

**COVENANT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SPRINGFIELD, PA**

**SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY & PROCEDURES**

**Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church**

**PREAMBLE:**

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 “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 state “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.”

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.” (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 15 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, Covenant United Methodist Church has seen fit to establish this policy that can help to 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our church; 2) make our church a place where children can feel safer in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

This policy conforms to the standards set forth by the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**Child or children or youth** – any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

**Imminent Risk** – (As defined in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.S. Chapter 63) – An act or recent act or series of such which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual exploitation of a child.

**Mental Abuse** – (As defined in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 PA C.S.S. Chapter 63) – An act or failure to act that results in a psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment that: Renders a child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic, or in reasonable fear that the child's life or safety is threatened; or Seriously interferes with the child's ability to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.

**Persons who work with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults** – any person who works with young people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults in any regular capacity such as Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, choir director, regular driver, regular food servers, and general helpers on a schedule that repeats such as weekly, monthly, quarterly; or who participates on-site or in transportation for an overnight or longer program.

**Physical Abuse** – (As defined in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 PA C.S.S. Chapter 63) – A recent act (within the past two years) or failure to act, which causes a non-accidental serious physical injury that causes the child severe pain or significantly impairs the child's functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

**Serious Physical Neglect** - (As defined in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 PA C.S.S. Chapter 63) – A prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning. Other essentials include food, shelter, clothing, dental care, personal care, protection from physical injury and supervision.

**Sexual Abuse** - (As defined in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 PA C.S.S. Chapter 63) – An act or failure to act that results in the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in a sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting or filming, of any sexually explicit conduct to rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault or other form of sexual exploitation of children.

**Supervision** – to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

**Vulnerable Adult** – 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 abuse or neglect without assistance from others.

## **SCREENING AND SELECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:**

Careful screening is an effective way to help protect children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but is an essential step in selecting the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

### **Screening Standards:**

All persons who are working with children, youth and vulnerable adults at the time this policy goes into effect shall complete the following steps by December 31, 2008. All new applicants for employment or volunteer service with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall complete the following prior to start service.

- 1) Written Application – All prospective workers with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall complete a written application that shall include at least the following information:
  - a. Name
  - b. Address
  - c. Phone Number
  - d. Work/Volunteer History
  - e. Experience and skills related to the position
  - f. Two (2) personal, non-related references.
- 2) Background Checks – The following background checks shall be obtained for all prospective workers with children, youth or vulnerable adults:
  - a. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Report – A report of criminal history information obtained from the Pennsylvania State Police or a statement from the Pennsylvania State Police that the State Police central repository contains no information related to that person. The report or statement shall have been obtained within a one-year period proceeding initial application. A new State Police Criminal History Report shall be obtained every three (3) years. The original document shall be kept in file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.
  - b. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance – A certification obtained from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse, indicated report of child abuse, founded report or indicated report for school employee. The certification shall have been obtained within a one-year period preceding initial application. A new Childline report shall be obtained every (3) years. The original document shall be kept in file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.
  - c. FBI Report – Where the applicant is not a resident of Pennsylvania, or where the applicant has been the resident of another state at any time during the past five years, a report of federal criminal history record information shall be

obtained within the preceding one-year period from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A new FBI report shall be obtained every three (3) years for persons who become or remain non-residents of Pennsylvania. The original document shall be kept in the file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.

d. Based on the results of the background checks obtained from sections (a), (b), and (c), the following, as found in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.S. Chapter 63, shall be grounds for denying employment or volunteer service. Grounds for denying employment or volunteer service is not limited to this list only:

i. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service that is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse committed within the previous five (5) years.

ii. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if the applicant's criminal history record information indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more of the following offenses under Title 18 (related to crimes and offenses) or an equivalent crime under Federal law or the law of another state:

1. Chapter 25                    Relating to criminal homicide
2. Section 2702                    Relating to aggravated assault
3. Section 2709                    Relating to harassment and stalking
4. Section 2901                    Relating to kidnapping
5. Section 2902                    Relating to unlawful restraint
6. Section 3121                    Relating to rape
7. Section 3122.1                    Relating to statutory sexual assault
8. Section 3123                    Relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse
9. Section 3124.1                    Relating to sexual assault
10. Section 3125                    Relating to sexual aggravated indecent assault
11. Section 3126                    Relating to indecent assault
12. Section 3127                    Relating to indecent exposure
13. Section 4302                    Relating to incest
14. Section 4303                    Relating to concealing death of a child
15. Section 4304                    Relating to endangering welfare of children
16. Section 4305                    Relating to dealing in infant children
17. A felony offense under Section 5902(b) Relating to prostitution and related offenses

- 18. Section 5903(c) or (d)      Relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances
  - 19. Section 6301                      Relating to corruption of minors
  - 20. Section 6312                      Relating to sexual abuse of children
  - 21. The attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses listed above
- iii. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if his/her criminal history record information indicates the individual has been convicted of a felony offense under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act (P.L. 233, No. 64), committed within the previous five (5) years.
- e. Applicants may be provisionally hired or used as volunteers for a single period not to exceed 30 days or, for out-of-state applicants, 90 days, if all of the following conditions are met:
    - i. The applicant has applied for the required background checks and the applicant provides a copy of the appropriate completed request forms.
    - ii. The administrator has no knowledge of information pertaining to the applicant, which would disqualify them from employment or volunteer service pursuant to the grounds for denying employment or volunteer service listed above.
    - iii. The applicant swears or affirms in writing that he is not disqualified from employment or volunteer service pursuant to the grounds for denying employment or volunteer service listed above.
    - iv. If the information obtained in the background checks reveals that the applicant is disqualified from employment or volunteer service, the applicant shall be immediately dismissed.
    - v. The applicant will not be permitted to work alone with children, and the applicant will work in the immediate vicinity of an employee or volunteer who has completed the screening process.
  - f. Applicants who can not obtain background checks due to administrative reasons may be used as volunteers if all of the following conditions are met:
    - i. The administrator has no knowledge of information pertaining to the applicant, which would disqualify them from employment or volunteer service pursuant to the grounds for denying employment or volunteer service listed above.
    - ii. The applicant swears or affirms in writing that he is not disqualified from employment or volunteers service pursuant to the grounds for denying employment or volunteers service listed above.
    - iii. The applicant will not be permitted to work alone with children, and the applicant will work in the immediate vicinity of an employee or volunteer who has completed the screening process.

- 3) References – at least two References Checks shall be made on all new applicants for employment or volunteer service
- 4) Relationship with Church – All prospective workers with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for 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.
- 5) Records – All written records shall be confidential and shall be kept in a locked file cabinet. All files shall be maintained for three (3) years after service ends.

#### **ADDITIONAL SCREENING MEASURES:**

Additional screening measures that can be considered include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) Written Position Descriptions – A written position description defines duties, performance expectations, and general qualifications necessary and to whom the position reports. This basic document establishes a common understanding of the role for each position.
- 2) Additional background checks – In addition to the State Police, Childline, and FBI background checks, additional checks may include:
  - a. Commercially available background searches including:
    - i. Multi-state criminal records
    - ii. Multi-state sex offenders records
    - iii. Drivers license records
  - b. Internet search on applicants (e.g. Google)
  - c. Checking the Megan’s Law website ([www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us/](http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us/))
- 3) Formal Interview – An interview provides a time to clarify any questions about information on the application, and it offers an opportunity to discuss the responsibilities of the role.

#### **TRAINING:**

All persons who work with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall participate in orientation training and then an annual review.

The orientation shall include an explanation of the Safe Sanctuaries program including:

- 1) The need for Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures
- 2) Supervision requirements
- 3) Appropriate discipline practices
- 4) Recognizing signs of child abuse
- 5) Reporting procedures

The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adults.

The annual review shall include a review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child or vulnerable adult abuse. The annual review may be a self-conducted reading of materials followed by a written self-test.

### **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.

#### **Supervision Standards:**

Programs and ministries that are licensed or accredited by a licensing or accreditation body shall follow the requirements established by that body for the supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Programs and ministries that are not licensed or accredited shall use the following standards for the supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

- 1) The two adult rule – Regardless of the size group, there will always be at least two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities.
- 2) No child, youth or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry activity/event.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Ministry events involving transportation shall require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child/youth/vulnerable adult.

### **REPORTING:**

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred (PA Child Protective Services Law), Title 23 Pa. C.S.S. Chapter 63). Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur (1) when any staff or a volunteer personally witnesses an incident of abuse, (2) when an allegation of an event of abuse is made to staff or volunteer by a third party, and/or (3) when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse to staff or a volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

1. The individual who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported is required to report the incident immediately to the Senior Pastor of CUMC or his/her designee.

2. The Senior Pastor or his/her designee shall investigate the alleged incident to the degree needed in order to complete a Report of Suspected Child Abuse (PA CY 47). The Senior Pastor or his/her designee shall then send the completed PA CY47 form to the local Children and Youth Services agency.
3. The Senior Pastor or his/her designee shall call the Pennsylvania Childline & Abuse Registry (24 –Hour service) at 1-800-932-0313 to make a report.
4. A plan of safety shall be put in place. (See Responses for Allegation of Abuse section below)
5. The individual who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported is required to provide a written statement to the Senior Pastor of CUMC or his/her designee.
6. The District Superintendent must be notified if the alleged perpetrator is a staff person or volunteer of the church.
7. The Senior Pastor shall notify the Safe Sanctuaries Liaison on the CUMC Board of Trustees and keep him or her informed of all developments.

In the event that a member of the clergy becomes aware of suspected child abuse as a result of confidential communication which is protected under 42 PA C.S. 5943 (relating to confidential communications to clergymen), the conference legal counsel should be consulted.

#### **RESPONSES FOR ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:**

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

#### **Response to victims of abuse:**

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, there shall be a reaching out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim shall be considered the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family shall be done in a positive and supportive manner.

The parents of the victim shall be notified and steps shall be taken to address 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 abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities shall be followed concerning notification of others.

#### **Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:**

The alleged perpetrator shall immediately, yet with dignity and respect for their sacred worth, be removed from further involvement with children or vulnerable adults and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse shall not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall 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.



When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse, 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 the Book of Discipline.

**Response to the Media:**

The District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

**Compliance:**

Compliance with this policy shall be a matter of record at each annual Charge Conference.