



## Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Guidelines

### St. Paul's United Methodist Church Shawnee, Oklahoma

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, 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." (para. 162C)

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)



In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, The St. Paul's United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

### **Purpose**

Our purpose for establishing this Child 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.

### **Covenant Statement**

The St. Paul's 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 prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of Oklahoma law.

### **Staff SELECTION Policies**

All volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults at SPUMC will be:

- All paid staff must be at least 18 years old.
- All volunteers and staff must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A member of SPUMC wanting to volunteer must be a member for at least 6 months.

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults at SPUMC will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of 3 personal references.



- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth. 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.

### **Staff SUPERVISION Guidelines**

Whenever supervising activities involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults at SPUMC:

- Two non-related adults will be present at all times.
- Children and youth will be checked in to and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- They will have access to a telephone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility
- One-on-one interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be with an open door and visibility to all.

Whenever SPUMC sponsors an activity involving children or youth:

- Anyone has the right to visit and observe the activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- All classrooms and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.

Whenever SPUMC transports children, youth, or vulnerable adults away from the church campus:

- No youth should drive to/from events unless prior arrangements have been made and guardian has signed release.
- Adults should never transport child/youth by self
- Approved and covered by church's insurance company
- Drivers should go through same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff

Whenever SPUMC hosts an activity involving children or youth from another church or community organization:



- The groups using the church facility will follow SPUMC's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.

SPUMC volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend annual and regular training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures and child abuse issues.

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a SPUMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- Call the church pastor and trustees chair
- Call the County Office of DHS

### **Conclusion**

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship, p.96).