

PREAMBLE:

When the crowd tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.” Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for the Holly Springs UMC ministries that deal with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected. Often abuse occurs in settings where children, youth, or vulnerable adults should have been able to feel safe-homes, schools, camps, and most sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.

It is the purpose of this policy is to first protect all the children that come to us, second to protect our staff both paid and volunteer from potential allegations of abuse, and third to limit the extent of legal liability of our church.

Following is a plan that will include various areas of the issue: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan.

OUR COVENANT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

As a Christian community of faith we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that provide an environment for spiritual growth and for safety of all children, youth in our care, as well as those who work with children and youth in this ministry. We will follow the measures of this policy in the recruitment and selection of paid staff as well as volunteer workers with children and youth. We will implement the operational procedures of this policy. We will train and educate our staff and volunteer workers in the use of these policies. We will define and follow procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to state law. We will define and follow procedures for handling an allegation of abuse among staff or workers. We will be prepared to respond to media interest if an incident occurs.

SAFE SANCTUARY – POLICY DEFINITIONS:

“Abuse” is defined as a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child/youth/vulnerable adult. Abuse includes non-accidental:

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- Physical Abuse – Any act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. Examples of physical abuse include, but are not limited to: beating, harmful restraint, use of a weapon or instrument, or actions that result in or could result in serious physical injury.
- Sexual Abuse – The sexual exploitation for satisfaction of sexual drives between a young person and someone older and more powerful, against whom the child, youth, or vulnerable adult is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts. This involves a range of activities, including fondling or other inappropriate physical contact; it also includes exhibitionism, child pornography, and suggestive behaviors or comments.
- Verbal Abuse – Any verbal act towards a child, youth, or vulnerable adult that is intended to humiliate, degrade, or threaten.
- Emotional Abuse – Emotional abuse is exposing a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty and sending messages that they are worthless, unloved or undeserving of love. All of which can lead to serious emotional or psychological damage.
- Neglect – Any act of omission that endangers the health, welfare, and/or safety. As well as withholding food, medical care, affection and/or education.

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child” means a person under the age of 18. For the purposes of this Policy, this definition includes vulnerable adults. “Youth” are a subgroup of children and are comprised of those who are in grades 6-12.

“Children/Youth activities” means any activity or program in which children/youth are under supervision of persons (staff or volunteers) in charge of these activities.

“Church” means Holly Springs United Methodist Church.

“Conference” means the North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“District Superintendent” means the person appointed as District Superintendent of the Fairway District.

“Person in charge of a children/youth activity” means the employed staff person responsible of the conduct of this activity, or the church volunteer that has been delegated authority. Such as a Sunday School or V.B.S. teacher, nursery worker, choir director, youth leader.

“Persons required to report child abuse” means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals; school administrators, teachers and nurses; social service workers; day-care center workers; mental health professionals; peace and law enforcement officers.

“Safe Sanctuary Coordinator” shall be appointed by Holly Springs united Methodist Church.

“Staff person” means any person employed by Holly Springs United Methodist Church .

“Volunteer” means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children/youth activities under the supervision of a person in charge of such activities/events.

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“Vulnerable adult” means a person over the age of 18 with a diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

“We” means the Holly Springs United Methodist Church.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 1 – SCREENING PROCEDURES:

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind assuring the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and the volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Hired staff, who have regular direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, shall be required to fill out an application. The application process includes an appropriate background check that will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. If anything comes back on the background check then the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will be brought in as a consultant.

Volunteers who have regular direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be required to have an appropriate background check performed prior to beginning volunteer duties. The questionable background check results will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor. If anything comes back on the background check the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will be brought in as a consultant to review the check and decide if the individual is able to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

North Carolina statewide background checks shall be run on potential volunteers living in North Carolina for greater than seven years. Potential volunteers which have lived in North Carolina for less than seven years will be required to have both state and nationwide background checks.

Vehicle background checks will be required for any person wishing to transport children or youth.

A volunteer must be attending church sanctioned events (or active participant) on a regular basis to serving in any volunteer capacity. Non-members that are volunteering must serve with screened members.

No person shall work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults if any of the following criteria are found on the background check:

- Any registered sex offender
- Convictions of or plea of no contest to any felony
- Conviction of or plea of no contest to any misdemeanor that indicates the volunteer may pose a threat to the integrity or safety of the church environment
- More than one DWI
- A pattern of criminal charges, even if the charges were dismissed, which cause concern that the volunteer may pose a threat to the integrity or safety of the church environment

Staff and volunteers must have a Safe Sanctuary Covenant on file with the church.

Staff and volunteer background checks, Safe Sanctuary Covenants and training must be updated every two years.

SAFE SANCTUARY STEP 2 – SUPERVISION:

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The second step for providing a holy place of safety for children, youth, and vulnerable adults is conscientious and intentional supervision. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth, or vulnerable adults and to protect staff and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

1. Training is a requirement for all staff persons and volunteers in charge of activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Such activities include, but are not limited to: Preschool, Sunday school, and Children's Worship, Youth Group, VBS, Youth Bible studies, youth or children's trips. The Holly Springs UMC children and youth minister in cooperation with the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator, is responsible for ensuring that training is provided to the appropriate persons and all volunteers have received training and had a background check prior to leading in ministry.
2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule". The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults (an adult "roamer" may be utilized in some situations) . **In the case of a nursery situation (0-24 months)- there should always be 2 adults present.** North Carolina State Law will be observed at all times in determining the ratio of Adults to children.(1:6 presently for preschool) In recognitions of the importance of familial service and the covenant of marriage, Holly Springs UMC shall allow related couples to serve with one another. We believe that it is important for children and youth to see healthy families and marriage serving God. In the case that two adult volunteers are not available, an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms may help. At least one of these adults must have training in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.
3. No person in charge of children or youth activities shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST five (5) years older than the children/youth with whom he/she is working.
4. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door, a half-door installed and opened, or in the case of a solid door; the door shall be left open. All windows must remain uncovered and all children must be able to be seen through the windows.
5. Registration materials for activities in which children are away from the church (e.g. youth trips) shall require advance signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate. A different form must be signed for each event.
6. Counseling children, youth, or vulnerable adults is to be done in such a way that both counselor and counselee are both clearly visible from outside the room. When possible, the door should be left open to make sure all are visible.
7. While on trips where hotel rooms are secured, youth and adult chaperones are to be housed in separate rooms. On trips where hotel rooms are not practical, separate sleeping areas for male and female should be established. Adult chaperones in said sleeping areas are required to exhibit behavior consistent with modesty and are to enable children/youth to maintain their modesty.
8. All trips that leave church grounds must be supervised by the minimum number of adults required by policy, 1 adult for every 6 children or youth. On trips with mixed gender children of youth, mixed gender chaperones are required.

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Safe Sanctuary Step 3- Reporting.

Once an incident of abuse occurs or an allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. It should be respected that while all allegations are to be taken seriously, they are allegations until proven otherwise. In that spirit – all incident information should be kept STRICTLY confidential until a resolution is achieved. However all records will be made available to all agencies and persons and parties with the right to know. This is in keeping with all laws both federal and state and local.

The persons who observe alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the person in charge of that activity. The person in charge will report the incident in confidentiality to the senior pastor or to the Safe sanctuary Coordinator.

The following procedure is to be used by the Senior and / or Safe sanctuary coordinator in the case of reported abuse.

1. Complete a report of Suspected Incident of Abuse.
2. CALL WAKE COUNTY CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES. (919)212-7000
3. If the alleged abuse has taken place on church grounds, or the alleged abuser is a church member, church staff or clergy, then the District Superintendent MUST be contacted.
4. Complete a Suspected Incident Checklist and attach it to the Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse.

If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator, the chair person of the Administrative Council shall be contacted immediately and he/she will execute the responsibilities assigned to that person under this policy.

Persons who are objects of this report will be removed immediately from all children, youth or vulnerable adult activities until the incident is officially resolved. In any suspension of a person from said activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.