

Safe Sanctuary Policy and Guidelines of Rehoboth United Methodist Church Williamsport, Maryland

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for 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." (para. 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children or for adults. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their 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. (*Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, p. 384-386*) Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Rehoboth United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

The Rehoboth United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of Maryland law.

Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who works with children and youth at RUMC will be:

- 21 years old.
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A member of RUMC for at least 6 months or have a signed letter from the pastor of the previously attended church.

All volunteer and paid staff who works with children and youth at RUMC will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Take the Safe Sanctuary training and pass the quiz with a grade of at least 80%.

All youth volunteers who work with children and youth at RUMC will be:

- Defined as anyone from the age of 10 – 17.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A youth who has attended RUMC for at least 6 months or have a signed letter from the pastor of the previously attended church.

Staff Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at RUMC:

- Two adults or one adult and one youth volunteer will be present at all times. The preference is that the adults be non-related.

- Children and youth will be checked in to and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- They will have access to a telephone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church.

Whenever RUMC sponsors an activity involving children or youth,

- Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's activity, classroom or church sponsored program at any time unannounced.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.

Whenever RUMC transports children/youth away from the church campus:

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- Adults should never transport child/youth by self.
- Adults will be approved and covered by church's insurance company
- Drivers will go through same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff

Whenever RUMC hosts an activity involving children or youth from another church or community organization:

- The groups using the church facility will follow RUMC's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures
- RUMC volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures and child abuse issues on a regular basis.

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at an RUMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Insure the safety of the child or youth.
- Call the church pastor.
- Call the County Office of Department of Social Services with the church pastor.
- Church official will notify family upon notification of allegation.

Conclusion:

This policy was designed to reflect the beliefs and policies of the United Methodist Church. The document will be supported by ongoing training so that any member of our church will be aware of their Christian duty and legal responsibilities. In simple terms, anyone working with children, youth and vulnerable adults need to remember to **“never be alone with a child and keep your hands to yourself.”** Following these two simple rules will keep everyone safe.

In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be, “Surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life.” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship, p. 96)