

“SAFE SANCTUARIES” POLICY

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Thorofare, NJ

PART ONE: Policy on Child and Youth Abuse

Abuse incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child or youth, the family, the church and its leaders. Churches can be torn apart by legal, emotional and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

In April 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child and youth sexual abuse in the church. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states: “children must be protected from economic, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.” St. Paul’s United Methodist Church affirms the policy that our churches should be “safe sanctuaries”, protecting children, youth and other vulnerable persons from sexual and other types of abuses. We are committed to be communities of faith where children and youth grow safe and spiritually strong.

Recognizing the forms of abuse as described below:

Verbal abuse: Any verbalization that humiliates degrades or threatens any child or youth.

Physical Abuse: Any hostile, aggressive behavior toward others, endangering a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition.

Sexual Abuse: Any act of sexual exploitation of a child or youth through: fondling, intercourse, incest, sexual actions, comments or innuendoes concerning one’s own or another’s body, or exposure to pornography or other suggestive visual materials.

Neglect: Any signs endangering the safety, health and welfare of a child. This could include inappropriate dress for climate, begging or stealing food, chronic hunger, depression, untreated medical conditions and poor hygiene.

Emotional Abuse: Any action, verbally or otherwise, that creates a situation where the child or youth is unable to continue to function in what is a normal behavior pattern for the child or youth.

We at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church will not tolerate any actions that are in any way abusive to our children and youth. These actions interfere with the mission of our church and are sinful, demeaning, abusive and wrong. We pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth. We have set up safety measures in the selection of recruitment of volunteer and paid workers associated with children and youth. Our workers with children and youth will be educated regarding the use of all appropriate policies and procedures. We have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirement of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs. This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all volunteer and paid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by St. Paul’s UMC.

In the light of the above statements, St. Paul’s UMC sets forth the following course of action for persons (both lay and clergy) who have any contact with children or youth:

- 1. As of February 2008, all future employees of St. Paul’s UMC must:**
 - a. Complete an application for employment with three references
 - b. Allow a background check
 - c. Sign a covenant statement

2. All current paid staff will be required to:

- a. Complete an application for employment with three references
- b. Allow a background check
- c. Sign a covenant statement

3. All volunteers who currently work with children and youth must:

- a. Complete a “Volunteer Application” with three references
- b. Allow a background check
- c. Sign a covenant statement

4. All future volunteers with children and youth will:

- a. Complete a “Volunteer Application” with three references
- b. Allow a background check.
- c. Sign a covenant statement

5. VBS volunteers other than VBS teachers/SS teachers who are current members of the church will not be required to have a background check as long as they have filled out and signed the Volunteer Application and the Participation Covenant Statement. VBS Volunteers who have not had background checks are never left alone with children.

Background checks for all general volunteer workers who work with children or youth such as nursery attendants will be paid by St. Paul’s UMC.

Background checks for Sunday school teachers, assistants, and hall monitors will be paid for by St. Paul’s Sunday School.

Anyone who would like to pay for their own, will be gratefully accepted but not required.

The required forms along with a copy of the “Safe Sanctuaries Policy” will be kept on file in the church office at 74 Church St., West Deptford, NJ 08086. The **completed forms** will be kept in a **secure file in the church office**. Background checks will be run through Trak-1 Technologies at www.gnjumc.org/safesanctuaries.

PART TWO: Supervision and Procedures

We will adhere to the following “Rules”

Two-adult or Roamer Rule:

Adults are described as those who are eighteen (18) years of age or older.

Two adults (whom we strongly suggest are **not related**) must be present everywhere children are gathered for worship, education, games and recreation, arts and crafts, and other activities. This will include our nursery, Sunday school classes, Vacation Bible School, youth programs and any other activities where children are present.

As an alternative, one adult may be present at all times in the room, and one adult may be a roamer.

A roamer will cover no more than the classrooms available on the same floor.

Five-years older Rule:

All counselors, volunteers and paid employees working with children and youth must be at least eighteen (18) years of age and at least five years older than the oldest student or youth in order to be in charge.

Those who are assisting the person in charge if under the age 18 or not 5 years older must not be left alone in the room or place where the activity is taking place.

Six-Month Rule: Teachers and leaders working with children and youth must attend St. Paul’s UMC for at least six months to allow the congregation time to know the individual.

Parent consent forms:

Parental consent forms **are required** for all special activities other than regularly scheduled meetings such as Sunday school, or Youth Group. This applies to overnight activities at St. Paul’s and activities away from the church property.

Transportation:

Transportation of all children and youth requires a permission slip from the child's or youth's parent or guardian.

The driver must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance and be at least 21 years of age.

The driver must have at least two children in the car at all times or another adult present.

Maintenance of forms:

St. Paul's UMC --Sunday school will maintain a file of contact forms for the parents or guardians.

This form will contain contact information as well as any special needs of the child.

For example: allergies or special types of supervision; any restrictions on who is allowed to pick the child up from the Sunday School or activity.

The forms will be updated for each trip/activity and again updated annually. *All forms (both parent consent forms and contact forms) will be kept in the Sunday school in a secure file.*

Bathroom procedure:

An adult, as described in Part I, shall escort a child, under the age of four years, or any sick child, to the bathroom to use the bathroom facilities.

In the case of a parent not being available to assist if necessary, then the adult may assist the child. Help will be given either by the "roamer" that day or a "hall monitor."

Those five years and above will need permission from the adult in charge to use the bathroom facilities.

Maintenance of a Nursery log:

A log will be used to record who is in the nursery during worship as well as the attendant's name who is in charge for that hour.

All children, infants and toddlers using the nursery must be signed in and out by a parent or guardian.

Diapers will be changed only by a parent or guardian.

Open door counseling:

In situations where adult paid staff, or volunteers must meet with a child or youth without another adult present, the door to the room must be kept open at all times.

Windows on classroom doors: All classroom and meeting room doors will have uncovered windows that have shatterproof glass (either tempered or wire glass).

PART THREE: Training and Education

Training will be a three tier format:

- Tier I will be the education and training of church staff and volunteer workers with children.
- Tier II will be the education and training for the congregation.
- Tier III will be the education of the children and youth.

A. Tier I – Staff and Volunteer workers with children and youth

- At St. Paul's UMC, attendance is mandatory for all training workshops for workers with children and youth.
- There will be at least one training session every year and others as needed.
- The purpose of the workshops will be to equip staff and voluntary workers to:
 - Become familiar with all parts of the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" and the procedures to follow in responding and reporting.
 - Become familiar and be able to recognize abuse in all its forms as described in Part I of this "Policy"
 - Understand the consequences of abuse.
 - Create an atmosphere where all children, and youth, can feel their voices heard.
 - Learn the reporting procedures of the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" and the chain for reporting.
 - Know the contact person/persons for the children or youth you are in contact with.

B. Tier II – The Congregation:

- Each year as Sunday School begins the pastor will take one Sunday worship to educate the congregation on the church's effort to provide a "Sanctuary of Safety" for all (children, youth,) who participate in the church's programs.
- All parents of children and youth who participate in our programs need to be given a copy of the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy". They will be required to read the policy and given an opportunity to ask questions.
- Once the policy is read and understood, each parent or guardian will be asked to sign a consent form saying that they have read the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" and understand its procedures. This form will be kept on file at the church in a secure place.
- A summary copy of the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" will be available at all times in the church office. A detailed copy of the "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" will also be kept in the church office and/or the pastor's office. These will be made available upon request.

C. Tier III – Children:

- The church needs to provide teaching tools to the staff and volunteer workers with children and youth that will deal with the education of children about abuse.
- This process of education will be done yearly, early in the Fall Sunday school calendar, according to the age level of the children.
- This procedure could be incorporated in the opening exercises of the Sunday school program at the start of the Fall Sunday school calendar year.

PART FOUR: Reporting and Responding:

State law requires that everyone who suspects or witnesses abuse has a legal obligation to report it. Failure to do so may result in criminal prosecution for the individual, and the organization.

Remember: Reporting abuse is an act of caring about the victim and not an act of disloyalty to the suspected perpetrator.

Abuse is defined in *Part I* of this document. In cases where abuse may be suspected but is not yet clearly evident, any suspicious behavior or signs should be reported to the Sunday School Superintendent and Pastor who will take appropriate follow up action. All reports will be logged and noted what action was taken .

Possible abusive situations requiring reporting are listed below with the appropriate actions that need to be taken:

Church Related Abuse: This includes abuse that occurs on church premises or at church related activities not necessarily on church premises. This abuse can be perpetrated by church staff, volunteers, church congregation members, or persons who are not members of the church Congregation.

Examples:

A Sunday school teacher witnesses another teacher touching a student inappropriately in an empty classroom.

A student tells a youth group leader that a chaperone has just touched him/her inappropriately at a Church function.

Action:

In the instances of abuse in this category, the victim should be removed from danger and the abuse reported following the procedures detailed below.

Abuse at Home or other Non-Church related settings: this includes abuse that is detected by, or reported to a church member. The abuse did not occur on church premises, or during church related activities.

Examples:

A Sunday school teacher notices suspicious marks on a student's arms and legs (indicative of a violent beating)

A child tells a youth group leader that he/she is being touched inappropriately by a family member or any other adult.

Action:

In the instance of abuse in this category the information should be reported following the procedure detailed below.

REMBER: Any abuse reported by a child should be taken seriously!

Process for reporting an abusive situation once it becomes evident that one is occurring

Once an abusive situation is determined the abuse should be reported to the following parties immediately:

Pastor , NJ Div. Youth & Family Services (DYFS) & the West Deptford Police Dept.

S.S. Superintendent

Parents (unless parents are involved)

SPRC Chairpersons (only if staff is involved)

Good judgment and discretion must be used in determining which parties should be contacted first. Priority should be give to reporting the abuse to the party who can take corrective action and create a safe environment for the victim. The adult who witnessed the abuse, or heard about the abuse need only report to the next person above him/her in charge.

REMEMBER: If any of the above parties are possibly suspected as perpetrators of the abuse, they should not be included in the reporting process.

The immediate, verbal report must be followed up by completion of the form - **REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE** - This is taken from the “Safe Sanctuaries” manual published by Discipleship Resources.

This report must be submitted to the:

Pastor of St. Paul’s, District Superintendent of Gateway South District.

SPR Chairperson of St. Paul’s – if staff personnel of the church are involved.

REMEMBER: Any and all reports of abuse and the victim’s identity must be handled in strict confidence.

ONE person, the Pastor will act as the official spokesperson for St. Paul’s UMC when a case of abuse has been reported. This person will be available to the media to answer questions and to interpret the “Safe Sanctuaries Policy” of St. Paul’s UMC where the abuse was reported. The use of a prepared statement with the advice of legal counsel shall be the means by which the “Safe Sanctuaries Policy” for St. Paul’s UMC will be described to the public. The statement should reinforce that St. Paul’s UMC is prepared to handle allegations and to cooperate with all agencies and law enforcement to see that the matter is resolved and justice sought.

Remember:

Document the allegation- take detailed notes at all times.

Secure legal counsel

Make records accessible to the proper authorities.

Handling allegations of abuse when they occur must be done so with the utmost sensitivity to all those involved. Since an allegation of child abuse is a public event, it is extremely important that the church proceed with an openness that will ensure confidence from both the church community and the wider community at large. How an abuse situation is handled here will bear directly on how the wider community will perceive our actions.

Proceed with the care of souls in mind. Do not jump to conclusions but proceed with the investigation by following the guidelines above. A pastoral concern should be given to the victim and the accused. **The safety of the victim should be the primary concern!**

Any further questions about our Safe Sanctuaries Policy may be directed to the pastor.