

Cheverly United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 2000, 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."

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, The Cheverly United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at events sponsored by this church. This church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the

appearance of abuse of children and youth and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

There are three types of abuse. Verbal Abuse is any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth. Physical Abuse is any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. Sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of another person.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

Covenant Statement

The Cheverly 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 on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with Maryland state law.

Supervision of children and youth

An adult is anyone 18 years of age or older. A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18 years. Youth assistants should not be in charge of, nor left alone with children and youth. Observation of activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare

- Whenever possible, there shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.
- Whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth

- The "2 Adult Rule" shall be observed (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight) whenever possible.
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult.

- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- We strongly recommend that at least (2) adults be present in every room.
- When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.

Transportation of child and youth:

Adult drivers of children, youth, and vulnerable persons will show their current driver's license, proof of insurance policy, and registration to the activity leader prior to any event requiring driving. No person under the age of 18 will be considered as a driver.

Screening for Adults

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

Guidelines for the recruitment of paid staff and volunteers

Pastors, all paid and volunteer workers in the church who have either direct, unsupervised access or indirect and/or supervised access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults in any ministry setting are required to be recruited and selected using the following procedures:

1. **Written Position Guidelines:** Be provided written position guidelines for positions in children, youth and vulnerable adult ministries, including identification of essential functions of the job. This Safe Sanctuaries Policy: For the Protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable Persons will be attached to each position guideline.
2. **Application, References, Interview:** All paid staff will fill out an application, provide two references, and be interviewed by the appropriate committee or board before beginning to work in children, youth, or vulnerable persons ministries at the church. References should be checked before the interview. Volunteers who express an interest in working with children, youth, or vulnerable persons ministries will have a meeting with the leader of that ministry subsequent to background check and prior to beginning ministry in order to discuss the appropriate position guidelines.

3. **Background Checks:** All Cheverly United Methodist Church staff will initially undergo a criminal history check and a child abuse history check for the state in which they currently reside. This is required prior to the staff beginning their ministry at the church. Every three years thereafter, all Cheverly United Methodist Church staff will subsequently undergo a criminal history check and a child abuse history check for each state in which they have resided since his/her last clearance.
4. **Record Maintenance:** All background checks will be maintained in a confidential secure location with limited access.
5. **Restrictions:** Adults convicted of child abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse), or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, will not be accepted for ministry positions (paid or volunteer) working with children, youth, or vulnerable persons in any church sponsored activity or setting.

Volunteers

Volunteers who work with children and youth will be required to submit the following three forms:

1. Volunteer Application
2. Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
3. Child and Youth Protection Policy Statement
 - a. Volunteers will be carefully screened by contacting given references.
 - b. If needed, background checks for CUMC's volunteers will be paid through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations are the responsibility of that organization.
 - c. Only the Senior Minister and/or Church Administrator will see the results of the members will be informed of individuals who are not cleared. All background checks will be kept confidential.

Training

This church shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons (including youth assistants) who work with children and youth. Training shall include this policy, and appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and leader misconduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after this policy becomes effective, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with this church. Adults thus certified are entrusted with the title "Certified Local Church Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth".

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Suspected incidents of child abuse should be immediately reported to the pastor. Never discuss allegations with other people except law enforcement or designated state/county investigators. It is the job of the staff to handle these matters in a professional and caring manner and to notify the proper authorities and district superintendent who will handle most inquiries about the alleged abuse.

In consideration of the alleged victim, the best way to respond to people, including children, who allege they have been abused is to assure them of your concern for their safety and well-being. If potential victims are in the abuse setting, take them to another open, safe spot in view of people. Have someone safe and familiar stay with the victim at all times. Do not leave them alone for even a moment.

Because abuse takes away power and control from the victim, victims need to be informed of and have knowledge of what is and will be happening. Keep them in the communication loop at all times in an age appropriate way.

Policy for Registered Sex Offenders

Maryland, the District of Columbia and West Virginia all maintain registries of sex offenders, which attempt to list all persons residing anywhere in those jurisdictions who have been convicted by a court of law of any of a very wide variety of sexual offenses. The registry in all three jurisdictions is available for public review and may be searched online at:

Maryland: <http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/sorSearch>

District of Columbia: <http://sexoffender.dc.gov>

West Virginia: <https://apps.wv.gov/StatePolice/SexOffender/Forms>

Contrary to popular belief, these Sex Offender Registries are *not* limited to listing convicted “pedophiles,” which, strictly speaking, describes persons with a primary sexual interest in prepubescent children aged 13 or younger. Rather, the Registries include sex offenders whose victims, depending on the crime, may include minors as old as 17 years of age or even adults.

From time to time, a local church pastor or church leader learns that a member, or any person who regularly frequents church premises for worship or other reasons, is a registered sex offender. When that happens, and even while resolutely affirming every person’s need to be part of a faith community and receive redemption, we hold in balance the imperative to do all we can to keep all our parishioners safe, especially (but not only) our children and youth. To that end, in striving to maintain an environment of love and safety for all, we believe the congregation’s process for responding to such information should include the following components:

1. Maintenance of List: The Staff Parish Relations Committee should establish and maintain a list of registered sex offenders who are members of the church, attend worship or are otherwise known to visit the church premises (buildings or grounds) on one or more occasions. The pastor and the chair of the SPRC will ensure that this list is updated in the following manner:

a. at least twice a year, by making a reasonably delineated geographical and name searches of the online version of the registry maintained for the jurisdiction in which the church is located, and

b. whenever it is brought to the attention of the pastor or the SPRC that another church member or visitor has become a registered sex offender. A current copy of the list will be delivered to the District Superintendent as soon as it is first prepared and whenever the list is updated.

2. Meeting and Covenant with the Registrant: Upon learning that a member or visitor is a registered sex offender, the pastor and the Chair of the SPRC chair, or another member of the SPRC designated by the Chair, will have an in-person meeting with the registered person (Registrant) and another adult of the Registrant's choosing to discuss the procedures the congregation will follow in order to allow the Registrant to continue to participate in the life of the congregation or visit the church premises for any purpose. During that meeting, the pastor and SPRC representative will:

a. indicate that they have been made aware of the person's name on the registry;

b. summarize the congregation's principles and guidelines in such situations, as outlined here and;

c. provide the Registrant with a Covenant Letter, signed by the pastor and the SPRC Chair; and

d. explain that the Covenant Letter must be counter-signed (in front of a witness), dated and returned to the pastor before the Registrant can be allowed to return to the church premises.