

The United Methodist Church Mandate:

REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

Adopted by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, April 1996

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, NRSV). 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* occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and appears to be increasing. 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. In response to this church-wide challenge, the following steps should be taken to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse.

Local churches should:

1. Develop and implement an ongoing education plan for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse and strategies for prevention.
2. Adopt screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, reference checks, background clearance, etc.) for workers (Paid and unpaid) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children and youth.
3. Develop and implement safety procedures for church activities such as: having two or more non-related adults present in classroom or activity; leaving doors open and installing half-doors or windows in doors or halls; providing hall monitors; instituting sign-in and sign-out procedures for children ages ten or younger, etc.
4. Advise children and young persons of an agency or a person outside as well as within the church whom they can contact for advice and help if they have suffered abuse.
5. Carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage.

6. Assist the development of awareness and self-protection skills for children and youth through special curricula and activities.
7. Be familiar with Annual Conference and other church policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

AGREEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING FOR CHURCH VOLUNTEERS

I HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH'S POLICY ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY ALL RECOMMENDATIONS, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES TO SAFEGUARD AND PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT.

Volunteer's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

(To be kept on file in the church office)