

**'Safe Sanctuary' Abuse Prevention Policy for
Children, Youth, Older, and Vulnerable Adults**
New Creation United Methodist Church
Durham, North Carolina

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. .

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 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" (para.162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [i.e abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites] occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. 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. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church includes a paragraph on "Rights of the Aging." (p.37) "In a society that places primary emphasis upon youth, those who are growing old in years are frequently isolated from the mainstream of social existence. We support social principles that integrate the aged into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and nondiscriminatory employment opportunity, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within existing communities. We urge social principles and programs with the emphasis on the unique concerns of older women and ethnic persons, that ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community. Further, we urge increased consideration, for adequate pension systems by employees with provisions for the surviving spouse."

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, New Creation United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child, youth, and older, and other vulnerable adult abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, Older, and Other Vulnerable Adult 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. "A 'vulnerable adult' is any person who is at least 18 years old and includes persons age 65 and older, those with self-identified disabilities, or one who has a caregiver who is helping the

vulnerable adult with daily living activities or managing their affairs. (Not every vulnerable adult would require a caregiver.)”

Covenant Statement

The New Creation 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, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth and vulnerable adult populations on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with North Carolina state law.

II. Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

A. Age and Selection

In recruiting and hiring volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 16 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. Volunteers and paid staff working with older and vulnerable adults must be at least 18 years of age. New Creation United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a paid worker for children/youth or vulnerable adults in the church unless they have completed a satisfactory background check and are at least 18 years of age. Unpaid volunteers may work with children and youth if they are at least 16 years of age and a member in good standing, on the implicit reference of the Children’s or Youth Ministry chairperson and the pastor. Unpaid volunteers with children, youth, older adults or vulnerable adults must additionally complete and attest to annual Safe Sanctuary training, must attest to never having been criminally convicted of physical or sexual abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or elder financial exploitation, and must complete a satisfactory background check.

B. Application and Reference Checks

The application process for paid staff working with children, youth, older and vulnerable adults is at the discretion of the pastor and SPPRC. Applicants for paid work must complete an application and provide consent to check references and background information. At least three references will be checked for each primary paid worker.

E. Background Checks and Interview

Going forward, criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy and paid staff, and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child or elder abuse or sexual misconduct, financial exploitation, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior. Background checks for paid staff will be reviewed by the pastor and SPPRC chair.

All applicants for paid work must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. Church policy and guidelines will be discussed during the interview.

All volunteers for work with children, youth, and older or vulnerable adults will be expected to consent to a criminal background check no less often than annually. The results of this background check will be reviewed by the pastor, Safe Sanctuary chairperson, and either the Children’s Ministry or Youth Ministry chairpersons.

F. Prior Convictions

Depending on the nature, severity, and timing of an individual's past criminal convictions, a given individual may not be eligible to volunteer in any church-sponsored activity involving children, older, or vulnerable adults. Specifically, individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

G. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the paid applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The pastor and SPPRC are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records. The pastor, Safe Sanctuary chairperson, Children's Ministry chairperson, and Youth Ministry chairperson are responsible for the implementation of policies and maintenance of confidential records as related to unpaid volunteers.

H. Required Forms and Signatures

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants to the paid staff will sign an Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check form, and will acknowledge receipt of, and agreement with, this Child, Youth, Older, and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention policy as part of the application process. All volunteers will acknowledge receipt of, and agreement with, this Child, Youth, Older, and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention policy as part of the application process and annually and will provide electronic or written consent for a criminal background check.

III. Staff Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with New Creation United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines. (When applicable, the policy will point out when guidelines should also be in effect for gatherings of older and vulnerable adults).

A. 'Two responsible persons' rule

Two approved volunteers or paid staff must be present at all times when working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults; one must be an adult over 21. Whenever possible, the two volunteers should both be over the age of 18 (ie the 'Two Adult Rule'). Teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in section III-I of this document. When thinking about prevention of child abuse, from either another child or an adult, it would not be sufficient for the volunteers or staff to just be present on a trip or present during class. They would need to be actively supervising, staying in close proximity to the children they are serving, even if there appears to be little risk for any incident to occur.

B. Check-in/ Check-out Procedures for Nursery and Children's Church

1. All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/check-out procedure as outlined in the nursery policy manual.
2. Preschool and elementary school aged children attending children's church or other

activities must be dropped off and picked up from all activities by a parent/guardian or their designee, unless other arrangements have been made with the teacher.

C. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the vulnerable populations at the church requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents/guardians (or their designee) of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe any activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program for children, youth, older or vulnerable adults at any time, unannounced.

D. Outside Access:

There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

E. Doors and Windows:

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied.

F. Individual Meetings:

One-on-one interactions, such as mentoring for teens, is sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that such interactions be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Youth receiving individual attention from an adult should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the meeting with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs.

G. Bathroom Policy for Vulnerable Populations:

Restrooms:

a. Children in Kindergarten or younger will be escorted to the bathroom if one is not available in their room. Adults will stand outside the restroom or stall unless the child needs assistance. It may be ideal to take a classroom bathroom break where one adult will be in the bathroom monitoring with the door open and one adult outside the bathroom monitoring the other children.

b. Children in 1st through 4th grades may go to the restroom independently if there is a second safe sanctuary trained adult monitoring the hallway. Ideally, restrooms should also be checked before and after programs for safety.

c. When it is appropriate for an Adult to assist a child in using the restroom, the door will remain open.

d. Youth may go to the restroom one at a time with Adult permission.

Outdoor worship bathroom:

It may be ideal to take a classroom bathroom break where one adult will be in the bathroom monitoring with the door open and one adult outside the bathroom monitoring the other children.

Youth Group: class will be taken as a group with adult monitoring outside the bathroom.

Any youth or vulnerable adult who identifies as transgender may use the restroom of their preferred gender.

Restroom facilities must have visible signage and be easily accessible for older and vulnerable adults.

G. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor. This is also true in situations where another child or youth is the one attempting to touch another child inappropriately. Workers and volunteers must immediately report allegations of child on child inappropriate physical contact to their ministry leader, staff member, or pastor, just as they would report if it was an adult who had done the inappropriate touching.

H. Outings Away From Church Property:

All children and youth participating in offsite outings must have written consent (church permission slip) and a medical release form. Consent forms and medical release forms may be filled out and signed digitally or onto a printed document.

There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are away from the church property. Please see attached permission slip template.

In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be a 1:7 staff:youth supervision ratio observed. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

The church must provide handicapped accessible vehicles for participants on trips should they be needed. The church will provide advance notice of all trips and activities for the benefit of older adults and any potential caregivers. This communication should provide details about the event, leadership, and medical and travel details, if applicable. The church will also find ways to routinely include and incorporate home bound members in various activities.

I. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. Other students and teachers should not discuss the child being separated, and will be encouraged to continue with their activities.

4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the parent of the behavior and will notify the Children's Ministry Coordinator or SPPRC chairperson of the conversation with the child's parents.
5. *No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.* If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

J. First Aid

It may at times be necessary for adults or responsible persons working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, to provide reasonable and basic first aid. (ie helping a child clean a scrape; provision of band-aids) We will keep a first aid kit accessible to staff and volunteers.

K. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

L. Training

Prior to working with youth ,children, or vulnerable adults, all volunteers and staff must undergo child and adult protection safety training. Initial training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees. In addition, a summary of current child and elder abuse statutes and reporting requirements for Durham County and the State of NC are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth and vulnerable adult activities, Administrative Council members, and all other church employees.

L. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read and agrees to conduct themselves in accordance with New Creation United Methodist Church's Abuse Prevention Policy for Children, Youth, Older, and Vulnerable Adults.

M. Virtual Activities

During times when meeting in-person with the children, youth, or vulnerable adult population is not safe or advisable, activities may be conducted virtually via a video conferencing platform. Virtual events will be password-protected and will have the 'waiting room' feature enabled. No unknown persons will be admitted to any virtual children's or youth activity. At least one supervising adult (21 years of age or older) will be present to supervise any official virtual activity for children or youth.

(Efforts will be made to work with older and vulnerable adults on communicating in cyberspace. Mentoring sessions will be available for caregivers and the vulnerable adults.)

IV. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth as well as all vulnerable populations participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an

emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) We will be prepared to do the following:

A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult, as the situation requires.

B. Immediately contact the pastor or on-call clergy.

C. Immediately notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church Safe Sanctuary representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:

1. Ensure that written documentation concerning the incident is recorded
2. Support the individual with the most first-hand knowledge of the situation, in notifying the Durham Police Department and/or Durham County Child Protective Services or Adult Protective Services as appropriate. *This is a requirement of the law.* (Note: We will not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
3. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent
4. Provide written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee.
5. A list of emergency numbers will be available to staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Please note that on weekends, any calls to Child or Adult Protective Services should be made via calling 911 and asking to speak to the social worker on call.

D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents or next of kin of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth/vulnerable adult until the persons arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s)/next of kin does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents or the family member is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents or family.)

E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office as necessary. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.

G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for

the sacred worth of the person, the accused will be removed from further involvement with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. If the accused is a child or youth member of the congregation, the pastor will speak with their caregiver about having the child/youth step back from all children/youth activities throughout the course of the pending investigation and beyond, as deemed necessary by the professionals responding to the immediate incident.

H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a predetermined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the North Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential