

Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY*Approved June 2007**Updated June 2009***OUR MANDATE**

Introduction: The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, beginning 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 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.” (Paragraph 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse 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 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 – 2004*: copyright 2004 by The United Methodist Publishing House, pp. 201-202)

Therefore, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference adopts this policy and its accompanying procedures to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, senior citizens, and at-risk adults. Every congregation within the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference is expected to uphold this policy as its minimum standard in establishing safe sanctuaries for all God’s children.

Statement of Covenant: In all of our ministries with children, youth, and adults, we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person 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).

Definitions of Abuse:

- Physical abuse – abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child.
- Emotional abuse – abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

- Neglect – abuse in which a person endangers a child’s health, safety, or welfare through negligence.
- Sexual abuse – abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs.
- Ritual abuse – abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child’s welfare.
- Abuse of vulnerable adults – ritual, emotional, or sexual abuse of any person over 19 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities.

The church at risk:

Any organization involved with young people is a place where abuse could occur. Several factors make local congregations, districts, and annual conferences more susceptible to risk:

- Churches behave as relatively trusting organizations, relying upon their members and their leaders to conduct themselves appropriately. Sometimes this trusting attitude persists even in the face of questions or reports of misconduct.
- Churches are notoriously inactive when it comes to screening its volunteers and/or employees who work with children and youth. Often, no investigation is done at all before total strangers are welcomed aboard.
- Churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact and for close personal relationships with children. Indeed, these are nurtured and encouraged as we try to live out the gospel message.

Consequences of abuse:

- When one child is abused within a church or Christian program, many victims are created, including the child, the congregation, the child’s family, and often the family of the abuser.
- The congregation becomes a victim after abuse is revealed and relationships are fractured. It may also suffer for a long time when civil or criminal litigation ensues as a result of the abuse.
- Of foremost importance is the child who has been harmed and for whom care must be provided.
- In addition, paragraph 2702 of the 2004 Book of Discipline names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members.

No congregation or annual conference can afford, either financially, ethically, or morally to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of any and every kind of abuse. Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to do everything in our power to prevent physical, emotional or sexual abuse against children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities involved in any ministry sponsored by the Annual Conference or in any of our local congregations.

Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end we covenant to be aware of our legal responsibilities and to comply with those responsibilities and go beyond those

responsibilities when necessary to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

Careful screening is the best way to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort and peace of mind that comes with having the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteer in place for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Although it is our fervent hope and prayer that child sexual abuse does not occur in our programs, we must put into place sufficient mechanisms to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, and those who work with them. For that purpose, our ministries shall implement the following procedures in congregation, district, and conference ministry programs and events. Local congregations may adopt their own policy provided the policies and procedures meet these minimum standards. Local congregations not adopting a policy shall be governed by this policy.

STANDARDS, CRITERIA, and RESPONSIBILITIES

Minimum age

The following standards for authority figures (whether volunteers or staff) are designed to separate authority figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the authority figure's role.

1. Authority figures – defined as the primary leaders of youth and children's activities
 - a. To work with youth (grades six and above), or children, (infants –fifth grade) the authority figure must be a minimum of age 19 and it is recommended they are at least four years older than the youth involved.
 - b. To work with children (infants-fifth grade), the authority figure must be a minimum of age 18.
2. Assistants – defined as persons who lend aid to the authority figure and act at the direction of the authority figure, including volunteers, interns, and camp counselors. Whether working with youth or children, assistants must be:
 - a. A minimum of 12 years of age and four years older than the participants, and
 - b. In the judgment of a staff member, competent to assist in the activity.
 - c. An assistant less than 17 years of age may not be counted as an adult in the child/adult ratios.
 - d. An assistant must lend aid with at least two authority figures present.

Two adult rule

A minimum of two non-related adults are to be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and at-risk adults. When it is impossible to staff with two non-related adults, there must be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

Open-door policy

Classrooms or child care rooms should be open to visitation at any time without prior notice by staff, parents, or other volunteers.

Sign-in and Sign-out Procedures

Sign-in and sign-out procedures should be in place for all ministries for and with children in the local church.

Six month rule

It is highly recommended that a six-month rule be established in the selection of volunteers wishing to give service in the areas of children and youth ministry. This means that all volunteers demonstrate an active relationship in good standing in a local congregation or campus religious organization for a minimum of six months. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only in an assistant capacity with two other non-related adults.

Adult/Child ratios

All ratios must be understood in light of first having two adults present at all times. Adults and authority figures should never be alone with a child or youth. This can include, but is not limited to an automobile while taking a young person home, a classroom with windowless or locked doors, or a cabin at camp.

State codes are required for day care centers and school-based programs and are a strong standard for all programs to follow. This includes Sunday school, mid-week, and summer programs.

Alabama State Codes for child care ratios:

- Birth to 18 months – 1 Adult to 5 Children
- 18 months to 2 ½ years of age – 1 Adult to 7 Children
- 24 months to 36 months of age – 1 Adult to 8 Children
- 2 ½ year to 4 years of age – 1 Adult to 11 Children
- 4 years of age to school age – 1 Adult to 18 Children
- School age to 8 years of age – 1 Adult to 21 Children
- 8 years of age and older – 1 Adult to 28 Children

Note: For more information contact the Alabama Department of Human Recourses

Florida State Codes for child care:

- Birth to 1 year – 1 Adult to 4 Children
- 1 to 2 years of age – 1 Adult to 6 Children
- 2 to 3 years of age – 1 Adult to 11 Children
- 3 to 4 years of age – 1 Adult to 15 Children
- 4 to 5 years of age – 1 Adult to 20 Children
- 5 years and older – 1 Adult to 25 Children
- Mixed Age Groups:
 - When children 2 years of age and older are in care, the staff-to-children ratio shall be based on the age group with the largest number of children within the group.
 - In groups of mixed age ranges, where children under 1 year of age are included, one staff member shall be responsible for no more than 4 children of any age group.
 - In groups of mixed age ranges, where children 1 year of age but under 2 years of age are included, one staff member shall be responsible for no more than 6 children of any age group.

Note: For additional information contact the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Participants who are physically or mentally impaired:

- Those needing constant and individual assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 1 participant
- Those needing close, but not constant, assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 2 participants
- Those needing occasional assistance – 1 leader to 4 participants
- Those needing minimal assistance – 1 leader to 5 participants

Overnight programs:

Overnight events include summer camps, retreats, mission trips, lock-ins, or any event that extends through the evening. The adults staying with the young people must always be the same gender as the young people. The adults must never share a bed with a young person and should not be alone in the room with a young person at any time.

- Grades 1-3 – 1 adult to 8 young people
- Grades 4-8 – 1 adult to 10 young people
- Grades 9-12 – 1 adult to 12 young people

Motel/hotel settings

- A hotel should be selected that has rooms opening to the interior (i.e. closed hallway) of the building. Where possible, select adjoining rooms on a single hallway.
- When two adults cannot be assigned to a room housing youth, the youth should be roomed separately from the adults. If adjoining rooms are available with doors that can be left in the open position, a single adult in each of the adjoining rooms is acceptable.
- An adult should not share a bed with a young person.
- Where adults need to be assigned to separate rooms, it is recommended that one adult room be located between every two youth rooms on the hall.
- Adults should develop a rotating schedule allowing for the hallways to be monitored throughout the night.
- If room checks are needed, they should involve two adults of the same gender as the room residents.

Transportation

- All drivers should be screened in the same manner as other leadership for an event including a review of their motor vehicle record.
- When private vehicles are used to transport young people for programmed church-related events, leaders should ensure that appropriate insurance is being maintained by both the church and the private driver.
- All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
- Where possible, it is recommended that two adults be placed in each vehicle or the vehicles teamed in minimum groups of two that stay together at all times.
- The trustees or bus committee should be requested to establish safety policies and guidelines for the operation of church-owned vehicles. These should be strictly followed at all times.

- On all planned trips, a signed, permission slip with medical authorization should be on file. In the absence of such a form, the adult should call a parent or relative to pick up the child.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs or other efforts to pair young people with caring adults are often credited with being the key to a young person's success in life. Therefore, mentoring programs should follow these guidelines:

- Provide basic screening and background checks for all adults who will be working with children and youth.
- Establish clear written guidelines for settings, boundaries, and the environment where the mentoring will occur.
- Providing training for all adults (or youth, if they will be working with children) who are interested in being mentors.
- Make it clear that all persons are expected to following congregation and conference guidelines for reducing the risk of abuse.
- Outings should be in public places with routes and time frames agreed upon in advance, and know to all. Outings with several mentors and young people are preferred.
- One-to-one mentoring or tutoring should take place in a group setting, such as one large room rather than individual rooms spread throughout the church building.

Counseling

At any counseling session with children, youth, or adults of the opposite gender, any non-windowed door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. A counseling session should never be held in secret, even if the person being counseled makes that request.

Whenever someone seeks counseling, it is important to determine in the initial meeting if the counselor is actually qualified to address the needs effectively. If not, the person should be referred to another counselor.

Interpersonal boundaries

Adult workers with youth and children must be attentive to:

- Appropriate dress codes
- Appropriate use of language
- Appropriate demonstrations of affection and encouragement. (i.e. an adult leader should never initiate a hug and should always be the one to end the hug.)

Home visitation

When visiting a young person in their home, the two non-related adult rule still applies. If a young person drops by the home of an adult volunteer or staff person, the visit should be conducted in the front yard or moved to a local restaurant. Educating young people of these requirements before they visit is most beneficial.

RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND TRAINING

Recruiting and screening volunteer and paid staff

- A. All persons employed or volunteering as an authority figure for children/youth shall:
1. Complete Application/Commitment Form. (form at end of this policy)
 2. Provide three character references. It is recommended that the three references be contacted on all applicants having access to children, youth and vulnerable adults. One of the references must be the applicant's pastor (clergy person's District Superintendent) and the other two must be non-relatives. (form at end of this policy)
 3. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program. (form at end of this policy)
 4. Consent to the following background checks:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
 - b. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth, or at-risk adults)

The Annual Conference recommends background checks be run through the Trak-1 company. A background check is valid for two years. If the individual changes physical addresses, the background checks must be run again. Details about running background checks are found in the appendix.
 5. Demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least 6 months.
 6. Have the experience and qualifications for the position.
 7. Attend training by the church and/or annual conference in maintaining the Safe sanctuaries policies.
- B. All persons employed or volunteering as an assistant for children/youth shall:
1. Complete an Application/Commitment Form.
 2. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program.
 3. Provide three character references.
 4. Consent to the following background checks:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
 - b. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth or at-risk adults)
 5. Attend training provided by the local church or annual conference.
- C. In the event a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last minute circumstances, that person must:
1. Complete an Application/Commitment form.
 2. Provide a character reference who can be contacted immediately by the director.
 3. Complete a basic orientation/training provided by the director or other supervisor before working.
 4. Consent to the following background check:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number.
- D. Unfavorable background checks or a refusal to complete the screening procedures:
1. Volunteers or Staff (other than clergy):

- a. The person shall be notified with a “Notice of unfavorable background check” form. (form at end of this policy)
 - b. The Pastor and Pastor Parish Chairperson shall meet with the person to discuss the report.
 - c. Review process may consider the following factors:
 - 1) The nature and seriousness of the crime
 - 2) The relationship of the crime to the purpose of the congregation
 - 3) The age of the person at the time of the commission of the crime
 - 4) The time elapsed since the person’s crime
 - 5) Any charge that deals with sexual abuse or child abuse shall prevent the person from working with children and/or youth.
 - d. Documentation of action taken should be placed in the person’s file.
2. Clergy Persons:
- a. The District Superintendent shall send a “Notice of unfavorable background check” form to the clergy person.
 - b. The District Superintendent and clergy shall meet to review the report.
 - c. The District Superintendent shall follow disciplinary guidelines in handling the report.
 - d. A letter shall be placed in the clergy’s personnel file reporting the action taken.

Training staff and volunteers

The church should ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annual) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training should be required of all paid staff members and adult volunteers who work with children and/or youth. Documentation of attendance should be kept from year to year so that if an incident occurs, the church has proof that they followed the policy. (Note: Many insurance companies are mandating training and its frequency.)

The training should include:

1. The definitions and signs of child abuse.
2. The church’s policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
3. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
4. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
5. Child abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
6. Definitions of appropriate interpersonal boundaries (ways of touching students, appropriate language, etc.)
7. All forms used by the church for application, background checks, reporting, and teacher files.

REPORTING ABUSE

Reporting abuse or alleged abuse in Alabama:

Alabama’s mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting law states that all school teachers and officials, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is

known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report, or cause a report to be made of the same, orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority. When an initial report is made to a law enforcement official, the official subsequently shall inform the Department of Human Resources of the report so that the department can carry out its responsibility to provide protective services when deemed appropriate to the respective child or children.

Reporting abuse or alleged abuse in Florida:

All cases of suspected abuse must be reported to the Florida Abuse Hotline. Initial reports should NOT be made to the county/local branch of the Florida Department of Children and Families. The Florida Abuse Hotline may be reached at **1-800-96-ABUSE**. Reports may be faxed in, however, the preferred option for the Florida Department of Children and Families is for persons to call the Florida Abuse Hotline and talk to a Hotline counselor.

IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The key to implementing a Safe Sanctuaries policy in our annual conference is communication with each congregation and conference agency regarding (1) the need for a policy, (2) to whom the policy applies, and (3) how it will be implemented. A form will be submitted with the Charge Conference packet to ensure that each congregation is actively providing a Safe Sanctuary for every age group. The Safe Sanctuaries Team shall be responsible for:

I. Develop a policy

This policy shall be evaluated at least every two years to ensure that it maintains its effectiveness. At a minimum, the policy should include a brief theological statement, definition of child abuse, a strong statement that abuse will not be tolerated, standards to be followed, a commitment to investigate any and all allegations of abuse, and a place for alleged incidents of abuse to be reported. It must also comply with state laws and insurance requirements.

II. Educate the congregations and conference agencies

Congregations and conference agencies should be sent a letter stating that the policy has been adopted by the Annual Conference and explaining the need for the policy in the letter. The congregation will be required to submit a form with their charge conference materials documenting their compliance with this policy.

IMPLEMENTATION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The key to implementing a Safe Sanctuaries policy in a local church is communication with the congregation regarding (1) the need for a policy, (2) to whom the policy applies, and (3) how the congregation plans to implement it. It is recommended that the policy be implemented by a board nominated by the Lay Leadership committee and the Administrative Council.

I. Create an ongoing “Safe Sanctuaries Team.”

A. Potential Members

1. Pastor
2. Staff Parish Relations committee member
3. Trustees member
4. Children’s ministries coordinator
5. Day Care Director (if applicable)
6. Lay Leader
7. One or two members at large
8. Lawyer

II. Develop a policy

Implement an organizational policy for the protection of children and youth. At a minimum, the policy should include a brief theological statement, definition of child abuse, a strong statement that abuse will not be tolerated, standards to be followed, a commitment to investigate any and all allegations of abuse, and a place for alleged incidents of abuse to be reported. Also, be sure to check conference policies and procedures, state law and the requirements of the insurance carrier. In writing a policy for a local congregation, language may be borrowed from this document.

III. Educate the congregation.

- A. Send a letter to the congregation stating that the policy has been adopted by the Annual Conference; explain the need for the policy in the letter.
- B. Have the board chairperson speak about it from the pulpit.
- C. Send a synopsis of the policy to the members of the church.

IV. Screen all staff and volunteers

- A. Implement a process for recruiting, screening and hiring workers (paid staff and volunteers) who will work with children and youth. A thorough screening process for staff (including clergy) and volunteers will:
 1. Deter persons who engage in predatory behavior from applying for a position,
 2. Identify possible predators,
 3. Show the church’s commitment to protecting children and youth
- B. Always check prior employment and references. The screening process should include an application with information on previous employers, references and church affiliation. Make sure each source is contacted and information on each contact is in the staff/volunteer “personnel” files.
- C. Conduct background checks on:
 1. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
 2. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth or at-risk adults)
- D. Prior to beginning the screening processes, have a question and answer time about the implementation procedures. This might be led by someone from Human Resources, Child Protective Services, or a day care center director.
- E. Provide time after an educational event for new people to receive their screening packets and ask questions about filling out the applications.

V. Train the volunteers and staff

All workers (staff and volunteers) should be required to attend training annually on the church's policies, procedures and expectations for working with children and youth (i.e. two adult rule, four year older rule, sign in and sign out sheets, what to do if an accident occurs, reporting an alleged incident of child abuse, information on state child abuse laws, and the like).

VI. Other information to consider:

Make the physical setting safe and conduct periodic safety inspections. For example:

- a. All classroom doors should have windows or a half door; if an office does not have a window in the door, the door should remain open during counseling sessions or private meetings.
- b. The bathrooms should not be isolated or far removed from classroom/play areas.
- c. Hall monitors should patrol the halls during programs.
- d. Sign in/out procedures can be helpful, especially for younger children (age 10 and younger).
- e. All other aspects of safety should be considered as well to minimize the risk of serious injury when accidents occur.

Communicate regularly with parents.

- a. Provide advance notice and full information/disclosure about events and activities, with written permission forms and information on who will be supervising and working with the children and youth.
- b. Give information to families about the church's policies and procedures for preventing child abuse.
- c. Encourage parents to communicate with someone in authority about any concerns, fears or worries about their children and/or a volunteer or staff person.
- d. Know the church's families.
- e. Be prepared for how to handle sensitive and confidential matters with families and concerned church members.

Maintain adequate liability insurance coverage.

- a. The coverage must apply to all the different activities of the church, at and away from church premises.
- b. The church should work with a knowledgeable insurance agent who knows the needs of a church.
- c. Remember, too, that the least expensive insurance may have significant gaps in coverage.
- d. The church should understand what coverage they have for sexual misconduct.

Be prepared for the worst at all times.

- a. "This is our church; it won't happen here" is a naïve viewpoint that can create an environment open to problems. Opportunities for accidents and abuse happen more frequently when prevention steps are not in place. Also be prepared for the worst, and never make assumptions about what might or might not happen in a church.
- b. This also means being prepared with a plan for responding immediately to allegations of abuse, including state reporting obligations.

Always remember that this is a Church!

- a. The Church is a sanctuary. Churches make a commitment to protect children each and every time a child is baptized.
- b. Churches should be role models in the community for the time and attention given to the care of children and youth.

Keep the records safe and secure.

- a. Limit the number of persons who know the outcomes of the background and criminal checks to the appointed clergy person, the Safe Sanctuaries committee chairperson, and perhaps one other designee.
- b. Copies of the applications and the actual reports should be “double locked” - locked file cabinet in a locked office.

No Exceptions!

- a. No one is exempt from the screening, even the woman who has been working with children for many years.
- b. The key to explaining this need is the reality that the procedure is designed to protect not just the children, but also the adults from false accusations.
- c. Another key to explaining this need is that if all current staff and volunteers are properly screened, then new staff and volunteers more readily understand the need.

Know the child intervention resources in the area and make that information available to your church.

1. National Child Abuse Hotline 1(800) 4-A-CHILD
2. Florida Child Abuse Hotline 1(800) 96-ABUSE
3. Alabama residents should call the National Hotline
4. County Department of Human/Children Services
5. Area Child Protective Services
6. National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse 1(312) 663-3520
7. Parents Anonymous 1(800) 421-0353
8. Alabama Sex Offender Registry <http://community.dps.state.al.us>
9. Florida Sex Offender Registry www.flsexoffender.net

EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT

Implementing a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of abuse in a local church must be accompanied by a substantial amount of education being provided for the workers with children and youth, the parents of children and youth, the congregation, and the children and youth themselves. This model is designed to be used as a three or four hour workshop and should be adapted for the target audience. It should be offered periodically throughout the year and any time new volunteers are beginning service in the congregation.

I. Opening Worship

- A. Prayer of invocation – Gracious and most merciful God, you have brought us together in witness to your love for all children. Open our hearts and minds in this moment and prepare us to receive your message. Show us your will and fill us to overflowing with courage to face the reality of abuse within our midst. Give us energy and dedication enough, to make this, your church, a holy and hallowed place where all your children may be safe and secure as they grow in faith and in their knowledge of your presence in their lives! Amen.
- B. Suggested scriptures:
1. Exodus 22:21-23 – You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry.
 2. Matthew 19:14 – Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”
 3. Luke 9:46-48 – An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.”
- C. Brief devotion – Begin by recalling the baptismal ritual for children, reminding the participants of the pledge made by the congregation at each child’s baptism. Acknowledge and list the many ways your congregation lives out that pledge through its current ministries. Conclude by introducing the safe sanctuaries policies as the newest component of your church’s ministries with children and youth.

II. Introductory information

- A. Current occurrences – Set the stage here for the substance of the event by introducing recent news reports from your own community’s newspapers or television broadcasts related to incidents of abuse of children, youth, or the elderly in any locations or institutions. Also, at this time, present the material related to any current litigation involving the church or claims of abuse.
- B. Current statistics – Quote the statistical information from the conference Safe Sanctuaries policy or from other sources available to you. Emphasize the fact that two million annual incidents translates into one incident of abuse every fifteen seconds.
- C. Reasons to implement an abuse strategy:
1. Our church is a community of faith that can offer a safe haven and sanctuary where children, youth, and adults can seek advice, help, and nurture.
 2. Our church is a place where more than just facts of abuse can be taught. We can also teach and proclaim our Christian values: compassion, justice, repentance, and grace.
 3. Our church is the place where all can come to learn and develop the inner strength and spiritual resources they will need to feel truly connected to God and to face suffering and evil.
 4. Our church can be the place where children and adults are able to learn how to respond to painful and confusing events using the wisdom of the Scripture.

D. Summarize – These reports and data demonstrate that we cannot ignore the possibility that abuse could happen here. For the sake of our children and youth and the protection of our workers against false allegations, we need to intentionally work to prevent abuse.

III. What is abuse and how can we recognize it?

Use the information from the ‘Our Mandate’ section of this policy to give the definitions of abuse.

IV. Who are abusers?

Abusers of children and youth are more often than not familiar adults trusted by others. Less than twenty percent of child abuse is perpetrated by strangers. Just as victims of abuse come from all segments of society, abusers can be from any racial, ethnic, economic, and social group. They will come into contact with their victim through their work in ministry or through their association with the congregation.

V. What are we doing to keep at-risk individuals and our workers safe?

Present the new policies and procedures for offering a safe sanctuary for all people. Give participants time to read the policies and review the forms. Allow time for questions and discussion as you review each section with the group.

- A. Screening of staff: employees and volunteers – Use your own policies and the information in this conference policy for the substance of this section. Provide copies of all screening forms, application forms, covenant forms, consent forms, and position descriptions. Allow time for a review of each form and for questions from the participants.
- B. Training of staff: employees and volunteers – Use your policies and the information in this conference policy for the substance of this section. Be thorough in reviewing all of the safety procedures, and allow time for questions.
- C. Reporting suspected abuse – Use your policies and the material specific to your state to explain the reporting procedures developed for your church. Explain the policy, the procedure for making a report, and the concept of confidentiality.
- D. Completing the task – If this is the first occasion the workers have had to see and review the screening, application, and position description forms, you may need to allow time for each of them to complete the forms.

VI. Closing worship

- A. Covenant forms – Distribute covenant forms to the participants. Invite people to celebrate the church’s commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals and those who work with them by completing a covenant form. (form at end of this policy)
- B. Read Luke 9:46-48 and sing “Jesus Loves Me.”
- C. Offering of covenant forms – Ask the participants to bring forward their signed covenant forms as a sign of offering themselves in ministry. Sing the Doxology.
- D. Benediction – May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit guide and direct you in all you do. Amen.

**SAFE SANCTUARIES
VOLUNTEER APPLICATION**

Name (First, middle, maiden, last): _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Occupation: _____

Employer: _____

Current job responsibilities and schedule: _____

Previous work experience: _____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Special interests, hobbies, and skills: _____

How many hours per week are you available to volunteer? _____

Are you available: _____ Days _____ Evenings _____ Weekends

Can you make a one-year commitment to this volunteer role? _____

Do you have your own transportation? _____

Do you have a valid driver's license? _____

Do you have liability insurance? (list policy limits and name of carrier) _____

Why would you like to volunteer with children and/or youth? _____

What qualities do you have that would help you work with children and/or youth? _____

Describe your parents' discipline style: _____

Describe your own discipline methods: _____

Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, and other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations)? _____ No _____ Yes

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Have you ever been exposed to an incident of child abuse or neglect? _____ No _____ Yes

If yes, how did you feel about the incident? _____

Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions? _____ No _____ Yes

References: Please list three personal references (people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide complete contact information for each. *References are confidential.*

1. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

2. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

3. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

**SAFE SANCTUARIES
EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION**

Are you over the age of 18? _____ Yes _____ No

Present address: _____

City, State, Zipcode: _____

Primary phone: _____ Secondary phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Position applied for: _____

Date you are available to start: _____

Qualifications:

Academic achievements: (Schools attended, degrees earned, dates of completion)

Continuing education completed: (Courses taken, dates of completion)

Professional organizations: (list any in which you have membership)

First aid training? _____ Yes _____ No Date completed: _____

CPR training? _____ Yes _____ No Date completed: _____

Previous work experience: Please list your previous employers from the past five years. Include the job title, a description of position duties and responsibilities, the name of the company/employer, the address of company/employer, the name of your immediate supervisor, and the dates you were employed in each position.

Previous volunteer experience: Please list any relevant volunteer positions you have held and list the duties you performed in each position, the name of your supervisor, the address and phone number of the volunteer organization, and the dates of your volunteer service.

Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, and other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations)? No Yes

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Have you ever been exposed to an incident of child abuse or neglect? No Yes

If yes, how did you feel about the incident? _____

Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions? No Yes

References: Please list three personal references (people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide complete contact information for each. *References are confidential.*

1. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

2. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

3. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

Waiver and Consent:

I, _____, hereby certify that the information I have provided on this application for employment is true and correct. I authorize this church to verify the information I have provided on this application by contacting the references and employers I have listed, by conducting a criminal records check, or by other means, including contacting others whom I have not listed. I authorize the references and employers listed in this application to give you whatever information they may have regarding my character and fitness for the job for which I have applied. Furthermore, I waive any rights I may have to confidentiality.

In the event that my application is accepted and I become employed by _____ Church, I agree to abide by the policies of the organization and to refrain from inappropriate conduct in the performance of my duties.

I have read this waiver and the entire application, and I am fully aware of its contents. I sign this consent freely and under no duress or coercion.

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

**SAFE SANCTUARIES
CHARACTER REFERENCE**

Applicant name: _____

Reference name: _____

Reference address: _____

Reference phone(s): _____

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?
2. How long have you known the applicant?
3. How well do you know the applicant?
4. How would you describe the applicant?
5. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children and/or youth?
6. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to adults?
7. How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?
8. How would you feel about having the applicant as a worker with your child and/or youth?
9. Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant's ability to work with children and/or youth? If so, please describe.
10. Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.
11. Please list any other comments you would like to make about this applicant:

Reference inquiry completed by: _____ Date: _____

SAFE SANCTURIES BACKGROUND CHECKS

The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference has signed a contract with Trak-1 to provide background checks for all conference programs and local congregations. Each congregation will need to complete a contract and submit the contract to Trak-1. After the contract is accepted by Trak-1, the church will receive a user id and a password. Each church will complete background checks within the local congregation. Contact the Coordinator for Ministries with Children, Rev. Leigh Meekins, at the Office of Connectional Ministries for contact information for Trak-1. A sample background check authorization is attached.

SAFE SANCTUARIES
AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST TO RUN BACKGROUND CHECK

I, _____, hereby authorize _____ Church to request the release of information regarding any record of criminal charges or convictions maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. I do release the information holder from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

Applicant's name (first, middle, maiden, last): _____

Print all other names that have been used by the applicant (if any):

Date of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Social Security number: _____

Driver's license number: _____ State issuing license: _____

Address: _____

Previous address: _____

Safe Sanctuaries Proof of Background Check Affidavit

_____ (Name of Church/Organization)
 has performed a **National Background Check** by _____
 (Name of Company performing the background check) on _____
 (Name of volunteer) with _____ (Social Security number). The National
 Background Check, dated _____ (Date background check was run), is on file at
 _____ (Location of file). The National Background Check
 was _____ clear _____ not clear. The custodian of the Background check information is:

Name _____
 Position with Church/ Organization _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ E-mail _____

I hereby certify the information above to be accurate and complete.

Custodian of records Print Name _____

Custodian of records Sign Name _____

Witness _____

SAFE SANCTUARIES
NOTICE OF UNFAVORABLE BACKGROUND CHECK

Date: _____

Applicant's name: _____

Applicant's address: _____

As you authorized in your employment/volunteer application, the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has recently completed a background check as part of our application process. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that there is information in the report we received that, if accurate, would prevent us from offering you employment, or allowing you to volunteer, at this time. A copy of this report is enclosed.

If, after reviewing the report, (1) you believe that the information contained is inaccurate, and/or (2) you want to know what information in the report falls outside of the acceptable guidelines, we ask that you contact us within five business days. The contact information is included below. Otherwise, we will assume that you no longer wish to pursue employment/volunteerism with us.

This report was furnished to us by the Trak-1 company. Please understand that while Trak-1 provided the report, they did not make the decision, and they are unable to provide you the specific reasons why the congregation made this decision. Under the law, you have the right to dispute directly with Trak-1 any information in this report.

Name of organization: _____

Address: _____

Contact person: _____

Contact numbers: _____

**Alabama West-Florida Conference
Photo Release**

CHILD'S NAME: _____

PARENT(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NO: _____ OR _____

E-MAIL: _____ OR _____

_____ I **DO** give permission for my child's picture to be taken for use in local newspapers, church newsletters, church website, etc.

_____ I **DO NOT** give permission for my child's picture to be taken for use in local newspapers, church newsletters, church website, etc.

Parent/Legal Guardian Name (print)

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date:

**SAFE SANCTUARIES
SCREENING INTERVIEW**

The following are some suggested questions which may be used in an interview with a potential employee or volunteer:

1. Why are you interest in being associated with our organization?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. When you read the job description, what appealed to you the most?
4. What specific skills do you bring to this job?
5. With what age group and gender do you prefer to work? Why? Please provide examples of your work with this age group.
6. If you are trained, are you willing to work with other age groups or genders?
7. What kinds of programs or activities would you be willing to lead, supervise, or conduct? If trained, would you be willing to conduct other activities?
8. What do you feel are the chief indicators of a successful program or activity?
9. Give a specific example of how you overcame a difficulty in a job, school, or family.
10. Give an example of how you overcame a problem with a young person other than your own?
11. How were you disciplined as a child? How would/do you discipline now?
12. In what types of activities or recreation do you participate?
13. What were your favorite subjects in school?
14. What would you like to tell us that has not been covered?
15. What questions do you have about our organization or this position?

SAFE SANCTUARIES PARTICIPATION COVENANT

This congregation is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, at-risk adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- Adults who have been convicted of child abuse of any kind are not allowed to volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his or her willingness with one of the church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
- All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
- Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please mark each of the statements to which you will commit:

- _____ 1. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth.
- _____ 2. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times.
- _____ 3. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to abide by the six-month rule before beginning a volunteer assignment.
- _____ 4. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment.
- _____ 5. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to my supervisor.
- _____ 6. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to discuss with a minister of this congregation my experience, if any, as a survivor of child abuse.
- _____ 7. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to inform a minister of this congregation if I have ever been convicted of child abuse.

After reading this participation covenant, I agree to abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant

Date

RESOURCES

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church – 2004 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004).

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2004 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004).

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries by Joy Melton (Discipleship Resources, 2003).

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church by Joy Melton (Discipleship Resources, 1998).