

REPORT 8 - POLICY STATEMENT CONCERNING SAFE SANCTUARIES

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 – 2012 page 240)

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 *2012 Book of Discipline* names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members.

Statement of Policy

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 18 years of age may not be counted as an adult in the child/adult ratios.
 - d. An assistant less than 18 years of age may not lend aid unless two authority figures are present.

Two adult rule

A minimum of two non-related adults should be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and at-risk adults. When it is impossible to staff with two non-related adults, there should 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 Resources

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 including their own child.
- 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 an authorized 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 known 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 other 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.

Cyber issues:

- Firewalls on computer systems at churches need to be in place and kept up to date.
- Volunteer and Employees should maintain Christian principles when using social networking sites, especially when referencing church and Alabama-West Florida Conference events.
- Those in authority and assistants are to be accountable for cyber communications.
- When utilizing pictures and videos from Alabama-West Florida Conference events no names are to be posted for those under 18 years of age. Churches are encouraged to establish policies for use of photographs and videos on the web.

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.
 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.
 3. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program.
 4. Consent to the following background checks:
 5. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
 6. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth, or at-risk adults)
 7. The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference recommends background checks be run through _____ company or other reputable screening company. A background check is valid for two years. If the individual changes physical addresses, the background checks must be run again.
 8. Demonstrate an active relationship with the local church.
 9. Have the experience and qualifications for the position.
 10. 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:
 5. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
 6. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth or at-risk adults)
 7. 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.
- b. If the unfavorable report is a volunteer the Pastor and chair of the Board of Trustees shall meet with the person to discuss the report.
- c. If the unfavorable report is a staff person the Pastor/Staff Parish Committee Chairperson shall meet with the person to discuss the report and a letter shall be placed in the person's file.
- d. 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.
 - 6) Documentation of action taken should be placed in the person's file.

A sample packet of forms can be found at www.awfume.org; forms

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.

This policy shall be evaluated each quadrennium 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.

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. 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.

IV. 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).

V. Other information to consider:

- A. **Make the physical setting safe and conduct periodic safety inspections.** For example:
 1. 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.

2. The bathrooms should not be isolated or far removed from classroom/play areas and doors should remain open where practical and given due consideration for privacy concerns.
3. Hall monitors should patrol the halls during programs.
4. All other aspects of safety should be considered as well to minimize the risk of serious injury when accidents occur.

B. Communicate regularly with parents.

1. 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.
2. Give information to families about the church's policies and procedures for preventing child abuse.
3. Encourage parents to communicate with someone in authority about any concerns, fears or worries about their children and/or a volunteer or staff person.
4. Know the church's families.
5. Be prepared for how to handle sensitive and confidential matters with families and concerned church members.

C. Maintain adequate liability insurance coverage.

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

D. Be prepared for the worst at all times.

1. "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.
2. This also means being prepared with a plan for responding immediately to allegations of abuse, including state reporting obligations.

E. Always remember that this is a Church!

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

F. Keep the records safe and secure.

1. 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.
2. Copies of the applications and the actual reports should be "double locked" - locked file cabinet in a locked office.

3. Electronically stored reports must be password protected and accessible only by those listed in (a).

G. No Exceptions!

1. No one is exempt from the screening, even the woman who has been working with children for many years.
2. 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.
3. 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.

H. 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.
- 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.