

NEW MEXICO CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

It is our calling and our mandate to insure safe sanctuary for God's people.

"But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'" Luke 18:15-17 NIV

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18:3-6, NIV

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our children, youth, employees, volunteers and the whole church body.

This policy shall be a guideline for conference and district events and ministries. (This policy shall not apply to local churches. However, local churches need to have their own policy in place no later than December 31, 2007 – see section VI of this policy.)

Definitions:

Abuse means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of a child, youth, or a vulnerable adult that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual contact, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.

Adult means any person at least 18 years of age.

Appropriate means conduct that one would reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.

Child, Children or Youth refer to a person under 18 years of age.

Leader means anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing the specific Church related function, event or activity.

Parent or guardian means any parent, step-parent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.

Sexual abuse means engaging in any sexual contact, sexual penetration, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, of a vulnerable adult, child or youth; or the

dissemination, exhibiting, or displaying of sexually explicit material to an adult with special needs or child or youth, regardless of whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the adult with special needs, or child or youth. This abuse may be violent or nonviolent. It includes any conduct that involves vulnerable adults, or children in sexual behavior for which they are not personally, socially, emotionally or developmentally ready.

Sexual contact means the intentional touching of the intimate parts or the clothing covering the immediate area of intimate parts of a youth, child or vulnerable adult.

Sexual exploitation means allowing, permitting or encouraging a vulnerable adult, child or youth to engage in prostitution or in the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer-generated images or other forms of depicting a child, youth or vulnerable adult engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct.

Sexual harassment means any sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.

Staff means any employee of the Conference, District or ministry, volunteer or paid.

Volunteer means a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any conference and/or district event or ministry without compensation.

Vulnerable adult means an adult who has one or more mental, physical or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without help.

Statement of Policy

- A. Abuse of a child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult is prohibited in any conference or district event or ministries.
- B. A member of staff or a volunteer for any conference and/or district event or ministry who observes or suspects that abuse has occurred concerning a child, youth, or vulnerable adult must immediately report such observed or suspected abuse to the appropriate legal authorities.
- C. Such reports of observed or suspected abuse must be reported to the Conference Council Director, and either the District Superintendent or Conference Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator in writing.
- D. It is the responsibility of the event coordinator to insure compliance with this policy.

(It is very important that all parties be sensitive to the alleged victim and his or her family as well as to the accused. Pastoral care should be available to all in the time of crisis.)

Implementation of Policy

- I. **Screening of all staff or volunteer members who work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults**

- A. General: For the purposes of this policy, paragraph B below shall apply to all persons (volunteer or staff) who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults are those who have direct contact with and supervision of children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. This does not include those persons who are employees of independent contractors who are involved in events, such as bus drivers of contracted bus lines, bands, and the like.
- B. Background Investigations: ALL staff and volunteers must have a nationwide criminal background check done for them.

II. Responsible Adult Supervision

- A. It is the requirement of this policy that each local church of the New Mexico Conference and all sponsoring organizations of district and conference events shall provide adequate adult supervision at district and conference events and ministries, attended by children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. (It is strongly suggested that a minimum of two unrelated adults be present at all conference and/or district events and ministries involving children or vulnerable adults.)
- B. Age Difference: Except in the case of events involving vulnerable adults, a five-year difference in age of at least one of the on-site supervisors and the oldest supervised participant is required. Persons closer in age to those supervised may be acceptable in assisting the primary on-site supervisor(s).

III. Overnight Accommodations - events requiring overnight accommodations

- A. When staying in a camp or hotel setting, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children; or if necessary for children to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children as long as any one leader is not alone with any one child.
- B. Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one leader is adequate, as long as any one leader shall NOT be alone with any one child.
- C. Coed overnight activities require both male and female adult leaders without exception.

IV. Supervision for nursery/childcare at Conference and District events

- A. There shall be a minimum of two (2) adult childcare providers per room.
- B. We recommend that whenever possible state childcare minimum standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of childcare providers to child ratio.

V. Supervision of children and youth at Conference and District events

- A. Whenever reasonable, the "Two Adult Rule" will require that no fewer than two adults be present at all times during any church-sponsored program,

event or ministry involving children or youth. Emergency situations may arise when the "Two Adult Rule" is not feasible. However, at no time will an adult be one on one with a child in an isolated or closed situation.

- B. In emergency situations, childcare and group activities will be relocated to a room near the main meeting area and doors will be left open.

VI. **Local Church Mandate**

Each local church is required to adopt a Safe Sanctuary policy for their church by December 31, 2007 and such policy shall be filed with District Superintendent.

A. Local Church policy should meet the following minimum standards

1. Educate the congregation on the definitions of abuse
2. Provide appropriate equipment and supervision
3. Develop selection & screening criteria for church staff & volunteers that include background checks
4. Implement the "Two-Adult" Rule
5. Have child safety protection policy annual orientation for all volunteers and paid staff
6. All events involving children must have at least two adults in a supervisory role
7. Have windows in all classroom doors or leave doors open
8. Have "sign-in/sign-out" procedures for nursery and preschool age children
9. Respond to allegations of abuse according to the law

B. **Other recommendations for inclusion in Local Church Policies**

1. Use open-door counseling procedures and limit counseling.
2. Provide advance notice to parents for off campus activities, trips & retreats and provide proper supervision
3. Procure adequate insurance for the scope of its ministries.
4. Develop guidelines for church and youth websites.
5. Develop transportation rules/guidelines
6. Have "Participation Covenant" for all participants and leaders.
7. Provide parent and family education
8. Have first aid/CPR trained personnel available at all times

(Participation Covenant and Local Church Policy examples can be found in the books "Safe Sanctuaries for Children" and Safe Sanctuaries for Youth" available through Cokesbury.)

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