

Safe Sanctuaries Policy for Maple Grove United Methodist Church



Introduction

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth and vulnerable adults can be safe and grow strong. Jesus taught that “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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).

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church states that “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (Book of Discipline, 2012) At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging: “With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II) Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth and vulnerable adults, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees.

Every 10 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Often, abuse occurs in places where children and youth feel safe – homes, schools, camps and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. In light of this, Maple Grove United Methodist Church,, in keeping with the West Ohio Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church has seen fit to outline policy and procedures that can 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our churches; 2) be a place where children, youth and vulnerable adults can feel safe in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy sets forth the requirements in the areas of:

- Screening
- Supervision
- Reporting
- Response Plan

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as the workers of children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; and we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of policies; we will 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 if media inquiries concerning an incident.

Definitions

“Abuse” means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult by a parent, guardian, or other person. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a child by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution upon the child.

“Child” or “children” or “youth” means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

“Exploitation” means obtaining or using another person’s resources, including but not limited to funds, assets or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

“Sexual abuse” includes, but is not necessarily limited to, any contacts or interactions in which the parent, guardian or other person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child for the purposes of the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

“Sexual exploitation” includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Ohio law; or a parent, guardian, or other person having custodial control or supervision of a child or who is responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under Ohio law.

“Supervision” means to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

“Vulnerable Adult” means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from neglect, exploitation, or a hazardous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

Screening

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

1. All staff and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Background Screening Form that shall include but is not limited to:

- a. Standard contact information
- b. Experience/qualifications for the position
- c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions
- d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure the background screenings and references necessary.
- e. Listing of 2 non-relative references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references.

This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.

2. Background screening:

- a. Minimum – Ohio state background check.
- b. Recommended – National background check.
- c. National background check is highly recommended if the person has lived outside the state and/or lives near the border of another state.
- d. Volunteers that will serve as leaders in overnight ministries are required to complete fingerprints, BCI and FBI screening.

Note: Clergy serving in the West Ohio Annual Conference will undergo a background screening upon entrance into the conference. This documentation will be kept in the personnel files of the conference.

3. Any person who has been convicted of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, ritual or neglect) should not be permitted to volunteer or work directly with children, youth or vulnerable adults in any church sponsored activity.

4. Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years shall resubmit the Background Screening Form. Background screenings be repeated at least every five years for all staff and volunteers.

5. The Director of Child and Family Ministries will be responsible for background checks for those involved in Children's Ministry, including: identifying these volunteers; arranging for the background screenings; and receiving completed background reports. In the event of a background screening identifying a volunteer with a criminal record, the Senior Pastor will assess the volunteers' suitability for working with children. All background screenings will be handled in a confidential manner and kept in a locked cabinet.

6. The Assistant Minister will be responsible for background screenings for those involved in Youth Ministry and Vulnerable Adult Ministry, including: identifying these volunteers; arranging for the background screenings; and receiving completed background reports. In the event of a background screening identifying a volunteer with a criminal record, the Senior Pastor will assess the volunteers' suitability for working with youth and vulnerable adults. All background screenings will be handled in a confidential manner and kept in a locked cabinet.

7. The Senior Pastor will be responsible for background screenings for Staff; arranging for the background screenings; and receiving completed background reports. In the event of a background screening identifying staff with a criminal record, the Senior Pastor and SPRC will assess the staff member's suitability for employment. All background screenings will be handled in a confidential manner and kept in a locked cabinet.

8. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.

9. A database will be created (possibly the current church database) to keep track of volunteers who have passed background screening requirements and first aid and cpr training.

Supervision

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth or vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

1. Training is a requirement for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. An initial educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries[®] programs and policies is required prior to any adult having direct supervision of children/youth/vulnerable adults. Thereafter, the minimum training would include documentation of an annual review of the Safe Sanctuaries[®] policies, procedures for supervision. Church will offer CPR and First Aid training periodically. Online training deemed appropriate by the Senior Pastor will be acceptable training.

2. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule". The two-adult rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults

present. This may include the presence of an adult 'roamer' who moves in and out of rooms/ ministry activities. When transporting children or youth for a church ministry event or activity, an additional adult must accompany the driver in the vehicle.

3. No child, youth or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while attending a ministry activity/event.

4. All ministry activities should occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example, enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration or an open door.

5. Registration materials should be collected for every ministry event where attendees are left without their parent or guardian, including name, phone, and medical information if applicable. A blanket registration form for the school year is acceptable.

6. Ministry events involving transportation shall require written/ signed permission from parents/ guardians. A blanket transportation form is acceptable.

7. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST 18 years of age or older and is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children/youth being supervised.

8. Counseling must be limited to two or three sessions and conducted in a room where the door remains open for the entire session. Whenever a child or youth seeks counseling, the person in charge of the ministry/activity must determine in the initial meeting if he/she is qualified to address the need effectively. If the problem has not been resolved after three sessions, the child or youth must be referred to a professional counselor.

9. Every local church must have adequate property and liability insurance coverage for the scope of its ministry. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church requires the trustees of each local church to secure adequate insurance.

¶2532.2. The Board of Trustees shall review annually the adequacy of the property, liability, and crime insurance coverage on church owned property, buildings, and equipment. The board of trustees shall also review annually the adequacy of personnel insurance. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that the church, its properties and its personnel are property protected against risks.

Reporting

Safe Sanctuaries[®] reporting is required by any staff or a volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation or when an allegation of such an incident is made by a child, youth or vulnerable adult. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline and Ohio state law.

¶341.5 All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.

If any of the above situations occur, the following steps will be taken in accordance with the flow chart (attached, Exhibit A):

1. If the victim is in immediate need of medical attention, the appropriate medical assistance will be obtained. If the alleged perpetrator is onsite and danger is perceived, local police authorities will be called.
2. Upon securing medical attention for the victim and ensuring the safety of the environment, the staff person or volunteer must report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the ministry/activity using the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (Attached, Exhibit B) with his/her age, reason for suspected abuse and any other helpful information to the investigation. The senior pastor (or church council leader) will contact Child Protective Services for Ohio Health and Family Services. When making the report by telephone, it is advisable that it be conducted in the presence of an objective witness who can verify that the report has been made (and by whom) in case this is needed later for possible legalities.
3. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged perpetrator, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification.
4. The senior pastor (or church council leader) shall immediately call the superintendent of the district in which the church resides and report the allegations.
5. The district superintendent will immediately report the situation to the Assistant to the Bishop and Communications Director at the West Ohio Conference office, as set forth in the Crisis Communications Guidelines for the West Ohio Conference.
6. Further communication or steps taken with the staff, congregation, community or media shall only be taken after consultation with the district superintendent and the conference office.
7. The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed and kept in a secure location.

Response Plan

A quick, compassionate and unified response to a reported incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements should be directed to the designated church spokesperson per the church's Crisis Communication plan or other spokesperson as designated by the Conference Crisis Communication Team. The spokesperson shall update the district superintendent of any media inquiries. The West Ohio Communication Office is available at any time for consultation and is able to provide tips for handling media or other community inquiries.
2. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children or vulnerable adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
3. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with Book of Discipline.
4. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
5. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.