

Statement of Purpose

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 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...I, 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.”

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, small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines.

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 grow safe and strong. (From the Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church – 1996. Copyright @ 1996 by the United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. {pp.384-386})

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist Congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of all types of abuse of children/vulnerable adults at White Bluff United Methodist Church.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Child/Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, White Bluff United Methodist Church, hereafter referenced as WBUMC, pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety, and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults, 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, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); 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 our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth or adult 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)

What is Abuse and How do we recognize it?

Generally, abuse is categorized in five primary forms: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse. The resolution passed by General Conference calls all congregations to work to prevent all of these forms of abuse. Although we may typically think of young children when we think of these forms of abuse, youth can be victims of each and every one of these abuses.

1. Physical Abuse

This is abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a youth of young child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (such as a knife or belt), burning, choking, fracturing bones, and other non accidental injuries.

2. Emotional Abuse

This is abuse in which a person exposes a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the youth that he or she is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Youth exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being deprived of all parental affection, being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs. This type of abuse is difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

3. Neglect

This is abuse in which a person endangers a youth or child's health, welfare and safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection, and even education to destroy the youth or child's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Neglect may well be the most common form of abuse. Although it is often difficult to prove, reports of neglect from teenagers or children should not be ignored.

4. Sexual Abuse

This type of abuse occurs when sexual contact between children, youth and adult or older more powerful youth happens. The youth victim is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts. Often, the child or youth victim is physically dependent on the perpetrator (for example a parent). Additionally, the youth victim is often psychologically dependent on the perpetrator (for example a teacher or youth minister). Examples of sexual abuse including fondling,

intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to pornography and/or prostitution.

5. Ritual Abuse

This is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a youth, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Typically, the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuses. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the child or youth victim or to people related to the child or youth victim. When reports of ritual abuse are made, they are often extremely horrifying. Such reports may even seem too gruesome to be true. However, any child or youth making such a report must NOT be ignored.

*Information and descriptions taken from the United Methodist publication "Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries" written by Joy Thornburg Melton
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Safe Sanctuaries Policy – White Bluff UMC

Abuse Prevention Policy

I. Introduction

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Conclusion

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Definitions

Adult – A person of 18 years of age or older.

Assistant – A person who assists a Responsible Adult in program activities but is only working under the direct guidance and supervision of the Responsible Adult in charge of the programming. This person may be younger than 23 years of age, provided the Responsible Adult participation requirements are met. No Assistant will help with any programming or activity without direct guidance and involvement of a Responsible Adult. Assistants may also be involved who may not reach the age requirement or have completed the volunteer application process however, in no situation shall these persons function as the Responsible Adult, but only serve to assist the Responsible Adult. Assistants may be adults who serve in a one time assignment but without going through the Volunteer Process however, any Adult serving on a regular basis will be required to go through the Volunteer Application process.

Child – A person of less than 18 years of age or an adult with diminished capacity.

Youth – A child of 13-17 years of age.

Responsible Adult - An adult who is responsible for the care of children and youth at a church sponsored event. This person shall be at least 23 years of age, meets minimum membership/participation requirements (See Six Month Rule) and have a valid Volunteer application status. Assistants may also be involved who may not reach the age requirement or have completed the volunteer application process however, in no situation shall these persons function as the Responsible Adult, but only serve to assist the Responsible Adult. Assistants may be adults who serve in a one time assignment but without going through the Volunteer Process however, any Adult serving on a regular basis will be required to go through the Volunteer Application process.

Senior Pastor – The most senior clergy (those ordained, commissioned or under appointment to White Bluff by the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church) at a church sponsored event.

Supplemental Restraint – A supplemental restraint is a state statute required harness or car seat for children under the age of eight and weighing less than 80 pounds.

Unattended Child – A child that is not in the direct line of sight at all times of the parent/guardian or their designated attendee.

Volunteer – An Adult that has completed the volunteer application process and has been approved for service.

Vulnerable Adult – An adult that is physically, emotionally or in any manner impaired by diminished capacity.

Child Abuse – Any act committed by a person in a position of trust (Parent, Caregiver, Sunday School teacher, Pastor, Responsible adult, Authority Figure or Volunteer) which harms or threatens to harm a child's welfare, physical, spiritual or mental health.

We recognize abuse may fall into but is not limited to the following four categories:

1. **Physical Abuse** – Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Instances of physical abuse may include any physical act of undue force such as assault with a knife, strap or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped or thrown. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.
2. **Sexual Abuse** – Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.

3. Emotional Abuse – Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor’s self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement shut in a small area) making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.
4. Neglect – Not hearing or addressing a minor’s basic needs for health, welfare or safety resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment: 1. Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, 2. Abandonment 3. Refusal to seek treatment for illness, 4. Inadequate supervision, 5. Health hazards in the home, school or church, or 6. Ignoring a minor’s need for contact, affirmation, stimulation or nurture.

Volunteer and Paid Staff Requirements

An essential component of preventing abuse is careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of the overwhelming number of persons with calling to ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons, we realize that abuse may occur in the church.

The following steps will be used to screen volunteer and paid applicants:

- A. Purpose – All volunteers for child and youth activities must satisfactorily meet the requirements set forth in the WBUMC Safe Sanctuaries Plan.
- B. Requirements -
 1. Application – Volunteers must complete the volunteer application process which includes a criminal background check (includes but may not be limited to criminal history, motor vehicle records and registered sexual offender listings) and be approved for service by an ordained staff member and Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator, if any. (Note – The Background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Senior Pastor and/or Staff Parish Committee of WBUMC, or Safe Sanctuaries Chairman or Vice Chairman, if any, who will in turn decide how any particular

information shall be handled and will be maintained confidentially.)

All volunteers must successfully pass the initial background check. Thereafter, a random background check will be completed on 25% of All Certified Safe Sanctuaries volunteers at White Bluff UMC every two years. This Requirement will be met without exception until changed or revised by the Church Council following recommendation by the Safe Sanctuaries Board of WBUMC. The person ordering the random checks will be assisted by the Safe Sanctuaries Board Chairman or Vice Chairman if neither of those individuals is responsible for the random selection and ordering of the background checks.

If any of these reports raise questions regarding fitness of the volunteer applicant to serve, the application will be disapproved and the person not placed into service. A person with a history of violent offenses shall be disqualified; a drug related conviction within the past five (5) years shall also disqualify a person. A person with an alcohol related offense within the past five (5) years shall not be allowed to serve as a driver for any activity. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or vulnerable adult shall automatically disqualify a person from serving.

2. Training – Volunteers must complete an initial training and a follow-up or refresher training at a minimum of every two years. An initial training and refresher training will be held at least once annually to allow for new volunteer applicants and re-upping volunteer applicants who may have opted out in previous years.
3. **Volunteer applications will be updated every Five years. Volunteers are encouraged to update their application more frequently as necessary.**

4. An interview will be conducted with all applicants. The interview will be conducted by the Clergy/Staff or Responsible Adult for the Volunteer Applicant's chosen work area (i.e., Youth Director for Youth Volunteer, Children's Coordinator for Children's ministries (this may be a clergy, staff or lay person.) This interview must also include someone from the Safe Sanctuaries Board (if any) and/or a clergy person assigned to WBUMC.

Complete Reference Checks

A minimum of three references must be provided and may be contacted on volunteer applicants. It is further recommended that the reference of a church official (pastor, Staff Parish Relations or Church Council Chairperson, Youth Director, etc.) from the church of the volunteer applicant's membership be obtained. For paid staff applications this process may be accomplished post-hiring due to the confidentiality of the job application process for paid staff positions.

Complete Background Checks

Background checks include, but may not be limited to: Criminal background check and history, Motor Vehicle Records and Registered Sex Offender registries. The Background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Senior Pastor and/or Staff Parish Committee of WBUMC, or Safe Sanctuaries Chairman or Vice Chairman if any, who will in turn decide how any particular information shall be handled and will be maintained confidentially. Permission for initial background check extends permission for future random background checks for the time period that the Volunteer remains a Certified Safe Sanctuaries Volunteer in the WBUMC program.

Federal and State Law

The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in this

document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and or State laws relating to employment and child abuse.

Six Month Rule

All Responsible Adults involved with children or youth or our church must have been members/active participants of this congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an Assistant with another trained Responsible Adult. The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consider exceptions to this rule and this requirement may be waived by the Safe Sanctuaries Board for Ordained Clergy assigned to WBUMC or Paid Staff hired via due process of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (i.e., new Clergy assigned or Choir Director, Youth Director, Pre-School Director or Teachers etc. who will function as paid staff or employees of White Bluff UMC or the Pre-School.)

Participation Number Requirements

- A. Purpose – the purpose of this procedure is to ensure that children are not left alone with one adult and/or adults and are not left alone with one child for an extended period of time.
- B. Two Adult Requirements - All reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that two adults will be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children. One adult must be present at all times and must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest child in the activity. Roving Adult – At times when multiple groups of children are present, one of the two responsible adults may be a rover, if necessary. The rover is a responsible adult who regularly moves in and out of each child's group that is staffed by one adult during each activity period.
- C. Minimum Child Requirements – In the event that only one child is present for a church sponsored event, every effort will be made to combine with another activity or contact the parents/guardian. An

exception to this requirement may be the nursery where only one infant or small child may be in attendance for an event or service.

Window in Door Policy

- A. Purpose – The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that children are visible at all times from a location outside of the room in which a church related activity is taking place.
- B. General Requirements – Each room that can accommodate a children’s activity will have a door with a window in it or a half-door.
- C. Counseling Requirements – At any counseling session with children, youth or vulnerable adults, at least one of the participants (counseled and counselor) must remain visible from outside the room throughout the entire session. Ordained clergy, assigned to WBUMC by the S. Georgia Conference of the UMC, and providing counseling services will be excepted from this requirement.

Safe Sanctuaries Certified Identification Badges

Safe Sanctuaries Volunteers who have completed the certification process (Training, Background Check and on file 4 page Volunteer Application) will receive an official Name Badge indicating their status as a Certified Safe Sanctuaries Volunteer – indicated by the gold insignia “Safe Sanctuaries Certified” in black and red on the bottom of the badge. These badges must be worn by the Volunteer at all times when they are acting in a supervisory or Responsible Person in Charge capacity on premises of White Bluff or off site activity sanctioned and supervised by WBUMC.

Transportation Procedure

- A. Purpose – The purpose of this procedure is to outline/insure safe transport of children to and from off-site church related activities.
- B. Church Owned/Rented Transportation –
 - a. All Church Activities that use the Church Van or for which a vehicle is rented must comply with the White Bluff Van or Vehicle Rental Procedure and all applicable state statutes. All vehicle operators must be 23 years old or older and be a certified Volunteer.

- b. Children in Supplemental Restraints – As a supplement to the Van Procedure, this procedure sets forth a maximum of four (4) children per one (1) adult for children in supplemental restraints not including the driver.
 - c. Children Not in Supplemental Restraints – As a supplement to the Van Procedure, this procedure sets forth a maximum of six (6) children per one (1) adult for children not in supplemental restraints not including the driver.
- C. Non-Church Owned/Rented Transportation – The driver of a non-church owned/rented vehicle assumes primary responsibility to insure the safety of all passengers.

Permission Waiver.

All children and youth must have a signed consent by Parent or Guardian giving permission to ride in church owned, rented or provided vehicles. This may be an annual waiver that can be rescinded in writing at any time and will also include information concerning any special needs or medical conditions.

Rooming

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or other similar situation, there must be two adults that are not related. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth.

Nursery Guidelines

WBUMC Nursery operating procedures will be followed and will include standard drop off and pick up sign in sheets.

Safety Keepers Program

To involve more of our Certified volunteers in the nursery, children and youth activities AND to address a specific situation of related parties wishing to teach a class (not allowed by the present Safe Sanctuaries policy) WBUMC has established a Safety Keepers Program - a listing of Certified Safe Sanctuaries Volunteers that agree to be “on call” to every nursery, children and youth program or activity at White Bluff. These “On Call” Volunteers will be listed in the office and known to all coordinators and other Certified Volunteers as persons who can be contacted in advance or at the last moment, to serve as a third person in the room as a Safety Keeper in situations where related parties or underage Volunteers may be the only Responsible parties present for the activity. Note that Safety Keepers cannot be utilized to comply with Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines for Youth, Children, Nursery in any activity involving off site locations, or travel/transportation. In the event of related parties teaching Sunday School or other activities it will be the responsibility of the related party Teacher *not in compliance with Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines* to secure a Safety Keeper for the class/activity. Any questions related to utilization of this program should be referred to Nursery, Children, Youth or Sunday School Coordinators or the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Safe Sanctuaries Board.

Outside Group Use of Church Facilities

All groups utilizing the WBUMC facilities will follow WBUMC Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures unless the organization follows policies and procedures more stringent than the WBUMC policies in place at the time of use.

White Bluff UMC Pre-School

The Pre-School will have policies, operational procedures and other guidelines specific to the Pre-School that meet the minimum requirements of this policy.

Reporting Abuse/Alleged Abuse

In abuse or alleged abuse, the Senior Pastor shall be contacted immediately, if that person is unavailable, the Associate Pastor should be contacted, and if the Associate is not available, the Safe Sanctuaries Chairman or Coordinator should be contacted. These persons will then follow the specified steps of the WBUMC Crisis Management Plan and the process of the South Georgia Conference of the UMC.

Shepherding Process for Sex Offenders **(Identified by the offender or otherwise)**

Because we are a redemptive fellowship, WBUMC will have a Shepherding process in place for shadowing and chaperoning a sex offender who attends any/all church activities. Registered Sex Offenders who desire to attend and participate in the life of WBUMC will be required to sign a Premises/Participation Agreement outlining the guidelines designed to reduce the risk to the offender and children, youth and vulnerable adults while on the premises of WBUMC. This agreement will be signed by the offender, their spouse, if any, a WBUMC Shepherd, Safe Sanctuaries Board Chairman, Safe Sanctuaries Board Vice Chairman, Senior Pastor, Children's Coordinator, and Nursery Coordinator. Other persons may be added to the agreement depending on the stipulations and the status of the Board and/or the Registrant.

It is recommended that the spouse of a married Registered Sex Offender not actively participate in or seek roles within the congregation involving supervision of Children, Nursery or Youth Activities. In the event a spouse wishes to participate directly in any of these activities, requests for these activities should be approved in advance by the Safe Sanctuaries Board.

Safe Sanctuaries Board

The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consist of Specific Officers and Teams of WBUMC in addition to At-Large members made up of **two classes** that will each serve two year terms. At least one member of the Board will be elected

from within the following specific Teams - Staff Parish Relations Committee, Director of the Pre-School or a Pre-school representative, Trustee Representative, Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry, Nursery Coordinator, Sunday School Superintendant, Interfaith Hospitality Network, Clergy Representative, and 4 At-Large Members from the church. At-Large Members will be appointed by the Lay Leadership Team or Committee. All Safe Sanctuaries Board members will be listed annually in the Report of Committee on Lay Leadership. This Board will elect from among its membership, one person who will serve as Chairman and Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator for a term to be decided by the Board.

Responsibilities of the Board will include:

1. Educating and or Training Responsible Adults, other Volunteers or Assistants, and all paid staff and other employees about this policy.
2. Answering questions about this policy.
3. Ensuring compliance with this policy.
4. Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances, including approval of Volunteer applications
5. Assisting, as needed, with investigations.
6. Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed.
7. Evaluating Board functions.
8. Conduct Initial and Refresher Volunteer Training on ongoing basis.
9. Other Duties as needed.

Review and Revision Policy

Any changes or revisions to this Safe Sanctuaries policy shall be considered and approved by the Safe Sanctuaries Board on an as needed basis. Any changes and or revisions shall be presented to and approved by Church Council.