

**Safe Sanctuary Policy
Soapstone United Methodist Church
Raleigh, North Carolina**

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me.” (Matthew 18.5). Children are our present and 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.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines.

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 and protection of children at Soapstone United Methodist Church.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, emotional well-being and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant

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

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "... surrounded by steadfast love, ... established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II," United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

Adopted by the Soapstone United Methodist Church Council on August 1, 2006. This document will be presented to the Charge Conference on November 15, 2006. Until final approval by the Charge Conference, the Council directs that implementation begin and that a schedule of implementation be presented at the September 2006 meeting.

**SAFE SANCTUARY PROCEDURES
SOAPSTONE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Definitions

Adult – An adult is a person of 18 years of age or older. An 18 year old still in high school or a recent high school graduate during the summer following the senior year is a youth for church purposes.

Adult Event – A meeting, class, or activity designed specifically for persons over the age of eighteen.

Child – A child is a person of less than 18 years of age or an adult with diminished mental capacity who is appropriately placed in programs for youth or children.

Child Care – A room or area where children are kept and supervised by a paid or volunteer care giver while a parent attends an adult event.

Children's Event – A meeting, class, or activity designed specifically for children from birth through the fifth grade.

Event - An event is a meeting, class, or other activity that appears on the Soapstone Calendar. An event will typically begin at Soapstone and end at Soapstone, although participants may travel to other locations. Transportation to and from Soapstone is the responsibility of parents.

Program Director – A paid staff member responsible for a particular ministry of the church.

Responsible Adult – An adult who is responsible for the care of children and youth at a church sponsored event.

Safe Sanctuary Coordinator – A lay member of the congregation appointed by the Church Council to assist staff members with the administration and responsibilities of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures.

Scouting Programs - Official Programs of the Boy Scouts of America or Girl Scouts of America.

Senior Pastor – The Ordained Elder appointed by the Bishop to serve Soapstone United Methodist Church as the lead pastor.

Staff Member – A paid staff member of the church, specifically including the Soapstone Pre-School.

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 who has completed the volunteer application process, has been approved for service, and successfully completed Safe Sanctuary Training.

Youth – A child between the school grades of 6-12. Note, the church usually promotes in August, so a recent graduate, even if 18 years of age who has not yet started college or other post-high school plans is considered a youth.

Youth Event – A meeting, class or activity designed specifically for persons in grade six through high school.

Paid Staff Members

All paid staff members (including clergy) are expected to submit to a background investigation, in-depth personal interview, and reference checks as required of volunteers as a condition of continued employment or employment. Paid staff members are also expected to update their information and undergo periodic training as required of volunteers. Current employees will not have to be “re-interviewed” or have their references “re-checked” as part of the implementation of this policy and procedure. The Staff Parish Committee is expected to adopt the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures as part of the Personnel Policies for the church.

Volunteers

Application Process Required

All volunteers for child and youth activities must satisfactorily meet the requirements set forth in the Safe Sanctuary Policy and these procedures.

Volunteers must complete the volunteer application process which includes a criminal background check, an in-depth personal interview, and reference checks. The primary focus of the background check, interview, and reference checking process is to determine the applicant’s temperament and suitability to work with children, youth, and/or young adults. The secondary focus is to confirm the applicant’s stated experience in working in the past with children, youth, and/or young adults. The final focus is to determine if the applicant’s previous experience was successful in the manner in which he or she took direction, accepted training and guidance, fulfilled commitments, and maintained confidentiality. NOTE: Credit and Employment History is not part of this process unless directly related to working with children or youth.

Those wishing to volunteer to work with children or youth who have a personal history of being subject to child abuse or neglect while growing up are requested to meet with the senior pastor prior to submitting any application. An adult with such a history is not automatically precluded from volunteering.

Those wishing to volunteer to drive church owned or leased vehicles on church sponsored activities must also submit to a review of their driving history.

Volunteers wishing to drive locally in their own vehicles must agree to a review of their driving history and provide proof of liability insurance on their automobile.

NOTE: The fact that a person has an arrest or conviction for a crime or traffic offense does not in and of itself preclude a person from being a volunteer or a driver. The nature of any offense, when it occurred, and the age of the applicant at the time of the violation will be factors taken into consideration. The “News and Observer test” will apply to any conviction. The N&O test asks the question, “How would the public perceive our Safe Sanctuary Program if there was an accident, incident, or accusation and a previous criminal record had been found?”

Soapstone UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures

An outside firm will be contracted with to perform the criminal background checks and driver history checks. The appropriate program director will conduct the personal interviews and check references. Only the senior pastor will receive copies of the criminal background checks. The Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will assist the program directors and senior pastor in reference checking and in weighing information that might question an applicant's suitability to work with children and/or youth.

Active Participation Required

Every applicant who volunteers to work with children and youth must have a period of six months of active participation in the life of Soapstone Church prior to submitting to an interview and reference checking. Active participation means that the person has gotten involved in more than just attending the Sunday morning worship services. Becoming a member of the church is not a requirement. This requirement is two-fold: we wish to have an opportunity for members of the church to get to know the applicant in a variety of settings in order that an opinion of their suitability to work with other's children can be formed and we wish to deter any individual that might be attempting to volunteer only to form inappropriate relationships with young persons.

Age Separation

A volunteer may not supervise youth or children unless there is a five year separation between the volunteer's age and the oldest child or youth they are supervising. A volunteer may be the second adult present with less than a five year age separation. In such a situation, the young adult volunteer must agree to guidance from a program director or senior volunteer. The program director or senior volunteer is considered the supervisor. The young adult volunteer's responsibility is to assist with leadership.

Training

Volunteers must complete an initial training program and refresher training every two years thereafter covering the specifics of the Safe Sanctuary Program, dealing with children, emergency policies and procedures, and the like..

Volunteer Follow-up

Volunteer applications must be updated every two years. Volunteers are encouraged to update their applications more frequently as necessary. This follow-up will include a new criminal background check and driver's history as appropriate. Part of the updating process is the voluntary disclosure of situations that may question the continued suitability of an individual to work with children and youth.

Supervision of Children and Youth

No child below the seventh grade who has not been confirmed should ever be on church grounds or a church related event wherever it is held without immediate supervision from that child's parent, an older sibling or another responsible adult.

As a matter of practice and practicality, the younger a child, the more likely a parent is to stay at the church during a children's event. Parents remaining at the church for the purpose of supervising their own children are not considered volunteers for the purposes of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures even if they from time-to-time assist with children other than their own. They do fall under this Policy when they start to lead small groups, teach Sunday School, teach or assist in Vacation Bible School, lead a musical program and related types of activities.

As children reach the age of confirmation, they wish more independence and to participate in activities without their parents physically present. These youth still require supervision and should not be on church property or church sponsored events without supervision.

The adults who volunteer to supervise youth are subject to these policies and procedures and must meet the application and training requirements and agree to abide by these policies. These positions specifically include any adult going on an overnight trip in any capacity with youth groups including Scouts, UMYF, Musical Groups, Mission Trips, Confirmation Partners and the like.

The following are considered supervision rules for children and youth events:

No adult should ever be alone with any child or youth. Even confidential counseling sessions should be in the view of another adult who is aware that counseling is going on.

There should be at least two unrelated adults for every event. The number of adults present should reflect the number of children or youth participating in the event.

Windows in doorways should not be covered during meetings, events, and small group sessions. Doors should never be locked.

A roving supervisor is permitted to be considered the second adult in small group sessions including Sunday School classes.

Husbands and wives cannot be considered to be the second adult for each other.

There must be at least one adult in every nursery school room on Sunday mornings. In addition to an adult rover, that adult may be assisted by a Youth Member or a Confirmand.

Soapstone UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures

Adults are expected to follow training guidelines on the appropriateness of various types of interaction between adults and youth between and between adults and children.

Restroom Procedures

The Church recognizes that use of the restroom is the most vulnerable situation and that this time is when children are at most risk of potential abuse and adults who work with children are most at risk of being falsely accused of abuse.

During organized church events, parents are encouraged to ensure that preschool aged children do not attend the restroom unaccompanied. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to have children use the restroom with parental supervision prior to the start of the activity.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to have elementary aged children remain in the sanctuary during the service, unless they accompany the child.

The following guideline from the Soapstone Pre-School is adopted by the remaining programs for children and applies to both volunteers and paid staff: “Staff should not be alone with any child. Never close a bathroom door with a child in the bathroom. The door can be blocked with a trashcan or another staff member can be located close by. If child is old enough to go to the bathroom alone, stand outside the door.”

Unattended Children and Youth

All paid staff members, volunteers, and other responsible adults have a responsibility to watch out for unattended children. The child should be escorted to the Program Director or Parent if the child is wandering alone or in with buddies and not participating in either the event or child care. Adult judgment is expected to determine if the unattended child has been “sent” by a parent to show responsibility by doing something alone. Those engaged in mischief should be approached right away. Whenever possible, two adults should approach the child and escort them.

Parent Notification

All children and youth events held away from Soapstone, specifically including Scouting, must have a written event plan communicated to parents and family members of all participants. A hard copy of the event plan must be filed at the Church Office so that the information does not require computer access to retrieve. The following are minimum requirements for the plan: Adult-in-Charge, other adults on event, non-participating adult familiar with all event details, methods of transportation, destinations, itineraries, contact information for all adults on the trip, and list of participants. Event coordinators can include more information or forms from Scouting to satisfy this information.

Emergencies

The person in charge of a children's or youth event is expected to do all things possible to protect all participants from any type of harm. To this end, the person in charge has the authority to immediately end the participation of anyone at the event. In the event that a child or youth has their participation ended, the person in charge must ensure the continued supervision of that child until the child can be turned over to his or her own parent or guardian.

Parent Responsibilities

As parents entrust the care of their children to both volunteers and staff members for various types of activities Soapstone offers, the parent should make sure that staff and appropriate volunteers have information necessary to properly protect and supervise their child in all situations likely to arise based upon the length of the activity and its location. This specifically includes notifying the appropriate program director of any medical, psychological, behavioral, child custody or similar issues. Parents should understand that not all activities are appropriate for all children.

It is a parent's responsibility to make sure that an Adult-in-Charge is physically present for an event before leaving the church grounds.

Parents are also expected to communicate clearly to their children and youth that program directors and volunteers are acting with the authority of that parent while the child is in the care of any Soapstone activity. Children and youth are expected to abide by any rules or conditions for any activity in order to participate.

Parents are requested to inquire of their children for feedback about Soapstone activities. Constructive feedback is appreciated by all program directors. As part of the feedback, parents are expected to be alert for anything that suggests inappropriate behavior on the part of any adult toward any child at the event. The parent is requested to contact the senior pastor, the program director, or the safe sanctuary coordinator immediately with any concerns.

Youth Responsibilities

Those children who have reach confirmation age and who in fact may be Confirmed Members of the Church have individual responsibilities for the safety of themselves and all other participants. Youth are responsible for their behavior. Youth are also to be trained on what is inappropriate behavior between individuals of the same sex, the opposite sex, and between youth and adults. Youth should contact the program director, senior pastor, or safe sanctuary coordinator immediately if anything inappropriate is done to them.

Youth Participation in Adult Events

From time-to-time, specifically skilled youth will want to participate in adult musical groups, study groups, and even official committees. If the youth's parent is not also participating in the adult event, the youth, the parent or parents, and appropriate program director should meet to discuss the nature of the adult events as it relates to the spirit of the Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures. Event specific guidelines should be established and reduced to writing and signed by the program director, youth, and parents.

Reports of Inappropriate Behavior

All responsible adults and youth have a duty be alert for behavior directed towards children and youth that is inappropriate. All staff members, volunteers, Church Council Members, and Trustees have specific responsibilities to protect children and youth and to initiate a response to inappropriate behavior however they learn of it.

As inappropriate behavior can range from perceptions to a deliberate criminal act, Soapstone's responses can range from modifying individual or group behavior to calling civil authorities.

For example, the game Twister can be considered innocent fun when played among persons of similar ages. If adults were to participate with youth in Twister, there may be a perception that it was inappropriate touching. The proper immediate response is to end the game and the proper follow-up is to point out to the adults that their participation might have been misinterpreted.

As behaviors leave area of perception and move towards poor judgment on the part of the adult, the response from the church will become more formal. A case of poor judgment can be investigated internally, the offending adult counseled and monitored more closely in the future. If the behavior were to be repeated or other examples of poor judgment occur, the adult could be assigned to activities where they are more closely supervised by either the program director or a senior volunteer. The volunteer could also be required to step down from their role as a volunteer.

At some point along this continuum of inappropriate behavior, the act of an adult towards a youth or child goes beyond perception, bad judgment, and becomes a criminal act. If there is any reason to believe that an adult has committed a criminal act towards a child, Soapstone's response is to call in the proper civil authorities and to cooperate fully with investigators. This specifically includes acts committed by parents against their own children. Child abuse laws require notification to the proper agency and Soapstone will respond.

Who Does What?

An investigations committee consisting of the Senior Pastor, Director of Youth, and Safe Sanctuary Coordinator is responsible for investigating any report of inappropriate behavior. In the event all of these positions are held by persons of the same gender, another person will be appointed so both genders will be represented on the committee. If any of these three persons are the subject of the inquiry, the District Superintendent will be notified immediately. All investigations are considered confidential. The committee should act as a team, especially during interviews, so that a statement made to the pastor while investigating an incident is not considered to be a legally privileged communication.

Program directors for children, music, adults, and the Soapstone Pre-School will participate in any investigation occurring in their area of responsibility. Nothing in the procedure should stop a Director or the Pastor from taking immediate action to further protect a child.

A spokesman for the church will be appointed by the Church Council. The spokesman's role is to "face the media." The spokesman should not have a role in the investigation and members of the investigating committee should not make statements to the media concerning any investigation. Once a spokesman is appointed, no member of the Church Council should speak to the media about any incident as an official spokesman.

Implementation Schedule

As there is a cost associated with the background investigations and driver history checks, the following order will be used to implement this policy and procedure.

- All Paid Staff and the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator
- All Volunteers Who Drive Rented Vans
- All Volunteers Who Lead or Coordinate Events
- All Volunteers wishing to or agreeing to drive their cars locally
- All Confirmation Mentors
- All Volunteers in their first year of volunteering
- All Volunteers in their second year or more of active volunteering

Both Boy and Girl Scouts meet the documentation requirements of this program when their Scouting Background Check Results are shared with the Pastor.

Cost Associated with Safe Sanctuary

This is a risk management program. The costs of background checks and driver history checks will be paid from the Trustees Budget. Volunteers are encouraged to help defray the cost of this program by a special donation marked "Safe Sanctuary." Paid staff members including Soapstone Pre-School will be charged back to their particular program budgets. Scouting should pay for their background checks.