

Royersford United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Rev. 0, Effective Date 1/1/2009

A. Child Abuse Prevention Policy

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of 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 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, emotional, 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, 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 within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all 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 – 200*, pp.180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth.

Types of Abuse Defined in the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law

Physical Abuse – 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.

Sexual Abuse – 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 any 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 or the 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.

Mental Abuse – 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.

Serious Physical Neglect – A prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the 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.

Imminent Risk – An act or recent act or failure to act or series of such which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation to a child.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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 Hymnal*, p. 44).

B. Recruiting and Screening Staff and Volunteers for Children's / Youth's Programs

Definitions

“Adult”: a person 18 years of age or older or out of high school.

“Child”: any person under the age of 18 or still in high school (it is important to note that this includes those persons who are normally designated as “Youth” at Royersford UMC)

“Vulnerable Adults”: Those adults with diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities.

“Staff”: any person employed by the Royersford UMC.

“Volunteer”: any adult who assists in conducting children’s / youth’s activities under the supervision of a Staff Person or Children’s Ministry Coordinator. A volunteer has regular and direct contact with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Drivers for Youth events are included and must present a valid drivers license.

“Children’s Ministry Coordinator”: a volunteer position at RUMC responsible for conducting the Children’s Christian Education Program.

“Visitor”: a parent or guardian who accompanies a child participating in a children’s program or other person approved by the activity coordinator.

Recruiting and Screening Procedure

Careful screening is one way to reduce the risk of abuse to children and youth. While we recognize that screening of children’s workers (staff and volunteers) is a morally complex and controversial issue, Royersford UMC has chosen to screen staff and volunteers who work regularly with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

All staff and volunteers who work regularly with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be required to complete the following:

- An Employment or Volunteer Application listing at the minimum standard contact information and three non-related references.
- An original Childline Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance certificate dated within the past 5 years.
- An original response to a PA Request for Criminal Record Check dated within the past 5 years.

OR

- A completed PA Child Abuse History Clearance Form (CY 113 12/99)
- A completed PA Request for Criminal Record Check (SP 4-164 12-99)

The Childline and Criminal Record Check will be repeated after 5 years of service or a break in service of more than one year.

Upon submitting the required forms an individual may begin a 30-day temporary assignment in the children/youth ministry programs with supervision of a cleared worker. This period will allow for the completion of the PA clearance checks.

The cost of the screening process is the responsibility of Royersford UMC.

The Pastor is responsible for reviewing and following up on each child abuse and criminal clearance. The Pastor and/or Staff-Parish Chairperson shall hold all information obtained from the background check in strict confidence. The records shall be kept in a locked file in the pastor's office.

C. Program Operational Procedures

The following procedures are to be followed to aid in protecting our children/youth and vulnerable adults and adult leaders in our ministries.

- When possible, two trained adult leaders shall be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children less than 12 years of age. If two trained adults are not available, then the activities in the room must be clearly visible through an unobstructed window or an open door by another adult present in the building.
- For children/youth 12 years and older or vulnerable adults, one trained adult leader may be present during a Royersford UMC sponsored program or event as long as there are two or more children/youth/vulnerable adults present. Otherwise, activities must be clearly visible by others who are nearby, such as through an unobstructed window or an open door. Whenever possible a child/youth/vulnerable adult should not be alone with a leader (staff or volunteer) or visitor (other than his or her own parent/guardian).
- Drivers who take children/youth/vulnerable adults to an off-site program or event must present a valid driver's license and insurance card. A visitor or other untrained leader should not drive children less than 12 years of age (other than his or her own). For children/youth 12 years and older or vulnerable adults, or if a car with children less than 12 years of age has only one trained leader, cars should travel and arrive together. In the event of an emergency situation one volunteer and one child/youth/vulnerable adult is allowed.
- The adult leaders who will be present and assume primary responsibility for a church sponsored program involving children/youth or vulnerable adults shall be at least 18 years old. For church sponsored programs involving teenagers, the adult leader who will be present and assume primary responsibility shall be at least 5 years older than the oldest teen participant in the program.
- Adult leaders in church-sponsored programs for children/youth and vulnerable adults shall participate in an annual training regarding Royersford UMC Safe

Sanctuary policy. This training will include a review of the policies and procedures and a written covenant signed by all participants to uphold these policies and procedures.

- All parents/guardians who have a child/youth /vulnerable adult participating in a Royersford UMC children's/youth's program are encouraged to complete the application and screening checks. A parent/guardian who has not done so may occasionally assist as a visitor as long as a trained leader is present. A visitor who assists regularly will be asked to submit a screening application.
- The parent/guardian of children/youth or vulnerable adults participating in church-sponsored programs will be given advance notice of all expected activities for those programs. Parents/guardians shall be provided with advance notice of changes in usual schedules and activities.
- Parents/guardians shall be ask to sign a general permission form for planned off-site activities that are part of regular programs.
- Transportation to and from on-site church events of children/youth and vulnerable adults shall be the responsibility of the parents/guardian.
- The Safe Sanctuary policy will be available on the church's web site.

D. Responding to a Reported Incident of Child Abuse

The following procedure shall be followed if it is alleged that _ abuse by a volunteer, visitor or other person occurred during a Royersford UMC sponsored program or event or anytime it is alleged that Royersford UMC staff is responsible for committing abuse.

1. The volunteer, worker, leader, or Pastor shall take the following action immediately.

- Insure the privacy and safety of the alleged victim
- Treat the individuals involved with dignity, honor and confidentiality
- Immediately remove the accused individual from further involvement with children/youth or vulnerable adults
- Notify the Pastor immediately
- If the Pastor is not available, notify the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the Chair of the Administrative Council.
- Complete a report form for each incident or abuse situation

2. Upon notification, the Pastor or Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the Administrative Council shall take the following steps immediately.

- Notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim
- Address any needs the child/youth or vulnerable adult may have, including medical
- Notify each of the following:
 - i. Pennsylvania Dept of Public Welfare ChildLine 1-800-932-0313
 - ii. The District Superintendent
 - iii. Eastern Pennsylvania Conference insurance agent
 - iv. Eastern Pennsylvania Conference attorney
- Keep a written record of each step taken including times and dates
- Prepare a brief, carefully worded statement to be mailed to the congregation telling the truth, but withholding the names of the alleged victim and the accused
- Cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by the Dept of Public Child Welfare and/or law enforcement personnel

3. When the Pastor is accused the following actions shall be taken immediately by the Chair of the Administrative Council

- Insure the privacy and safety of the alleged victim
- Treat the accused individual with dignity, honor, and confidentiality
- Remove the accused individual from further involvement with children/youth or vulnerable adults
- Notify the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and together notify the District Superintendent
- The District Superintendent will represent Royersford UMC response to the accusations

E. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually and modified as required due to changes in the children/youth and vulnerable adult programs at Royersford UMC.

Approved by the Royersford UMC Administrative Council, September 2, 2008

Chairperson Administrative Council

Pastor