conference.

SCOPE

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff persons, volunteer or paid, lay or clergy, who have any direct contact with children and/or youth and/or adults from vulnerable populations in any activities or events sponsored by _____ United Methodist Church.

DEFINITIONS

1. Physical Abuse: Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. This definition includes any non-accidental physical injury caused by a caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations.
2. Direct Contact: with children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations is defined as the care, supervision, guidance, transportation or control of such persons or routine interaction with children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations.
3. Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, other physical contact and sexual relations.
4. Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is "any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue" (2016 Book of Discipline, ¶161J). Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender.
5. Sexual Misconduct: Sexual misconduct means a chargeable offense within the meaning of ¶2702 of the *Book of Discipline*.

6. Persons in a ministerial role of leadership with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations: shall include all paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy, who have a direct or indirect contact with same who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the _____ United Methodist Church.
7. The Certification Authority: for this church shall be the Certification Authority for the Great Plains Annual Conference.

SCREENING AND TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS OR STAFF

The Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church has developed and implemented training procedures (the “Safe Gatherings” program) for all individuals who work with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations. No such worker individual shall have any direct contact with children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations until they have completed this training program.

1. Prior to employment or acceptance as a volunteer or paid staff person, the event coordinator or administrator in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective worker to complete the Safe Gatherings program. By registering for Safe Gatherings, the applicant will give the Certification Authority of the Great Plains Annual Conference permission to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
2. Upon receipt of the application, the Certification Authority shall facilitate a screening check with appropriate agencies. All persons applying for Certification or Recertification must register for online training through Safe Gatherings and pay the required fee toward the cost of background checks.
3. The Safe Gatherings program will facilitate reference requests from all applicants, who must have one clergy and one lay person as references. The clergy reference must be a District Superintendent if the applicant is a professional minister.
4. The Safe Gatherings Coordinator of the Great Plains Annual Conference will receive the completed reports and review them. If any of the completed forms or reports raises questions about the fitness of the applicant, the Certification Authority should disapprove the application and notify the applicant. The _____ United Methodist Church reserves the right to turn away any persons for volunteer or paid service.

5. If the applicant, clergy or lay, volunteer or paid, is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations, the applicant will not be hired/approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations shall disqualify any applicant.
6. Results of screenings shall be kept confidential within the limits of the law.
7. The Great Plains Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has developed an online training program for all clergy and others in a role of leadership who work with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations. It is the responsibility of this local church to arrange for its applicants to take the Safe Gatherings online training. No person shall, after _____ (date), have primary responsibility for working with children, youth, or adults from vulnerable populations until they have completed this training program, except for persons already holding valid certification.

SUPERVISION

Whenever possible, a team approach to ministry with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations is most appropriate. Ordinarily there will be two workers present during each event. Workers are to be encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed. At the completion of the event or program, the administrator or supervisor in charge shall file a report with a count of persons in attendance and a comment that there were or were not any reportable incidents. This document will be retained on file in the church office.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

Kansas: Kansas Statutes Annotated 38-2223 lists those who are mandated reporters in the State of Kansas. If you do not know whether you are in the mandated reporter category, go to the Kansas DCF (Department for Children and Families) website, www.dcf.ks.gov to find out. Certification does not automatically make you a mandatory reporter. All clergy serving United Methodist churches in Kansas will be mandated to report incidences of child abuse.

Reporting Child Abuse - Anyone has the right to report suspected abuse directly to the State of Kansas at 800-722-5330. When the DCF is not open for business, suspected abuse may be reported to a law enforcement agency. Under Kansas law, anyone who, without malice, participates in the making of a report of abuse is immune from civil liability. The Guide to Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in Kansas is an excellent resource and is found on the DCF website, www.dcf.ks.gov. ChildLine and Abuse Registry Intake Unit, Call 800-932-0313 (TTD: 866-872-1677)

Nebraska: Nebraska Revised Statutes, section 28-7111, requires any person who suspects that a child has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to report it promptly to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services at the Abuse/Neglect Hotline, Mandated reporters include specified professionals and child service organizations, but also include any person who in the course of engaging in activities under this policy has reasonable cause to believe that a minor has been subjected to child abuse or neglect or observes such child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which reasonably would result in child abuse or neglect.

Failure to report is a misdemeanor. Anyone making a report in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability.

IMPLEMENTATION

Management of all provisions of this Policy is the sole responsibility of the _____ United Methodist Church. In carrying out the duties and responsibilities of this policy, the _____ United Methodist Church may utilize and rely on certain policies, procedures, and/or training courses recommended or endorsed by the Great Plains Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. The _____ United Methodist Church, in relying upon any such assistance, acknowledges that the Conference provides the assistance for informational purposes only and does not assume any responsibility for the actions of the _____ United Methodist Church with respect to the implementation and/or enforcement of this policy.