



SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
Grace United Methodist Church
Aberdeen, MD 21001

BACKGROUND

Our biblical faith and our United Methodist Social Principles affirm that God has called us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can be safe and grow as disciples of Jesus. To this end, Grace United Methodist Church has developed this Safe Sanctuaries Policy that outlines the practices and procedures that will be followed to prevent, report and respond to the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

National research indicates that a report of child abuse occurs every 10 seconds and vulnerable adults abuse is prevalent and continues to increase. While reporting is on the rise, there is still much abuse that goes undetected and unreported. Often, abuse occurs in places where children, youth and vulnerable adults feel safe – home, schools, camps residential care settings and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. The intent of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy is to: 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our church; 2) be a place where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can feel safe in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees who minister to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

This policy sets forth practices and procedures in the areas of:

- Screening
- Supervision
- Reporting
- Response Plan

Our Covenant Statement

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that seek to assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as those who work with them. We seek to follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; and to implement prudent operational procedures in all ministry activities and events.

DEFINITIONS:



Abuse: Harm or threat of physical or emotional harm to another person. Abuse includes: the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk and committing or allowing to be committed, an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution.

Child or children or youth: Any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

Exploitation: Obtaining or using another person's resources, including but not limited to funds, assets or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

Sexual abuse: Includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction in which the parent, legal guardian, or other person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult for the purposes of sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

Sexual exploitation: Includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, legal guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Maryland law. Sexual exploitation also includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, legal guardian, person having custodial control or supervision, or person who is responsible for the welfare of a child, youth or vulnerable adult; allows, permits, or encourages the child, youth or vulnerable adult to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under Maryland law.

Sexual Harassment: Unwanted touching or physical contact. Unwelcome sexual advances. Discussing sexual relations/stories/fantasies while at the Church, at Church-sponsored events and/or transportation to and from a Church-sponsored event. Sexual harassment includes a range of actions from verbal or visual transgressions to sexual abuse or assault.

Supervision: To oversee or direct a ministry or ministry activity or event.

Vulnerable Adult: A person eighteen (18) years of age or older who is unable to protect him or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others because of a physical, mental, or emotional impairment.

SCREENING:

Careful screening is a potential way to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children, youth and vulnerable adults. Background screenings have the capacity to create peace of mind by showing that the staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, have no known record of abuse.

All staff and volunteers who may have regular or direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will undergo an initial background screening (done by PeopleFacts company) including:



-Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions.

-Authorization allowing the church to secure any background screening to be conducted. A state-level criminal records check will be part of Grace's screening process.

All clergy persons serving in positions that may allow regular or direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will undergo a state background screening.

Information about any conviction will be evaluated in view of all the facts, including the date of the conviction, the nature of the offense, the position sought, applicable law, and obligations. Offenses against children, youth and vulnerable adults will disqualify a person from serving as a volunteer/staff member at Grace.

Every year, staff and persons with regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults will complete the "Laity Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire" (Attachment 1).

Criminal records checks will be repeated at least every five years for all staff, including clergy, and volunteers. Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years may be required to undergo a new background screening. All screening records will be kept in the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) locked file drawer, accessible only to the Pastor and SPRC Chair, and others as officially designated. These records be kept in an active status for ten years and then permanently archived.

Volunteers will have an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the Pastor may replace the six-month waiting period.

SUPERVISION:

These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, youth and vulnerable adults and to protect staff and volunteers against unfounded accusations. The following will be followed; deviations will be approved by the Pastor or SPRC Chair.

All staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will read and sign this Policy before having direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Annually thereafter, volunteers and staff will document, by signing the Laity Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire form (Attachment 1), that they have read and understand the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and any current or revised information on how to identify and report child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse.



The “two-adult rule” will be observed for children and youth under the age of 12 and all vulnerable adults. This requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will

be two unrelated adults present. Unrelated adults is defined as two people who do not have a familial relationship. Exceptions to this rule will be approved by the Pastor or Chair, SPRC. In situations where there are two related adults present, or only one adult present, a screened adult ‘roamer’ will move in and out of rooms and places where ministry activities or events occur.

When transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults for a church ministry event or activity, an additional adult will accompany the driver in the vehicle.

The “rule of three” can be followed for ministries with youth, age 12 and older. The “rule of three” states: there will always be a minimum of three unrelated people together for ministry events, this can be two youth and one adult, or one youth and two adults.

Children, youth, and vulnerable adults are to be supervised while attending a ministry activity or event. Exceptions to the rule of three will be approved by the Pastor or Chair, SPRC.

All ministry activities and events will occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities or events occur will be open to public view. For example, enclosed spaces such as classrooms will have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration, or an open door.

Before the start of every external activity or event, appropriate contact information will be collected from those who are participating. Ministry activities and events involving transportation will require written and signed permission from a parent or legal guardians.

When a ministry involves an overnight situation, a ministry plan including travel plans and sleeping arrangements will be made available in writing to and will be signed by the parents or legal guardian prior to the event.

No person shall supervise an age group unless they are at least eighteen years of age and at least three years older than the children or youth being supervised.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church requires the trustees of each local church to secure adequate liability insurance to cover the risk associated with its ministries. The Board of Trustees shall review annually the adequacy of the property, building, and personnel coverage.



REPORTING:

This policy requires all church members, including the Pastor, church staff and volunteers to report any incident of abuse or exploitation that is personally witnessed or when an allegation of such an incident is made by a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and that the allegation(s) be dealt with as soon as possible to the incident or disclosure.

The Book of Discipline requires that clergy, church staff and volunteers will comprise the “mandatory reporting group” meaning if they personally witness or hear of an allegation of such an incident are required by the discipline and Maryland State law to report the incident in accordance with this policy.

If any of the defined situations occur, the following steps will be taken:

If the victim is in immediate need of medical attention, the appropriate medical assistance will be obtained. If the alleged perpetrator is onsite and danger is perceived, the alleged victim will be transported to a safe location and/or protected. Local police authorities will be called. The care and safety of the victim is the first priority.

Upon securing medical attention for the victim and ensuring the safety of the environment, and if no medical attention is needed, the church member must report the incident immediately to the Pastor and/or SPRC Chair, using the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (Attachment 2) with his/her age, reason for suspected abuse and any other helpful information to the investigation. The Pastor or SPRC Chair will notify the parents or legal guardians of the situation and steps will be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the victim until parent/legal guardian arrive. If a parent/legal guardian is the alleged perpetrator, the Pastor or SPRC Chair will contact Child Protective Services authorities and will follow their advice concerning notification.

The Pastor will immediately call the District Superintendent and report the allegations. However, if the person making the report is also a “mandatory reporter”, he/she will, at a minimum, “co-report” with the Pastor. When making a report by telephone, it must be conducted in the presence of an objective witness. The witness can verify the report has been made and who made the report. All reports will be documented and filed in the SPRC locked file drawer.

The District Superintendent will immediately report the situation to the Assistant to the Bishop and Communications Director at the Baltimore Suburban Conference office, as set forth in the Crisis Communications Guidelines for the Conference. Further communication or steps taken with the staff, congregation, community, or media will only be taken after consultation with the District Superintendent and the Conference office.



The Pastor or SPRC Chair will ensure that a written report is made of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report will be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It will be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed and kept in the SPRC locked file drawer.

RESPONSE:

A quick, compassionate and unified response to a reported incident of abuse will be done in all cases. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, the Pastor and SPRC Chair will coordinate and collaborate with all investigating agencies as required.

All media requests for statements will be directed to the Pastor who will work in conjunction with the District Superintendent and the Conference Crisis Communication Team. The Pastor will update the District Superintendent of any media inquiries. The Baltimore Suburban Conference Office is available at any time for consultation and to provide advice for handling media or other community inquiries.

Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the accused will be removed from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate civil authorities and in accordance with The Book of Discipline. The accused will be advised that there has been an allegation of abuse, but details of the allegations of the abuse must not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from a ministry activity or event, care must be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.

Grace Church will take all allegations seriously, including reaching out and responding in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family. Care and support will be offered/given to help prevent further hurt. The Pastor will extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. The church will seek to provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.



Laity Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
Baltimore-Washington Conference – Church Conference **2022**



To be completed and signed by all persons who are to work with children and youth within the ministry of this congregation.

Please check the appropriate box. If more space is needed, please use an additional piece of paper

Name:	
Date :	

<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>1. Have you ever filled out this questionnaire for this church or agency?</p> <p>If NO (or unsure) please answer questions 3 - 9 below. Then sign and return this form.</p> <p>If YES, please give the date: _____ and answer question #2</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> NOT SURE	<p>2. If you answered "YES" to Question #1, have any answers changed since you filled out that copy?</p> <p>If NO, please sign and return this form.</p> <p>If YES OR NOT SURE, please answer questions 3 - 9 below</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>3. Have you ever been accused, in a written and signed statement of sexual misconduct with a child or a youth?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>4. Have you ever been accused in a written and signed statement of sexual misconduct with an adult?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>5. Have you ever been dismissed from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of accusations of sexual misconduct on your part?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>6. Have you ever resigned from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part, or to avoid being dismissed because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part?</p>

	<p>If your response to any of the foregoing questions (2 through 6) is “yes”, please provide all details regarding each accusation of sexual misconduct that has been made with respect to you, including a description of the alleged conduct, the name of the person who made the accusation, the date of the alleged misconduct, and the name of your employer at the time of the alleged misconduct.</p> <p>Please attach explanation(s).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>7a. Have accusations of sexual misconduct on your part ever resulted in civil or criminal court proceedings at any level (e.g. indictment, arrest, trial, etc.)? If yes, please provide the complete details of those proceedings (including dates, circumstances, the jurisdiction where the proceedings occurred, the nature of the accusations, and the result of the proceedings).</p> <p>Provide explanation below or attach additional document.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>7b. Have accusations of sexual misconduct against you resulted in civil or criminal court proceeding on more than one occasion? If so, please provide the same details with respect to each such proceeding.</p> <p>Please attach explanation.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	<p>8. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of young people?</p> <p>Please attach explanation.</p>

I verify that the answers I have provided on this Questionnaire are true and accurate to the best of my ability.

I understand false answers, as well as the failure to sign this Response Form, will result in my being denied the position for which I am being considered.

Signature:		
Printed Name:		
Date :		



REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF ABUSE

1. Name of person observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

2. Grievant's name:

Grievant's age/date of birth: _____

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3. Date/place of initial conversation with/report from grievant: _____

4. Grievant's statement (give your detailed summary here): _____

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5. Name of person accused of abuse:

Relationship of accused to grievant (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other):

6. Reported to pastor.

Date/time: _____

Summary:

7. Call to grievant's parent/guardian:

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____



8. Call to Child Protective Services: 410-836-4713; afterhours-410-838-6600 (Sheriffs Off.)

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____

9. Call to local law enforcement agency*

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary _____

10. Other contacts:

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____

Signature of Person Reporting: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date _____

*Depending on location that alleged incident occurred:

Aberdeen Police Department: 410-272-2121

Bel Air Police Department: 410-638-4500

Harford County Sheriff's Office: 410-838-6600

Have de Grace Police Department: 410-939-2121